

# Chapter 15

## Enhancing Pilgrim Experiences: Insights Into Motivations and Preferences on the Santiago Way's Portuguese Routes

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter examines into the motivations of pilgrims on the Santiago Way, a traditional pilgrimage route that ends at the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela in Spain. This research, which attracts thousands of pilgrims from all over the world, attempts to better understand the various motivations that drive people to proceed on this journey. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews with a structured questionnaire, obtaining a final sample of 185 pilgrims. The data show that the motivations for choosing Portuguese routes are multifaceted, with significant aspects including the quality of hotel facilities, local cuisine, and easy access and closeness to the airport. This comprehensive analysis of modern motivations provides important insights for improving pilgrim support services and implementing tailored tourist initiatives. The study benefits stakeholders involved in pilgrim support and tourist development along the Portuguese pathways of the Santiago Way by offering a more in-depth understanding of modern pilgrimage.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most prominent sectors of economic activity in Portugal.

In the 2023, overnight stays reached 77.179.2 thousand and increased by 10.7%. Compared to 2019, overnight stays increased by 10.0%. Total profits, which reached 5.676.4 million euros by December 2023, grew by 13.2%, and revenues amount to 25.1 million euros, with 60% of this total coming from five markets: the United Kingdom (share: 15.3%), France (12.4%), Germany (11.2%), Spain (11.0%), and the United States (9.8%) (Turismo de Portugal, 2024:3)

One of the most important types of tourism is religious tourism, which has received increasing attention in literature (Poria et al., 2003; Fourie et al., 2015; Durán-Sánchez et al., 2018, Di Giovine & Choe, 2019; Giu că, 2020; Rosak-Szyrocka et al., 2023) due to its economic potential, i.e. its ability to promote

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small businesses along the Pilgrimage ways, such as restaurants, hotel establishments or regional trade (Gomes et al., 2019).

The increasing relevance of religious tourism as an economic activity and an attraction of a large number of tourists, especially in places such as Santiago de Compostela, has aroused the interest of researchers and stakeholders (Silva & Borges, 2019). The significance of religious tourism in rural communities is highlighted. With the evolution of modern society and rural depopulation, religious tourism has become a determining factor for the development of rural areas due to its historical heritage. The itineraries of faith play a fundamental role in increasing the competitiveness and development of the regions through which pilgrims pass, helping to strengthen their identity (Sgroi, 2021). Religious tourism is a branch of cultural tourism motivated by faith, with pilgrimages to religious sanctuaries being its most direct expression (Iliev, 2020).

In the 2000s, the literature produced a number of concepts and theories: pilgrimage, religious tourism, and spiritual tourism (Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005; Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Das et al., 2024), and new approaches for the relationship between religion and tourism. Some researchers challenge the traditional view of pilgrimage and religious tourism as entirely separate concepts (Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Schnell & Pali, 2013; Durán-Sánchez et al., 2018), argue that they are more intertwined than distinct, and pilgrimage and religious tourism share the same destinations, with different motivations to travel. Pilgrims seek spiritual connection and the “holy” or “sacred,” while religious tourists may be driven by a thirst for knowledge or cultural understanding (Cortese et al., 2019:2) and a pilgrim can engage in both religious and non-spiritual activities during their holiday, such as visiting tourist attractions and shopping, a tourists can engage in spiritual activities during their holiday, such as visiting holy places through daily tours (Shtudiner et al., 2018). However, pilgrims and tourists are a distinct market segment characterized by their unique attributes, consumer behavior, and expenditures (Fleischer, 2000). However, the pilgrimage experience goes beyond the religious aspect, as contact with nature and participation in social and sports activities also play a fundamental role (Silva & Borges, 2019). To enhance the overall pilgrim experience, understanding the motivations, preferences, and challenges faced by travelers is crucial (Remoaldo et al., 2024).

According to Hsu et al. (2009:9) are identify four types of religious motivations: 1. Sacred Pilgrims: Those who love to participate in religious rituals, experience the dignity of God, and feel spiritual comfort; experience the dignity of God, and feel spiritual comfort; 2. Believers: Those who have a devotion to God; 3. Experience Companion: Those who go on a travel and accompany their friends and 4. Secular Polytheists: Those who want protection from Gods.

The Santiago Way, a pilgrimage route leading to the shrine of the apostle Saint James the Great in northwestern Spain, has witnessed a surge in popularity in recent years. Among its various ways, the Portuguese routes have emerged as particularly attractive options for pilgrims seeking spiritual, cultural, and personal enrichment. The Portuguese Way of St. James has experienced a significant increase in popularity, attracting pilgrims from around the world who seek spiritual, cultural, and personal growth. This surge can be attributed to several factors that have combined to create a pilgrimage experience. Santiago de Compostela is one of the most well-known religious destinations worldwide, and the Portuguese Way is the second most visited by pilgrims (Oficina del Peregrino, 2023).

This surge in popularity underscores a broader trend of renewed interest in pilgrimage as a means of personal and spiritual exploration. The Portuguese Way's appeal extends beyond religious devotion, encompassing a diverse range of motivations that resonate with contemporary travelers. According to Casais & Sousa (2020:6) pilgrims on the Santiago Way have multiple motivations: “to fight loneliness”;

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