



## Spiritual Tourism

Supitchaya Sarakong<sup>a\*</sup> & Ungul Laptaned<sup>a</sup> & Witchaya Tiyapongphaphan<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Faculty Graduate College of Management, Sripatum University, Bangkok, 10900 Thailand

<sup>b</sup> Corporate Strategy Bureau, Thai Red Cross Society, Bangkok, 10330 Thailand

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### Abstract

In this article, the concept and meaning of tourists are explained, including the component of spiritual tourism and the differences between spiritual tourism and religious tourism. Spiritual tourism is usually linked to words such as faith-based tourism, religious tourism and sacred tourism. Spiritual tourism has two meanings: (1) Tourism for spiritual purpose, pilgrimage, joining religious ceremony or fulfilling belief and faith of each person. (2) Tourism for self-improvement or self-exploring. Traveling to fulfill one's identity looking pass race, religion, color and cult. Spiritual tourism can be divided into 5 types: (1) Refuge Seekers (2) Learners (3) Exploratory Dabblers (4) Reinforcers (5) Spiritualists. The components that influence tourists to travel to spiritual tourist attraction are: (1) Natural Resources (2) General Infrastructure (3) Tourist Infrastructure (4) Tourist Leisure and Recreation (5) Arts, Culture and History (6) Political and Economic Factors (7) Natural Environment (8) Social Environment (9) Atmosphere of the Place. This article presents the body of knowledge about data management for spiritual tourism to be used as history, storytelling to enhance diversity and value for tourism.

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### Introduction

Spiritual tourism is the form of traveling that has a purpose to seek the spirit of each person and spiritual relaxation. It can help create the balance, mind and soul. It may be related or not related to religion.

Spiritual tourism is a fairly new development in tourism offerings (Satpathy & Mahalik, 2010). It was first officially mentioned in 2013 by The World Tourism Organization (United Nations World Tourism Organization) at Ninh Binh, Vietnam. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) views spiritual tourism as the form of Equitable, Responsible, and Sustainable Tourism

under the Code of Ethics because spiritual tourism can create understanding and acceptance for the variety and differences of culture and increase the economic value in personal level and collective goals. From the study of The Center for the Promotion of Imports: CBI, it was found that tourism in Thailand and aboard conducted religious tourism for 600,000,000 people a year and half of them visit famous religious places at 1:4 ratio of the amount of tourist from all over the world and it creates 50 -100 billion USD per year. It also is predicted that spiritual tourism will continuously increase. (Fedorova, 2016)

Thailand is a Buddhist country. People's way of life is deeply bonded with Buddhism. People often rely on religion for comfort by worshiping, make wishes and pray or what Thai people call "Mutelu". It is the belief among Thai society that has a long history in Thai culture. There are many forms of Mutelu such as charms, sacred objects, sacred places including local beliefs like Naga, amulets, famous monks. Even sacred tattoos (Sak Yant) which are believed can make those who have such a tattoo to become charming or gain adoration from people. Nowadays, this belief is used to gain income for temples or sacred places. It attracts tourist especially group of Chinese such as Malaysian-Chinese, Singaporean-Chinese, Hong Kong-Chinese, Taiwanese-Chinese or Chinese people from the mainland of China. (Duangkaew, 2020). In 2017, the number of Chinese tourists totaled 9.8 million people, which is the highest among any other country that Chinese people travel to. The trend of spiritual tourism is not limited to only elder people, but includes the GenY and Z, who have high purchasing power and are interested in arts, ancient culture, history and charm. From the survey on Thai spiritual tourist, it was found that there are activities related to spiritual tourism almost 3 times a year and it costs 1,818.65 Baht per person each time. (Economics Tourism and Sports Division, Ministry of Tourism & Sports, 2021)

### **Concept of Spiritual Tourism**

The concept of spiritual tourism includes the (1) meaning of spiritual tourism (2) meaning of spiritual tourist (3) type of tourist interested in spiritual tourist attraction (4) the differences between spiritual tourism and religious tourism (5) components of spiritual tourism. The details are presented below.

#### **1. Meaning of Spiritual Tourism**

Spiritual tourism is a type of traveling that is accepted and is different from the original concept which is religious tourism (Kujawa, 2017). The word 'Spirituality' is from the Latin word 'Spiritualitas' that matches with the Greece word that says 'Pneuma' which means (Essence of Life) (Bone, 2011; Heelas et al., 2005). Many academics gave the definition of spiritual tourism as follows.

Norman (2012) defined spiritual tourism as a type of travel that happens based on the desire to seek solutions for daily life problems. It seeks to find self-discovery that focus on creating experience in physical and mental health for tourist and improve their wellbeing. Giddens (1991) stated a similar definition

such as spiritual tourism creates experience for tourists to find knowledge and self-discovery. At the same time, Narayanan & Macbeth (2009) agreed with Norman (2012) in the point of health and added that spiritual tourism is a type of travel that serves the traveler's wish to escape daily routine and explore a new geography.

Singh & Singh (2009) noted that spiritual tourism encourage a tourist to improve themselves. Similar to Bone (2011) who stated that the purpose of spiritual tourism is for a tourist to improve themselves and ego. For Frey (1998), spiritual tourism focuses on fixing or improving the daily life of a tourist that is problematic. It tries to assist tourists with psychological treatment by allowing people to analyze themselves such as meditate. Moreover, Fluker & Turner (2000) commented that spiritual tourism focuses on responding to one's identity. It is the center of social psychology without the concern of race, religion, color and cult.

Smith et al., (2010) offered a similar and a difference in the definition from Fluker & Turner (2000). The similar stated that spiritual tourism means traveling that seeks the spirit of each person. The difference was that the spiritual tourism can be related or not related to religion.

However, Rao (2019) agrees with Smith, Macleod & Robertson (2010) who defined spiritual tourism as traveling to find goals and the meaning of life and not related to any religion. The researcher synthesized the definition of spiritual tourism as shown in Table 1.

From the definitions above, it can be concluded that spiritual tourism tends to be defined related to words such as faith-based tourism, religious tourism and sacred tourism. Researchers viewed spiritual tourism offering two meaning as follows.

1. It is the type of traveling that seeks spiritual encouragement, pilgrimage, attending religious ceremony. It responds to belief and faith of each person and lift people's spirit. It can be related to religion or not.

2. It is the type of traveling that seeks self-improvement, to find oneself, the desire to find solutions for everyday life's problem by focusing on self-discovery, responding's one identity without concern about race, religion, color and cult. It is also the type of traveling that focuses on creating experience in both physical and mental health and wellbeing.

#### **2. The meaning of Spiritual Tourist**

Spiritual tourist is categorized in the Wellness Tourism (Lehto et al., 2006). Voigt et al. (2011) stating that this type of tourist is a new age tourist which is spiritual tourists and yoga tourists.

**Table 1** Definition of Spiritual Tourism

Author	Year	Source	Definition
Giddens	1991	Research	Creating experience for tourists to find knowledge, understanding and self-discovery.
Frey	1998	Research	Fixing or improving the daily life of tourists that is problematic. It tries to help tourist with psychological treatment by allowing people to analyze themselves.
Fluker & Turner	2000	Research	Spiritual tourism focuses on responding to one's identity. It is the center of social psychology without concern about race, religion, color and cult.
Narayanan & Macbeth	2009	Research	Spiritual tourism is the type of traveling that serves the traveler that wish to escape daily routine and explore a new geography.
Singh & Singh	2009	Research	Spiritual Tourism encourages tourists to improve themselves
Smith et al.,	2010	Research	Spiritual tourism means traveling that seeks the spirit of each person or to relax one's mind, create balance of body, mind and spirit. It can be related or not related to religion
Katherine Bone	2011	Research	The purpose is for tourists to improve themselves and ego.
Jesurajan & Prabhu	2012	Research	Spiritual Tourism is the traveling to sacred goal which is the spiritual support to respond belief and faith of each person.
Norman	2012	Research	Spiritual Tourism is a type of traveling that happens from the desire to seek solutions for daily life problem. It seeks to find self-discovery which that focuses on creating experience in physical and mental health for tourists and improve their wellbeing.
Rao	2019	Research	Defined spiritual tourism as traveling to find a goal and the meaning of life. Spiritual tourism is the connection between mind, spirit and body and not related to any religion.

Spiritual tourist means tourist who seek to find goals that serve health, beauty and wellbeing including release from anxiety. It might include escape from a chaotic world of being expected and duties. (Norman, 2012). It is in line with the definition by Chinthaka & Senarathna (2012) that noted tourist that seek happiness on holidays and wish for spiritual development. It is also in line with Snyder (2007) who stated that spiritual tourist is the group of tourists that want to find a peaceful place and seek spiritual treatment. However, it also includes finding peaceful place to meditate and take care of one's health.

Voigt et al. (2011) stated that what tourists seek are (1) spirit (2) uplifting (3) physical improvement such as exercise and dieting including (4) a place that offers positive perspective. Academics added that spiritual tourists are interested in spiritual development which depend on their belief not because a religion forces them. (Satpathy & Mahalik, 2010) An outline of the definition of spiritual tourist is shown in Table 2

From the definition above it can be concluded that spiritual tourist means tourists who seek spiritual development through activities that focus on meditation

**Table 2** Definition of Spiritual Tourist

Author	Year	Source	Definition
Snyder	2007	Researcher	Spiritual tourist is the group of tourists that want to find peaceful place and seek spiritual treatment. It includes finding a peaceful place to meditate and take care of one's health.
Satpathy & Mahalik	2010	Researcher	Spiritual tourists are interested in spiritual development which depends on their belief not because a religion force them to.
Voigt et al.	2011	Researcher	This type of tourists are new age tourists which is spiritual tourists and yoga tourists.
Chinthaka & Senarathna	2012	Researcher	Tourists that seek happiness on holidays and wish for spiritual development.
Norman	2012	Researcher	Spiritual tourist means a tourist who seeks to find goals that serve health, beauty and wellbeing including release from anxiety. It might include escape from chaotic world of being expected and duties.



**Figure 1** Spiritual Tourism  
source: Bangkokbiznews (2024)

#### 4. Differences between Spiritual Tourism and Religious Tourism

This research synthesized the difference of spiritual tourism and religious tourism from what prior academics have explained as follows.

Spiritual tourism focuses on personal experience as the main perception. (Fedorova, 2016; Singh & Singh, 2009) And it is the practice that allow a tourist to become the essence of being themselves, take care of themselves rather than religion (Norman, 2012) or church. (Heelas et al., 2005) It does not focus on being loyal to religious doctrine (Hill et al., 1995).

The main purpose of spiritual tourism is to encourage the understanding and enlightenment in religion (Smith & Kelly, 2006). It focuses on the shared belief system and cooperation in worshiping (Norman, 2012). The motivation of spiritual tourists is to find their spirit, try to get close to God, admire the architecture or nature. They are interested in stories and history of places (Simone-Charteris & Boyd, 2011).

Smith & Kelly (2006) have concluded the differences between religious tourism and spiritual tourism as shown in table 4.

**Table 4** Differences between Spiritual Tourism and Religious Tourism

Religious Tourism	Spiritual Tourism
Committed to one religion.	Have faith in many religions.
Interested in religious enlightenment.	Interested in personal spiritual development.
Care about pilgrim from other religion and local community.	Seek the interaction with local community and the native.
Focuses on religious ceremony.	Occasionally take part in ceremony or ritual.
Seek religious union or to be released from sins.	Want good mind and spirit.

#### 5. Component of Spiritual Tourism

This study has synthesized the components that influence tourist to visit spiritual tourist attraction. They are (1) Natural Resources (2) General Infrastructure (3) Tourist Infrastructure (4) Tourist Leisure and Recreation (5) Arts, Culture and History (6) Political and Economic Factors (7) Natural Environment (8) Social Environment (9) Atmosphere of the Place

**Table 5** Component of Spiritual Tourism

Component	Researcher/ Year
<b>Natural Resources</b> means weather: temperature. Scenery: mountain, tree, animal	McKercher & Du Cros (2002) Klenosky (2002) Bui & Kiatkawsin (2020) Kiatkawsin & Han (2017) Syamala & Kakati (2016) Rot et al (2014)
<b>General Infrastructure</b> means facilities for transportation.	Chi, Lee, Ahn, & Kiatkawsin (2020) Rot et al (2014)
<b>Tourist Infrastructure</b> means Tourist Information Center, Restaurant and Souvenir Shop	Kim (2014) Rot et al. (2014) Fernandea et al. (2012) McKercher & Du Cros (2002) Klenosky (2002) Kim (2014), Hooper (2015) Albayrak et al. (2018) McKercher & Lew (2003)
<b>Tourist Leisure and Recreation</b> means activity related to relaxation such as feeding fish, sightseeing, coffee shop and costume rental shop.	Kim (2014) Chi et al. (2020) Nunkoo & Ramkissoon (2011) Rot et al. (2014)
<b>Arts, Culture and History</b> means stories and background, architecture, historical significance and belief.	McKercher & Du Cros (2002) Klenosky (2002) Crouch & Ritchie (1999) Gnoth & Zins (2013) Syamala & Kakati (2016) Rot et al. (2014) Dann (1981)
<b>Political and Economic Factors</b> means safety of life and property of tourist and price of tourist products.	Crouch and Ritchie (1999) Syamala and Kakati (2016) Rot et al (2014)
<b>Natural Environment</b> means the beauty of nature, tourist attraction, cleanliness and traffic management.	McKercher and Du Cros (2002) Klenosky (2002) Bui & Kiatkawsin (2020) Kiatkawsin and Han (2017) Rot et al (2014) Dann (1981)
<b>Social Environment</b> means hospitality and friendliness of tourist staff.	Turner & Reisinger (1999) Reisinger et al. (2009) Li (2012)
<b>Atmosphere of the Place</b> means reputation, notability and significance of the place.	McKercher & Du Cros (2002) Klenosky (2002) Dwyer & Kim (2003) Fernandea et al. (2012) Dann (1981)

## Conclusion

Spiritual tourism has two meanings. (1) Tourism for spiritual purpose, pilgrimage, joining religious ceremony or fulfilling belief and faith of each person. (2) Tourism for self-improvement or self-exploring. Traveling to fulfill one's identity looking pass race, religion, color and cult. Spiritual tourists seeks the goal that serves their health and wellbeing including release from anxiety. They seek a peaceful place and spiritual treatment.

Spiritual tourism is usually linked to words such as faith-based tourism, religious tourism and sacred tourism. Spiritual tourism has two meaning: (1) Tourism for spiritual purpose, pilgrimage, joining religious ceremony or fulfilling belief and faith of each person. (2) Tourism for self-improvement or self-exploring. Traveling to fulfill one's identity looking pass race, religion, color and cult. Spiritual tourism can be divided into 5 types: (1) Refuge Seekers (2) Learners (3) Exploratory Dabblers (4) Reinforcers (5) Spiritualists. The components that influence tourists to travel to spiritual tourist attraction. They are (1) Natural Resources (2) General Infrastructure (3) Tourist Infrastructure (4) Tourist Leisure and Recreation (5) Arts, Culture and History (6) Political and Economic Factors (7) Natural Environment (8) Social Environment (9) Atmosphere of the Place.

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