

SPIRITUAL (WALKING) TOURISM AS FOUNDATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT: KUMANO-KODO PILGRIMAGE, WAKAYAMA, JAPAN

Abstract

Spiritual tourism is one of the oldest types of tourism activities. Besides being oriented towards religious activities, tourists are invited to get to know more about the environmental, economic and socio-cultural conditions around tourist areas through spiritual tourism, which are part of sustainable tourism concept. This paper will discuss about slow tourism implementation as part of sustainable tourism in Kumano-kodo, Wakayama, Japan through walking-based spiritual tourism activities and reflection on related tourism issues in Indonesia.

Keywords: *tourism, sustainable tourism, spiritual tourism*

1. Introduction

Travel with spiritual motivation has become a trend for tourists nowadays. Pilgrimage activity is part of a slow tourism where the activities carried out are dominated by walking and interacting directly with the community around the pilgrimage tourist destination. Spiritual activity which is identified by a slow attachment to a location and society in its surroundings denotes as sustainable tourism fundamentals.

Kumano-kodo, Wakayama Prefecture as the research location, has 2 pilgrimage trails that are listed as World Heritage Sites, namely sacred sites and pilgrimage routes around Kii Mountain (UNESCO, 2004). This pilgrimage route includes Kumano-kodo which has 5 other routes. Kumano-kodo is the name of the 7 climbing routes in Kii Mountain Region. There are Koyasan Choishi-michi and 3 large holy temples, such as Kumano Hongo Taisha, Kumano Hayatama Taisha, and Kumano Nachi Taisha known as Kumano Sanzan. This route has been used for centuries by Japanese people as a worship route. Among the routes found in Kumano-kodo, Nakahechi is the most popular route for tourists because it is supported by close distances, easy accessibility, destination authenticity and promotion.

The phenomenon states that pilgrimage routes such Nakahechi are visited by tourists who has motivations to look for qualities such as calmness, beauty, cleanliness, physical health, and a sense of achievement which feel when completing a certain distance on foot rather than religious motivation. In addition, the concept of slow tourism is also used as a basis for knowing the relationship between spirituality and sustainable tourism (Caffyn, 2012; Dickson & Lumsdon, 2010). Therefore, Nakahechi was used as research's basic reason to find out how the "spirituality" sought by pilgrims has an interest in the tourism development that is related to sustainability

2. Discussion

Contemporary Spirituality and Slow Tourism

Religious travel has a long been motive for traveling and is the oldest form of non-economic travel (Jackowski and Smith, 1992). According to Kelly (1982), the religious aspect as the main role in tourism gives a new color to its development and influences how tourists use their free time. The differences between religious tourism and spiritual tourism is still debated because

of the tendency of the elements in it to overlap and blur the boundary between the two until now.

According to the explanation in the journal, religious and spiritual tourism activities belong to slow tourism. Slow tourism has significant implications in tourism development, regulating certain parameters related to sustainable tourism, and is a process of enjoying destinations without causing severe environmental impacts. According to Sugiyama and Nobuka (2007), slow tourism is a type of trip that supports self-realization by doing something or becoming slow with a deeper observation than just doing recreation. Moreover, Sugiyama and Nobuka (2007) determined five characteristics that represented slow tourism, namely (1) Maintaining health by walking and enjoying slow food; (2) Minimum stay of about one day; (3) Showing self-realization; (4) Restrictions on the use of cars and other motorized vehicles; (5) Adopt green or ecological concepts. On one hand, Takeuchi (2005) states that slow tourism is characterized by unhurried relaxed activities, high quality with a minimum of one day's stay, and having experiences or activities that are "locally produced and consumed locally".

Lumsdon and McGrath (2011) explain that slow tourism is related to reducing activities, traveling at close range, and adding to tourism experiences both on the way to and at the destination, and is a response to tourism development, while at the same time offering a reduction in carbon emissions. There are 4 important elements in slow tourism according to Lumsdon and McGrath (2011), namely (1) slowness and the value of time; (2) locality and activity in the location of tourist destinations; (3) modes of transportation and travel experience; (4) environmental awareness. Based on the elaboration of the theories above, Murayama and Parker (2012) describe the ideal features of slow tourism compared to fast tourism presented in the table 1.

Table 1 Characteristics of Fast Tourism and Slow Tourism

Dimensions	Fast Tourism	Slow Tourism
Relationship	Instant	Harmonious
Ownership	Outside capital	Locally owned, individual/cooperative
Local people	Marginalised	Main actors
Scale	Often larger	Mainly smaller
Size	Accommodate larger groups	Mainly individuals, families or small friendship groups
Activity	Hoping/passive	Doing/active/being
Value	Efficiency, quantity	Valued experiences, quality
Pattern	Standardised	Flexible
Process	Tourism industry led	Bottom up/co – constructed
'inhabitation'	Not possible	Possible
Options	Many places	Selective
Mentality	Taking	Absorbing, deep appreciation
Spirituality	Consumerist, materialistic	Fulfilment, purifying
Benefits	Few larger businesses	Wider community
Local economic leakage	More leakage	Minimised leakage
Length	Short stay	Longer stay
Sustainability	Unsustainable	Sustainable
Examples	Grouppackage tours, day visits	Ecotourism, green tourism, agri-tourism, health tourism, cultural tourism, food tourism

Source: Murayama and Parker (2012, Fullagar et al, 2012)

Based on table 1, it can be concluded that slow tourism is an activity which involves the quality of time utilization, process apresisasi, respecting locality (nature, society, culture and food), and trying to reduce environmental impacts.

Slow and Sustainable Tourism in Kumano

Under UNESCO World Heritage program, Kumano-kodo or the Kumano pilgrimage route are listed as sacred sites and pilgrimage routes in the Kii Mountain Region in 2004.

Table 2 Nominating Routes on Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in Kii Mountain

Routes	Distance (km)	
Omine – Okugake	86.9	
Kumano Sankeimichi	Nakahechi	88.8
	Kohechi	43.7
	Ohechi	10.0
	Iseji	54.2
	Sub – total	129.6
Koyasan Choishimichi	24.0	
Total	307.6	

Source: UNESCO (2004, Kato and Prograno, 2017)

The total area of Kumano-kodo is around 9,900 km² with a total route length about 307.6 km. Kumano-kodo pilgrimage route consists of (1) Kijji, which is the northern part of Oheji where this route is not included in the World Heritage list, (2) Oheji, which is located near the western part, (3) Nakahechi, which is a mountainous region in the west, (4) Kohechi, which is a mountainous region in the north, (5) and Iseji, the coast in the east, where one of the locations is used as a sanctuary, namely Omine – Okugake. Nakahechi's popularity as a pilgrimage route in Kumano-kodo is influenced by 9 characteristics, such as (1) Distance, where the route can be completed in 2 to 3 days on foot; (2) Landscape, most routes pass through the forest with sacred sites scattered throughout the route; (3) Topography/slope, although in some parts there is a steep section, but it has been managed well; (4) Local culture, the availability of traditional food and lodging with conditions that still maintain its authenticity; (5) Cultural significance, where there are various sets of historical images on each part of the route; (6) Signs, there are road markers in Japanese and English; (7) Accommodation, availability of lodging with traditional themes; (8) Travel luggage, baggage delivery service; (9) Hot springs, available at every inn to add to the tourist experience.

Based on sustainable tourism implementation, Nakahechi Route has succeeded developing community opportunities through participation in nature conservation and tourist guidance. There are 3 examples of the development of the route that presented Nakahechi.

1. Conservation Walks

A program that involves various layers of stakeholders, from local governments, the private sector, local communities to volunteers participating. The program includes route infrastructure improvements such as roads, canals and disaster recovery, as well as leadership training for local communities in the field of World Heritage Master Program management and conservation. This program has been running since 2006 and is held annually, where trainees will get a World Heritage Master certificate issued officially by the prefectural government.

2. Sustainability and Tourism Focusing on Health and Leadership Training

The increasing proliferation of independent organizations that facilitate work training and guidance have a positive impact on people living around tourist areas, one of which is the ability as interpreters. According to Tilden (1977), interpretation is an educational activity that aims to express the true meaning and relationships within it through inheritance objects, with direct experience and using media illustrations rather than simply knowing on factual information in a simple way. Through interpretation, the benefits of conservation can be obtained such as encouraging changes in habits to reduce the impact on the environment, encouraging tourists to be more aware of the surrounding environment as a contribution to conservation (Littlefair, 2004).

There are 2 specialist guides in the Kumano-kodo Region, namely (1) Kumano therapists, they are therapists who are trained to facilitate in the health sector (such as geo-therapy, herbal medicine and organic food), and provide health advice in living a lifestyle; (2) Kataribe, is a story-teller that tells stories of legends, myths and folklore, where guides with this expertise have been prepared to master English fluently, supported by local knowledge of history, conservation principles and skilled storytelling skills.

3. Local Communities Development

Local communities around pilgrimage routes have a tendency to find a more sustainable place to live and life. It is usually a community in rural areas who are interested in organic products such as organic food, natural clothing materials, chemical-free products, handmade products, and alternative energy that creates tourism opportunities with the promotion of an environmentally friendly and sustainable lifestyle.

Conclusion

According to the results of the discussion, slow tourism is categorized as a type of tourism which is considered capable of improving quality, raising awareness, and contributing directly or indirectly to the sustainability of an area. There are some key elements in spiritual tourism,

- 1. Promoting spiritual heritage, which focuses on heritage related to unspoiled environment and ethical and responsible tourist habits.*
- 2. Facilitating various kinds of community participation, such as facilitating educational programs, interactions between urban and rural residents, intergenerational relations, and relations between local communities.*
- 3. Promote leadership carried out by trained professionals and volunteers, namely by investing in training and education guides / instructors / translators who work creatively.*
- 4. Environmental image, by promoting activities that have a low impact and are beneficial to the environment, promoting health and spiritual tourism, and collaborating with tourism volunteers as social contributions.*

From those elements, a model will be formed for stakeholders of sustainable tourism who are influential in tourism development.

Based on the results of the study, it was concluded that walking-based spiritual tourism was very effectively used as part of the promotion of tourism development in an area. This type of tourism activity will be increasingly attractive because of the use of natural functions that are

used as an alternative to natural healing, as well as efforts to reduce the impact of tourism development on environmental, social and cultural aspects.

3. Reflections on Indonesia

The development of slow tourism and spiritual tourism walking-based has begun to develop in several regions in Indonesia, including pilgrimage tours to places of worship, pilgrimage tours by visiting the tombs of Walisongo or kings of royal descent. Popular destinations for pilgrimage tours in Indonesia such as the island of Bali with its cultural diversity, Lombok which has a thousand mosques, Yogyakarta with tombs of royal families in Imogiri and so on. Indonesia has great potential for spiritual tourism because it is supported by ethnic, cultural and religious diversity that is spread throughout the region. One example is pilgrimage-based tourism on foot at Borobudur Temple, Magelang. Borobudur Temple is one of UNESCO World Heritage sites that has been built since the 9th century. In 2017, the Tidar Heritage Foundation (THF) introduced a cultural introduction program attended by several representatives of the country, with the aim of promoting peace and bringing a sense of harmony throughout the world through Borobudur Temple as the largest Buddhist temple in the world.

Different than spiritual tourism in Kumano-kodo, Wakayama where tourism activities are carried out without a specific schedule, this type of tourist activity in Borobudur Temple can only be done when the celebration of Vesak is celebrated. This tourist activity is a series of events in celebrating Vesak with tourist routes, starting from Mendut Temple, Pawon Temple, and ending at Borobudur Temple. With a total route distance of about 6 km, this route for Buddhists has meaning which represents three phases in the achievement towards Nirvana. In addition, the entire route provides an experience for tourists to explore and understand the Buddha's journey from his birth, adventure after leaving the kingdom, to receiving enlightenment.

Spiritual tourism at Borobudur Temple when Vesak celebration held increases the number of tourists visiting both domestic and foreign. The level of income of both the local community, tour package managers, lodging and food entrepreneurs, and the inclusion of regional government revenues increased significantly. Based on this, it can be concluded that although walking-based spiritual tourism in the Borobudur Temple only runs once a year, the positive impact it can cause sustainability.

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the discussion above, it can be concluded that sustainability is obtained from slow tourism through walking-based spiritual tourism, which is related to distance, natural conditions, socio-cultural conditions, available tourist facilities, and the community inside. The training program that held by local governments is also part of a series of tourism area marketing, because without cooperation among stakeholders the sustainability of tourism activities will be difficult to work. Nowadays, the development of slow tourism in Kumano-kodo, Wakayama has been going well even though from 7 routes offered there is only one route that is very popular with tourists. Meanwhile, slow tourism in Indonesia is still in the development stage, such that found in the Borobudur Temple. Although walking-based spiritual tourism activities only run during the celebration of Vesak only, but the implementation

of sustainable tourism in the Borobudur Temple Area can be seen through economic, environmental and socio-cultural activities before and after the celebration day.

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