Islamic Tourism and Managing Tourism Development in Islamic Societies: The Cases of Iran and Saudi Arabia

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ABSTRACT

This paper is concerned with the effects of state religion on tourism development in Muslim countries with particular reference to Iran and Saudi Arabia. Aspects of the relationship between Islam and tourism are investigated overall and issues of tourism policies, management and marketing and community involvement within the context of the two cases are discussed. The distinctive circumstances prevailing in Iran and Saudi Arabia are suggested, but more general insights are also presented into the interactions between and management of tourism and Islam. Copyright © 2009 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

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INTRODUCTION

Islam is the foundation of public and private life in Muslim nations and its influence extends to politics, especially in theocracies where the state and religion are indivisible. In these countries, society is ordered in conformity with the principles of Islamic law, which directly and indirectly affect recreation and travel. Religion thus influences individual host and guest experiences, but also the operation of the industry, tourism policy-making and destination development. However, research into the impacts of Islam on tourism in Muslim societies and the ways in which it shapes formal strategies where it is the state religion is limited. This paper seeks to improve understanding of these issues by exploring the consequences of Islamic government for international tourism development with particular reference to Iran and Saudi Arabia, both theocracies in the Middle East. Comments are derived from analysis of published material supplemented by observations made during fieldwork for other studies in both countries.

The relationship between Islamic doctrine and tourism in general is first discussed, followed by an account of how the former informs official tourism policies. Conditions in Iran and Saudi Arabia are then reviewed and questions of tourism management and marketing and community involvement within the context of the cases are examined before a final conclusion. Insights are thus afforded into the attitudes and behaviour of governments and their citizens with regard to international tourism in situations where Islam is the state religion and foundation of the political system. It is hoped that the paper will be of value to academics and practitioners and a useful source for further research into Islamic tourism overall, a subject of growing importance given the size and growth of the Muslim population worldwide.

ISLAM AND TOURISM

There are approximately one and a half billion followers of Islam, making it one of the leading religions globally. Most Muslims reside in the 57 member countries of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), where it is the
dominant and often formal or informal state religion (OIC, 2008a). These are located mainly in the Middle East, the birthplace of the religion, which subsequently spread to parts of Africa and South and Southeast Asia (Esposito, 1999). Several of the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia are Islamic and there are sizeable Muslim populations in other nations around the world. Muslim life is directed by the holy book of the Quran and the Sunnah or Hadith, containing the sayings and deeds of the Prophet Muhammad recalled by his companions and family.

The verses of the Quran cited below from the chapters named in brackets endorse travelling with a view to achieving spiritual, physical and social goals. Al-Imran (The Amramites): 137; Al-An’am (Livestock): 11; Al-Nahl (The Bee): 36; Al-Naml (The Ant): 69; Al’-Ankaboot (The Spider): 20; Al-Room (The Romans): 42/9; Saba’ (Sheba): 18; Yousuf (Joseph): 109; Al-Hajj (The Pilgrimage): 46; Faater (Initiator): 44; Ghafer (Forgiver): 82/21; Muhammad: 10; Younis (Jonah): 22; and Al-Mulk (Kingship): 15’ (Pickthall, 1976; Yusuf Ali, 2005). The lessons are that more complete submission to God is possible through firsthand the beauty and bounty of His creation; grasping the smallness of man reinforces the greatness of God. Travel can enhance health and well being, reducing stress and enabling Muslims to serve God better. It leads to the acquisition of knowledge and is a test of patience and perseverance. Family and wider religious fellowships are affirmed, Muslims also having a duty when at home to offer hospitality to visitors from abroad. Guidance is additionally obtained from the Qiyas that extend Islamic, or Shariah, law to ‘new situations by analogy’ and Ijma, or ‘scholarly consensus’ (Hashim et al., 2007, p. 1086). It should also be made clear that religion is an individual matter in Islamic belief with no scope for coercion (Quran: 2: 256).

Islam thus endows travel with important attributes and this has been evident throughout history (Kessler, 1992; Bhardwaj, 1998; Aziz, 2001). Hirja incorporates migration and the Hajj to Mecca, one of the five pillars of Islam, requires Muslims to make the journey at least once in their lifetime unless prevented by physical incapacity (Rowley, 1997). Ziyara applies to visits to shrines and Rihla to travel for other reasons such as education and commerce. The emphasis is on purposeful movement, as one component of more spiritual journeys in the service of God, which contribute to fostering unity among the larger Muslim community or Ummah (Eickleman and Piscatori, 1990).

Tourism of many sorts is thus compatible with Islam and encouraged by its teachings. At the same time, the religion demands adherence to stipulations about conduct, dress, food and prayer. Interpretations of religious strictures are not uniform, with variations within and among countries that have correspondingly different socio-cultural impacts (Hassan, 2005), but societies as a whole tend to be conservative. Political factors are also critical and the religion has become highly politicised, including among traditionally moderate regimes. Several have been compelled to assert their Islamic credentials in the face of opposing parties claiming the role of religious champion for themselves. The trend has implications for international tourism and certain visitors are targets for extremists, exemplified by attacks in Egypt (Aziz, 1995) and Indonesia (Robinson and Meaton, 2005). Islamic scholars are particularly influential in much of the Middle East where governments are rigid in the implementation of Islamic law as a consequence (Goldsmith, 2007). These can be described as theocracies, defined by Chambers (1980, p. 1399) dictionary as states where ‘God or a god is regarded as the sole sovereign and the laws of the realm as divine commands’.

MUSLIMS AS HOSTS AND GUESTS

The aforementioned conditions and obligations about religious observances both in everyday affairs and when overseas can pose dilemmas for Muslim visitors and destination hosts. Islam is all pervasive in societies where religion and culture are interwoven and Sharia law may govern much of what is considered acceptable (halal) regarding leisure. Laws prohibit public displays of affection, shaking hands or any physical contact between members of the opposite sex, unmarried couples sharing rooms, gambling, breaking fast in daylight during Ramadan, consumption of pork and other haram (forbidden) foods, selling or
drinking liquor and dressing inappropriately. Both sexes must cover their torso and upper legs at all times and only women’s faces may be exposed (Deng et al., 1994). Frequenting discotheques and bars and miscellaneous other entertainments are deemed unlawful. Men and women may be segregated at events and sites such as museums and shopping malls. The amount of recreation time for nationals is also circumscribed by religious duties (Saudi Arabia’s Supreme Commission for Tourism, 2002). Local adherence to and enforcement of these requirements does, however, vary across Islamic countries. Religious principles and practices are strictly enacted in certain states while others are more relaxed.

A greater degree of liberalism is likely to make travel easier for non-Muslims, although it must be remembered that Muslims have obligations as hosts and a tradition of offering hospitality to strangers, which many Western travellers have appreciated. Nevertheless, tourists are advised to be respectful of local norms and abide by rules such as the wearing of a head covering by women and modest dress by men in public. What are perceived to be excessive curbs on freedoms of dress, consumption of food and beverages, personal and social relations and entertainment are likely to depress international arrivals. An additional constraint is that Islam is often associated with ultra-conservatism, terrorism, oppression and anti-Western sentiment by outsiders (Armstrong, 2002), and the marketing of Islamic destinations can be a daunting task (Henderson, 2009). Purposes are: ‘first, the revival of Islamic cultures and the spread of Islamic values; second, economic benefit for Islamic societies; and third the strengthening of Islamic self-confidence, identity and beliefs in the face of negative stereotyping in comparison to other cultures and lifestyles’ (Al-Hamarneh, 2008, p. 2).

Islamic tourism is agreed to be a powerful commercial force (Euromonitor, 2008), especially within the Middle East, with excellent prospects (Mintel, 2005). Nevertheless, OIC territory in total accounts for only about 12% of global tourist arrivals who are very unevenly distributed (OIC Journal, 2008). Turkey, Malaysia and Egypt record the highest volumes due in part to their popularity with non-Muslim holidaymakers (UNWTO, 2008). Statistics hint at realised potential among Muslim and non-Muslim markets and significant obstacles to destination development, although the often substantial scale of domestic tourism should not be forgotten (Bogari et al., 2003). Circumstances can be explained by less advanced stage of economic development (UNDP, 2008), which inhibits both demand and supply and aforementioned doubts about safety and security. Lack of political commitment or ineffective policies are also observable as elaborated on hereafter.

**THE STATE, RELIGION AND TOURISM**

Government has an essential role in tourism development and the operation of the tourism
industry through specific and related policies and spending (Pearce, 1989; Oppermann and Chon, 1997; Page, 2003). It provides the infrastructure and various services and amenities as well as overall direction (UNESCO, 2007). Responsibilities include liaison with and coordination of diverse stakeholders, planning, regulation, industry stimulation and promotion. An effective tourism policy should set realistic aims and objectives (Fennell, 1999) and devise suitable strategies (Mill and Morrison, 1985), which can be documented in a tourism plan (Wilkinson, 1997). Contemporary policies and plans are usually presented within a framework of sustainability, but focus heavily on maximising the economic returns from tourism.

Policy-making is a political process shaped by the political ideologies and socio-cultural values of ruling elites (Jenkins, 1997; Gunn, 1998; Hall, 2000) and others with power and influence. Such underlying dynamics mean that the type and amount of government involvement in tourism differs from country to country according to their distinctive profiles. The spectrum of intervention ranges from a laissez-faire stance to extensive controls, and some rulers may wish to discourage particular types of tourism and avoid or minimise contact between residents and tourists because of the damaging social changes that can ensue. Policies are thus determined by political structures, value systems, institutional machinery and power distribution (Hall and Jenkins, 1995; Elliot, 1997).

There is an additional dimension of religion at work in theocracies where government is conducted in alignment with religious dictates or at least authorities profess this to be the case. Contrary to the economic and commercial orientation of much public sector tourism, travel and the relationship between hosts and guests is conceived of by Islamic officials primarily in terms of surrender to the way and will of God and other aspects are secondary. Iran and Saudi Arabia are examples of this approach to tourism policy-making that are discussed subsequently, and Islam has also impacted on attitudes of OIC members that are not theocratic such as Indonesia and Malaysia.

There is sometimes a marked preference for targeting fellow Muslims and some governments have demonstrated little enthusiasm for hosting non-Muslim foreign tourists, choosing a ‘rejectionist’ or ‘isolationist’ position (Din, 1989, p. 557). Reasons are economic, oil-rich nations having had little call for extra revenue, and socio-cultural, with fears about the erosion of religious devoutness and conventions. Hegemonic motives cannot be ignored and those in power may resist an opening up for modern tourism because it could precipitate political changes and challenges. Investment in tourism and its marketing has thus been restricted, frustrating development and destination awareness.

Some authorities have been more amenable and welcomed tourists, irrespective of their origin (Kelly, 1998; Henderson, 2003), but there are still reservations about the undesirable influence of un-Islamic visitor lifestyles. There have been attempts to check adverse outcomes by isolating tourists, one instance being the Maldives where self-contained resorts are confined to uninhabited islands (Domroes, 2001). Concerns about the harmful effects on Muslim residents of exposure to non-Muslim tourists have, however, to be balanced against the prospective economic rewards of the industry, which are increasingly appreciated. While Muslims might be favoured and constitute a large audience, including extremely wealthy citizens, many have very low incomes, which limit their participation in tourism and its economic contribution.

Economic imperatives have prompted a shift in thinking about international tourism, even among richer states where it was formerly shunned (Sharpley, 2003). For example, Brunei is seeking to utilise tourism as an economic diversification and job creation tool in anticipation of the exhaustion of the sultanate’s oil and gas deposits in the next 20–30 years (Brunei Tourism, 2008). The same rationale underlies moves in this direction by some Persian Gulf States, perhaps inspired by the achievements of Dubai that has transformed itself into a modern and cosmopolitan destination (Henderson, 2007). There have been signs of greater support for the tourism industry in Iran and Saudi Arabia, but they and many OIC members confront serious obstacles to enticing more leisure tourists from around the world. Some of the inhibiting factors have already been referred to in this general discussion and others...
are outlined in the next sections devoted to the cases.

IRAN, SAUDI ARABIA AND TOURISM

Economic and political background

Iran and Saudi Arabia are located in the Middle East and are two of the world’s foremost oil producers. Oil and gas account for over 80% of their export earnings, indicative of a heavy reliance on hydrocarbons, which has resulted in efforts at diversification (EIU, 2008a,b) with often positive repercussions for the tourism industry. Both are ruled by theocratic governments of an authoritarian character, but they display contrasts politically. Relations between the two neighbours are not very close, partly because they espouse different ideologies and are rivals in their aspirations to lead the Islamic world.

In Iran, the Islamic Republic dates from 1979 when the monarchy was overthrown and Ayatollah Khomenei installed a form of political Islam. Currently, there is a complex political framework with a dual power structure involving the supreme religious leader and an elected president. A Guardian Council exists to ensure that president and parliament abide by Islamic principles and the judicial system is based on Sharia law. The population is mainly Muslim (Shia), but there are small communities of Christians and Zoroastrians as well as Jews.

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is an absolute monarchy and the Al Saud dynasty has ‘operated in partnership with senior clerics’ since the foundation of the modern Saudi state in 1902 (EIU, 2008a: p. 4). There is a small minority of Shia Muslims in the kingdom, but Sunni predominate and practice an austere interpretation of Islam labelled Wahhabism beyond Saudi Arabia after a preacher of that name. The judiciary is made up of clergy who are responsible for the administration of Islamic law and jurisprudence. Religion can be a source of domestic tensions and Saudi Arabia has had to contend with Islamic dissidents alongside mistrust between Shia and Sunni.

Tourism resources

Iran has a very old civilisation and a wealth of historic sites (Alavi and Yasin, 2000). O’Gorman (2007) identifies the country’s archaeology, cultural heritage, traditions and natural features as key tourist attractions. It is also known as a centre for Shia pilgrimage. Inbound tourism has seen some growth, averaging 5% annually, and a total of 2.2 million foreign visitors were recorded in 2007. Receipts for 2005 were almost US$830 million (UNWTO, 2008). Statistical data are unreliable, but most visitors appear to be from Central and South Asia and the Middle East and former Soviet countries with only an estimated 10,000 Westerners (EIU, 2008b). Culture- and nature-based vacations and study tours are popular with the last group and itineraries combine heritage sites, several linked to the historic Silk Road trade route, and the natural scenery with traditional villages and shopping. Tehran, Shiraz, Esfahan, Yazd, Kerman and Hamadan are the most visited destinations. Its complex climate also means that the country is famed for appearing to have four distinct seasons at the same time.

Known as the birthplace of Islam and home of the Prophet Mohammad, Saudi Arabia has immense symbolic importance for Muslims. It is guardian of the holy sites and most of the 8.6 million arrivals reported in 2006 were pilgrims from across the world taking part in the Hajj or Umrah (EIU, 2008a). The authorities have a strict quota to keep the number of religious visitors to a manageable level and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina are closed to non-believers. Travel from outside the region is primarily for business, centred on the capital Riyadh, and vacationers have been actively discouraged in the past. Nevertheless, there are outstanding attractions of ancient archaeological sites, the natural scenery of desert, mountains and valleys and Red Seas beaches and coastline that offer excellent diving (Seddon and Khoja, 2003).

Official policies

Appreciation of these resources has been growing among officials who are now more enthusiastic about exploiting the kingdom’s untapped potential as a destination (Sadi and Henderson, 2005a). Tourism’s economic role has been allocated greater priority and is seen as a means of lessening reliance on finite oil reserves. It is anticipated that the industry will
be a major employer of the future, helping to resolve the urgent problem of rising youth unemployment (Sadi and Henderson, 2005b). Visas have been issued for vacation travel since 2006, although these are subject to tight restrictions, and selected tour operators are licensed to bring foreigners on tourist visas into the country. Pilgrims are also being enticed by new leisure programmes to stay longer on completion of their religious duties (Al-Hamarneh, 2008).

Responsibility for tourism in Saudi Arabia rests with the General Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, incorporating the Supreme Council for Tourism, which has a mission to ‘facilitate the sustainable growth and success of the tourism industry in the Kingdom’, deemed to be an ‘important pillar of the national economy’. It is headed by one of the Prince Sultans who reports directly to the king and is seeking to attract 1.5 million tourists, excluding Haj and Umrah pilgrims, by 2020 as well as boost domestic tourism (Arab News, 2008a). The marketing chief has commented that Saudi Arabia would not be ‘providing the things that are incompatible with our Islamic customs and traditions’, but an ‘original tourism experiment that is based on traditional Arab hospitality’ (Reuters, 2008).

A national tourism development strategy for the next 20 years is underway, founded on ‘value based tourism’, which ‘follows the basics and fundamentals of Islam and is economically, socially, culturally and environmentally feasible and also entertaining to be able to attract the tourist’ (General Commission for Tourism and Antiquities, 2008). Classification of accommodation has begun and there has been talk of launching a chain of heritage hotels. Training colleges in partnership with major multinational companies such as Accor, airport expansion and investment in accommodation and exhibition and conference facilities are all planned (Asia Travel Tips.com, 2008). Saudi Arabia is also working with the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) on its Capacity Building Programme designed to ensure adequate tourist information systems across the region and upgrade human resources and institutional capacities. The kingdom was the first country in the Middle East to complete the Tourism Satellite Account exercise in conformity with UNWTO standards (Arab News, 2008b).

Iran has a longer history of tourism planning that is characterised by a high degree of state intervention. A series of five-year socio-cultural and economic development plans have been in operation since 1978, the fourth running until 2009. Among wider objectives, the intentions are to disseminate awareness of the culture and civilisation of Islamic Iran, increase foreign exchange earnings, stimulate local commerce and industry and generate a favourable image of the country worldwide. The efficacy of the plans is debatable and tourism’s contribution to the economy remains relatively minor. A 20 Year Outlook Tourism Plan of Iran was introduced in 2005, consisting of a 10-year plan and two subsequent five-year plans to address existing challenges. The target is 20 million tourist arrivals by 2025 with projected investment of over US$32 billion, US$5 billion from the government and the remainder from private enterprise (Faghri, 2007).

Administrative structures have evolved over the years and formal responsibility for tourism now lies with Iran’s Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organisation (ICHHTO) under the President. The main goals of ICHHTO are to inform about the country’s history, protect its heritage and promote tourism. Cultural concerns are at the forefront with a partiality for visitors who respect the Iranian people and are knowledgeable about cultural and religious traditions. Promotional literature and collaterals are produced in 17 languages and ICHHTO undertakes some advertising campaigns directed at individuals and the travel trade, but there is not a consistent brand and the amount and distribution of materials is limited. International trade fairs in 26 countries were attended in 2007, mainly in priority markets of Middle Eastern Muslim neighbours (ICHHTO, 2008; ITTO, 2008).

Among recent endeavours to encourage tourism is the streamlining of the cumbersome entry arrangements by granting visas on arrival, albeit valid for only one week. Visas are no longer required for stays of less than three months by certain nationalities. A computerised hotel reservations system has also been introduced. The ICHHTO has signed several letters of understanding and bilateral
Tourism agreements with other states covering a range of issues, which include the exchange of tourists. Eight overseas tourism offices have been opened with private sector support and plans were announced in 2008 to open Foreign Investing Offices in Malaysia, Turkey, China and several Middle Eastern and European countries in a bid to raise investment in tourism from overseas (IRTAT News, 2008).

However, tourism development has been impeded by the revolution, which commenced in 1979, and later war with Iraq from 1980 to 1988 and their legacies. Disadvantages persist of a ‘strict social code, shortage of adequate accommodation, bottlenecks in internal transportation and poor marketing’ (EIU, 2008b p. 26). The limited promotional efforts outside the region mean that the country remains relatively unknown as a tourist destination globally. It does receive publicity in the news media, but this is often negative. Such observations resonate in the case of Saudi Arabia, although it is more cautious about development and modest in its growth targets.

Iran and Saudi Arabia are thus unique as political and tourist entities, but they do exhibit some similarities in terms of destination strengths and weaknesses, tourism policies and the strong influence of Islam. The implications of theocratic structures and processes are evident in stances adopted, tourism management and marketing and the involvement of residents and these core areas are discussed in the final section.

TOURISM MANAGEMENT, MARKETING AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

Tourism administration encompasses multiple tasks related to managing resources and tourist interactions with the physical environment and resident community in ways that are effective, efficient and correspond to notions of sustainability (Doswell, 1997; Mason, 2003; Page, 2003). The purpose is to exercise some control over tourism supply and demand in order to pursue defined policy goals (Middleton, 1994). Despite a growing commitment to environmental stewardship, economic motives still dominate official tourism agendas in general. However, policies in Iran and Saudi Arabia can be directed as much, if not more, towards religious and socio-cultural ends than income and employment generation.

In terms of policy implementation, certain management principles are perhaps universal and relevant to all types of organisation (Certo, 2003). Competent managers must possess appropriate technical, human and conceptual skills and have the right personal qualities (Dessler, 1998). Personnel with the most suitable skills and character are likely to perform well and contribute to organisational success, and these attributes become the criteria for recruitment. The assignment of posts in public sector tourism in Iran and Saudi Arabia follows a different pattern. The selection of top-level managers and key figures in authority appears to be commonly decided by their devotion to Islam (belief and practice) and Islamic appearance alongside political allegiance. Gender is a consideration and males are strongly, if not exclusively, favoured as they are in many Arab States (Sonmez, 2001). Proximity to people of religious and political influence is another factor and the skills remarked upon above may be neglected. Tourism may therefore not be as well managed as it could be, with development impeded as a result.

Destination marketing is an essential tourism management tool that is employed to inform and influence tourist and industry attitudes and behaviour (Ryan, 1991) with attention concentrated on markets judged to be most profitable. In Iran and Saudi Arabia, stress is placed on tourists who are familiar with Muslim societies and preferably adherents of the religion. There is an additional shared interest in domestic tourism, outside the ambit of this paper, where there are no risks of importing undesirable forces. Saudi Arabia is less active and ambitious in its promotion than Iran, but overseas advertising of both is mainly regional in nature and centres on OIC members of the Middle East and South Asia. The tendency to ignore lucrative Western generators could be viewed as a missed opportunity for earning revenue, as well as for counteracting the negative images of Muslim nations and their inhabitants circulating in the West (Said, 1981; Shaheen, 1987; Din, 1989). Tourism development is thus again hampered, although it must be recognised that growth driven by business from Europe and North America is not officially sought.
Finally, community participation is now acknowledged to be another crucial component of sustainable tourism development. The rationale is to give a voice to locals affected by tourism, utilise their knowledge, reduce conflicts and foster resident support (Swarbrooke, 1999). Proponents maintain that destination communities are important stakeholders who should be involved and empowered in tourism policy-making, but such arguments may not be sympathetically received in Iran and Saudi Arabia. Theocratic governments portray themselves as vehicles for the communication of divine edicts, and being a Muslim entails wilful submission to God and living in accordance with His messages. Questioning government authority can be interpreted as an expression of doubt about God’s omnipotence as well as civil disobedience. Ideas with origins in liberal democracies of the West may not be compatible with Islamic philosophy or political practice and government has also become centralised so that local people have little say in decisions about tourism.

Whether residents of Iran and Saudi Arabia would make use of the chance to engage in the policy process is unknown, but there are signs that they may not always concur with Islamic officialdom. For instance, officials frequently make reference to guarding residents from the adverse socio-cultural impacts of Western style international tourism when explaining their opposition to it. Research on tourism in Iran conducted by one of the authors in 2006 and 2007 (Zamani-Farahani and Musa, 2008), however, revealed that a majority of respondents have no preference regarding a tourist’s religion and are interested in reducing visitor unease about the Islamic religion. A number of superior standard hotels managers were found to be reluctant to accommodate large family parties of Middle Eastern Muslim tourists due to past experiences of misconduct and vandalism. It was also observed that some of the less affluent Muslim travellers and pilgrims resort to begging to cover the cost of their trip, creating crime and health risks. Issues of the socio-cultural impacts of tourism in theocracies is an avenue to be explored further and are particularly pertinent if destinations are set to see a rise, however modest, in longer haul inbound tourists.

CONCLUSION

This paper has investigated aspects of the relationship between Islam and tourism, focusing on the religion’s implications for tourism policy and development in the theocratic states of Iran and Saudi Arabia. The Islamic religion has been shown to have profound consequences for destination conditions and inbound and outbound tourists and be influential in determining the content, direction and implementation of tourism policy. The impacts on tourism of Islam as the state religion do, however, vary across diverse Muslim societies, and Iran and Saudi Arabia are perhaps among the countries where it has the greatest effects. Islamic government power is very strong in the two theocracies and religion dictates the conduct of political affairs as well as the functioning of societies and economies.

One result may be that such countries, despite a wealth of unique tourist attractions, draw relatively few inbound tourists from the developed countries that are the major generators of international flows. They are thereby denied the full benefits of tourism in economic and other domains. It seems that a state religion can be a serious barrier to tourism development, but at the same time it must be admitted that certain types of development are not always wanted and the absence of large numbers of Western tourists might be hailed as highly desirable by officials and residents. Nevertheless, there is awareness of the economic value of these markets, and tensions therefore arise among religious, political and commercial imperatives. These pose a dilemma for authorities and it will be interesting to monitor attempts at resolution in the years ahead.

It is hoped that this paper has succeeded in providing some original insights into the interactions between the Islamic religion and tourism which are of value to authorities, the industry, academics and local communities in both the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds. Nevertheless, its shortcomings are recognised by the authors and there are restrictions on comparing the findings of this account with previous work. Tourism research into conditions in many Muslim countries is still limited and some features of Islam and Islamic governance can be especially sensitive. More
cases outlining tourism development and management in individual states as well as international comparisons would be useful, as would analyses of motivations of Muslim travellers and their expectations and experiences. Impact assessments encompassing environmental and economic, as well as socio-cultural, matters, would yield valuable data to assist in sustainable management. Other worthwhile topics include levels of religious intervention in tourism development within and across Islamic countries and views about the consequences, not least among destination residents, and tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim tourists sharing the same destination. Such questions and those raised in this paper are important and the subject constitutes a rich field for continued research.

REFERENCES


