

MEETING THE SAINT

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Abstract:

The study presents aspects of leading religious tours and challenges that tourism industry faces due to the dynamic development of pilgrimage market.

Based on the author's relevant experience the following stages of events have been included: planning, programming, organisation and execution of the tour by a tour guide, valid procedures in case of emergency situations and itinerary changes.

INTRODUCTION

Pilgrimage traditions are strictly connected with people's beliefs and development of various religions. Judaism with its origins reaching 2000 BC has played a crucial role for contemporary monotheistic religions. In the beginning of our era it gave the foundation for Christianity and in the 4th century - for Islam [4]. In the Middle Ages there were caravan routes for Muslims to Mecca, in Christian times pilgrimage walks to the Tomb of Saint James the Great in Santiago de Compostela (Spain) and Jerusalem has been a sacred place for Christians, Muslims and Judaism worshippers. The motives of individual pilgrimages are strictly religious and their purpose is to reach a place filled with sacrum or participation in a religious act [2].

Religious tourism constitutes a specific kind of tours organised by travel agencies, especially to Rome-the metropolis as ancient as Christian culture. It is distinguished by a social and cultural identity of the participants expressed by common prayers, services, chants and spirituals experiences [6]. Such offers, as well as satisfying religious needs, also include acknowledging architectural beauty, sculpture and painting arrangements, music, chants or nature highlights. The specific and demanding character of these tours requires the best services by a well qualified and knowledgeable tour-leader, also a clergyman at times. Only a few are able to meet such high -standard requirements [5].

The main purpose of this study is to present a thirty-year-experience of the author as a tour guide of pilgrimage and sightseeing tours to Italy, whose main or one the most important goals was meeting the pope. Yet another reason is making proposals for tourism branch due to pilgrimage market development inspired by the forthcoming canonization of John Paul II, falling on 27th April 2014.

JOHN PAUL II- A PILGRIM'S MESSAGE

The author's first encounter with John Paul II took place in Warsaw, on Saturday June 2nd 1979 during the pope's first visit to Poland. The author took part in the event during his doctorate apprenticeship at the Academy of Physical Education and was the result of both spiritual need and curiosity. Awaiting the arrival of the Pope, the crowds gathered in Victory Square (Pilsudski Square at present) emphasized the significance of the event by singing religious songs, cheering and applauding. The homily quotation " Let Thy Spirit descend and renew the face of the land, this land!", addressed to political leaders (political significance)

and the nation (spiritual message)-engraved deeply in people's hearts.

A year later a family trip by car to Rome took place to commemorate the apostles and martyrs Peter and Paul and also to feel this unusual city's cultural spirit of the past.

Participating in Wednesday general audience in St. Peter's Square in Vatican City, among other tourists and pilgrims, was a unique experience which evoked pride and joy at the sight of cheerful and grateful people who thanked 'our pope' for blessings uttered in different languages.

Cultural abundance was fascinating and the general audience showed that apart from the previous holiday destinations, Rome and Vatican will permanently appear in the itineraries of the tours organised and led by the author.

ITALIAN TOURS PREPARATIONS

Ranging from late 1970s to the 1990s, the author combined jobs of a university teacher and a tour guide cooperating with *Almatur, Juventur, Logostour, Pielgrzym and Restur* travel agencies and being self employed in his own travel agency. Experience gained while working as a travel agent's representative and tour guide of tramping groups across Europe, Morocco and South-East Asia set up the foundation for taking coach parties to Italy. Every event was preceded by a meeting with the participants informing them about possible hardship of intensive, usually ten-hour daily programmes of tours or pilgrimages. As far as mass tourism is concerned, both offers were integrated. Each of them included acknowledging cultural heritage of Italian cities and thus numerous churches, cathedrals and basilicas; visiting museums and galleries, presenting historical sights of ancient Rome and objects of renaissance and baroque art and architecture [1].

The great emphasis was put on John Paul II's Wednesday general audiences in St. Peter's Square or the Paul VI Audience Hall (outfit, awaiting, safety procedures, post-audience assembly spots, shopping for devotional articles, personal safety, getting in touch in case of getting lost, collection of audience photos etc...)

The high point of each itinerary was arrival in Rome on Tuesday afternoon or evening and taking part in Wednesday general audience in Vatican. After getting accommodated, it was customary to telephone the Polish House in Rome to inform about the group name so that the Pope could greet the pilgrims the next day.

A TYPICAL PILGRIMAGE GROUP

Tours engaged different age groups (pic. 1) which wasn't an obstacle in creating immediate community identification ties. The pilgrims were assured with only one audience per itinerary. However, the group reacted enthusiastically when the opportunity for a private audience, at 7 am the next morning, occurred. On the way from the hotel to the Pope's Palace in Vatican there were no prayers or chants heard-everybody awaited meeting the Pope in silence. After entering the chapel, the holy confession and communion started. Participating in the mass with the Pope was an unusual experience. Following the mass, during a private visit everybody was impressed with the warm smile of the Holy Father and his deep glance filled with kindness, generosity and cordiality.

To celebrate the pompous atmosphere of the day the remaining programme of the tour was adjusted to the circumstances and visiting the taverns, squares, fountains and renaissance and baroque Rome was put off until later days.



Pic. 1. Pilgrims getting a private audience with the pope

PILGRIMAGE TO ITALY FOR SENIORS

The group consisted of the residents of a small town in Podkarpackie region; senior citizens prevailed. A special offer, prepared with consideration and filled with religious contents, was prepared. An elderly lady, distinguished with great piety, was appointed by the group as the most deserving to give a gift to the Pope during the private audience in Vatican Clementine Hall.

Meeting the Holy Father was preceded by an exciting ceremony: escorting the group by the Swiss Guard along the Palace corridors, preparations to meet the Pope, the moment of greeting the Pope, a memorial photo. A special bond between the eldest pilgrims and the Holy Father was noticeable.

Their evident profound perception of the Pope's every look, gesture and word -all in silence and posture-was the evidence that they felt honoured and distinguished participating in that spiritual confrontation.



Pic. 2. Senior pilgrims at the Holy Father's

HOLY WEEK IN ROME AND VATICAN

Visiting Rome and Vatican at that time was a special experience. The main goal of the pilgrimage was to participate in religious ceremonies and a private audience with the Pope as

well as Stations of the Cross conducted by John Paul II from Colosseum toward the Capitol.

Picture 3 shows meeting the Holy Father during the most important week for the Church. The pilgrims intensely looking at the Pope talking to the guide, listen to the wisdom behind the uttered words. Their attitude proved that their expectations for being a part of unusual and constructive event-were met. Even more willingly they participated in common liturgies, when they made personal requests. Everybody was concerned for keeping that moment of concentration and dignity as long as possible.

After completing the Stations of the Cross, the group set off for Poland so that the pilgrims could arrive home on the Holy Saturday and start celebrating Easter with families. Easter and family gatherings were enriched by omnipresent sensations felt after having met the Pope.



Pic. 3. Holy Week with John Paul II

TEACHERS' NEW YEAR'S MEETINGS WITH THE HOLY FATHER

The purpose of that winter Rome tour was participating in the New Year's pope's solemn blessing *Urbi et Orbi* (to the city of Rome and the world), passed on from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica. The first day of the journey from a Hungarian town of Nagykanizsa went smoothly.

The next day, however, started with some misfortunes- the coach failure, then delays at the Hungarian-Yugoslavian border, finally the blizzards in the Alps enormously slowing down the journey eventually affected the programme of the trip in Venice and overnight stay in Bologna.

The moods improved after the general audience and the completion of part of the itinerary in Rome and ceremonies in St. Peter's Square at noon on New Year's Day. When a chance for a private visit at the pope's occurred (pic. 4), the tourist reacted approvingly. However, it required some changes in the sequence of executing the programme and 'extending' the next day itinerary. The ceremony of meeting John Paul II was dignified and memorable for all the participants.

Due to unexpected incidents in Hungary and Slovenia, missing the night stay in Bologna and the necessity of the programme changes in Venice and Rome the tour guide was obliged to draw up a report, including all the incidents and occurrences according to the procedures [3]. All the participants signed the document approvingly with understanding those 'acts of God', being pleased with taking part in an unplanned private audience at the Pope's.



Pic. 4. Welcoming New Year with John Paul II

TOURIST GROUP OF RANDOM SELECTION

Picture 5 shows the group of tourists significantly divided into those who were fascinated with everything they saw and heard and those uninterested in visiting churches to see the great art of Michelangelo's sculptures like: *Pieta*, *Moses* or *Christ Carrying the Cross*; paintings by Caravaggio: *The Conversion of Saint Paul*, *Calling of Saint Matthew*, *Martyrdom of Saint Matthew* and many other masterpieces. The programme of the tour did not include general audience in St. Peter's Square because the pope was away on holiday. When an opportunity for meeting the Pope in his summer residence in Castel Gandolfo occurred, everybody accepted this alternative of enriching the itinerary. A spiritual transformation, which took place in the participants' hearts, even those sceptical ones, after a private visit at the Pope's is worth noticing. The photograph depicts the group focusing on the moment when the tour leader greets the pope.



Pic.5. Group of tourists with the pope in Castel Gandolfo

TRAMPING GROUP IN ITALY

A week after Moroccan trip a tramping tour in Italy started. Following the prompt border crossing in Barwinek, the group accomplished the itinerary for Vienna, Padua and Florence. The next day, yet in Siena market square a telephone call was made to the Polish House in Rome to make the appointment for the Wednesday general audience. The nun receiving the phone call informed us that in four hours the Pope is meeting the group of Poles in his summer residence. The request to include our group in the programme was accepted. If the phone call had been made after the arrival in Rome, the visit in Castel Gandolfo wouldn't have been possible. The sudden change in the programme required other modifications.

During the audience (pic. 6), the Pope's spirituality, vitality and good mood after a holiday refreshment turned out to be contagious. The group expressed those feelings by sharing their experiences and being- more than so far- interested in John Paul II's visits to other places in Italy, whose detailed display was guaranteed by Rome and further route to the south of Italy as well as the programme on the way back past Orvieto, Assisi, San Marino and Ravenna.



Pic. 6. Private audience for the tramping group in Castel Gandolfo

THE ENDING

After John Paul II had died (Saturday, 2nd April 2005, at 21.37) the book of condolence was displayed at University of Rzeszow. The author expressed his gratitude for being able to attend all the described audiences leading and making it possible for the pilgrims and tourists to meet the Holy Father in person. Working on this study brought back memories and recollections of the ceremonies conducted by John Paul II and close encounters with Him while he conveyed all the values a human being should be guided by in life.

Judging by his experience the author concludes that pilgrimages to holy places are frequent in many cultures. They are commonly associated with faith in miraculous features of such places and special grace streaming on praying pilgrims.

The popular ones are holy waters and rivers, e.g. Ganges River or Lourdes; mountains, e.g. Olive Mountain, Sinai; places hiding genuine or presumed remains of people being the subjects of worship or places commemorating the saints, e.g. presumed Tomb of Jesus Christ, Tomb of St. Frances of Assisi, Tomb of Confucius; temples and objects acknowledged as sacred, e.g. miraculous image of Our Lady of Czestochowa in Jasna Gora monastery, numerous sanctuaries of St. Mary in many regions of the world; localities with the highest Church authorities, e.g. Vatican City mentioned in the study; sites famous for ceremonies or church fairs, e.g. Fatima.

A contemporary pilgrim, apart from religious experience, also seeks some educational

values, being interested in both past and present and national and foreign cultural heritage. Thus the conclusion, that dynamically developing religious and pilgrimage tourism sets new challenges for tour operators. It also requires specialized professional training for tour guides covering previous and new, more specialized segments like knowledge on sacred architecture of various religions essential for interpretation of art works such as sculptures, paintings, frescoes and icons.

This training should focus on specific requirements oriented to different creed pilgrims which tourist services carry along, It would prepare prospective tour guides for leading groups in various parts of the world featuring pilgrimages and religious tourism.

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