

Impacts of Religious Tourism – Lourdes

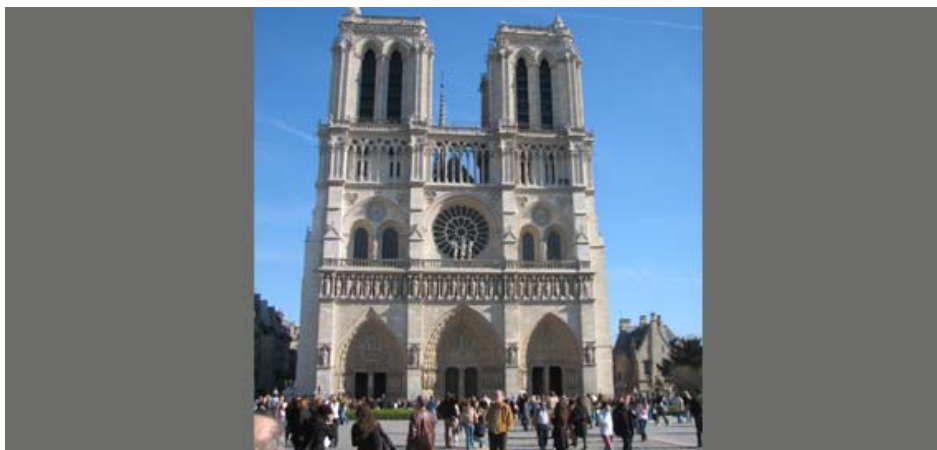
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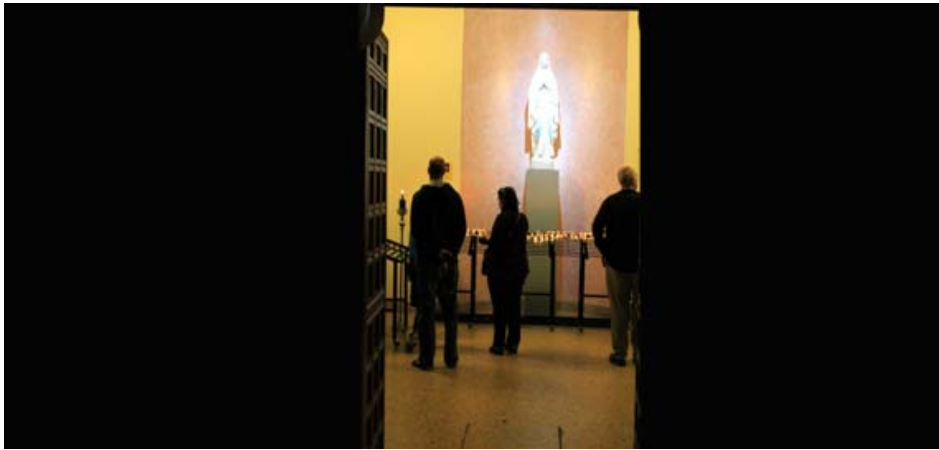
1. Why is Lourdes so appealing to its visitors?
2. How are visitor trends changing?
3. What are the impacts of tourism on Lourdes?
4. Activities
5. Evidence Log

TAB 1

QUESTION – Why is Lourdes so appealing to its visitors?

IMAGE:





INFORMATION:

There are many reasons why people choose to travel to different destinations. One motivating factor which is often overlooked is religious tourism. In fact, religious tourism in the form of pilgrimages was one of the earliest motivators for people to travel. Throughout the world and across all major religions there are particular destinations which draw many thousands and even millions of tourists each year.

All of these tourists require transport from their home to their destination and accommodation while they are away. Many will travel in family or other groups. There are many tour operators specialising in religious tourism and thousands of tour guides throughout the world who provide tours of religious buildings and sites.

In some cases, religious buildings form important attractions within major cities. Examples would be St Paul's Cathedral and Westminster Abbey in London, St Peter's in Rome and Notre Dame in Paris. Although most tourists would not visit these destinations specifically to visit religious buildings, they would be an important part of many itineraries and add to the appeal of the city.

As with all forms of tourism, religious tourism creates major impacts on the destinations where it takes place.

QUESTION – What is the area of Lourdes like?

INFORMATION:

Lourdes is a town of 17,000 inhabitants which lies in the South of France in the foothills of the Pyrenees Mountains. The local river, called the 'Gave de Pau' splits the town into two levels; the higher town and the lower town, where the famous religious buildings can be found. The town is dominated by a rocky outcrop which boasts an old castle.

Lourdes is the second most popular tourist city in France and the third most popular destination worldwide for Catholic pilgrimages. The town of Lourdes offers a large range of varied accommodation, restaurants and souvenir shops to the great number of tourists and pilgrims who visit each year.

The airport of Tarbes-Lourdes is only 10km away and it brings in some 50,000 passengers a year, mainly from Italy, Ireland and the UK, as well as other European countries. The airport provides easy access to a number of winter sports resorts in the Pyrenees Mountains nearby as well as making it far easier for modern-day pilgrims to reach Lourdes.

Lourdes is also accessible by train. Since 2000, sick people who come to visit Lourdes can be looked after from the time they leave the train to their transfer to hospitals or other specialised centres using new infrastructure.

Lourdes is also in a prime location for outdoor recreational activities. A funicular railway leads to the top of the peak of Pic du Jer from which there are magnificent panoramic views of the town and its surrounding area. In the area surrounding Lourdes there are numerous outdoor activities such as hiking, mountain biking or kayaking in the area.

The main season for pilgrimages extends from Easter to the end of October. All year round a number of masses are celebrated every morning in the chapels, churches and basilicas in the sanctuary as well as a mass at 11pm during the pilgrimage season.



During the main season the hour long Blessed Sacrament Procession takes place on a daily basis at 5 pm.

Every night there is also a torch lit procession which ends on the esplanade in front of the *Basilique Notre Dame du Rosaire*. A statue of the Blessed Virgin is carried between torches, and pilgrims carry a lighted candle and walk in groups behind their pilgrimage banner. At the end of the procession they are invited to attend the last mass.

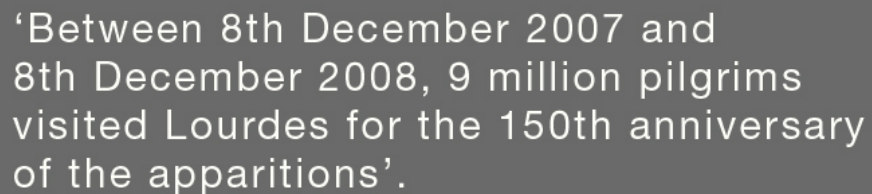
In July and August there is also an international youth mass twice weekly. Pilgrims are invited to walk in the footsteps of Bernadette to discover her message of faith.

Between 8th December 2007 and 8th December 2008, 9 million pilgrims visited Lourdes for the 150th anniversary of the apparitions. The pope Benoit XVI paid a visit in September 2008.

TAB 2

QUESTION – How are visitor trends changing?

IMAGE:



‘Between 8th December 2007 and 8th December 2008, 9 million pilgrims visited Lourdes for the 150th anniversary of the apparitions’.

About 25,000 people a day in a town with a population of 17,000! That’s like over 10 million people visiting London in a day. On busy days up to 100,000 visitors may be in Lourdes!

INFORMATION:

As would be expected, there is a range of accommodation available in and around the town of Lourdes. This includes hotels, apartments and gites (cottages), B&B and hostels.

There are about 33,700 beds spaces in Lourdes

- 208 hotels with 26,400 beds
- 5 residences with 360 apartments – 1,400 beds
- 11 campsites – 2,400 beds/spaces
- 3,500 beds in hostel types of accommodation and religious accommodation (shown in the image below)



TAB 3

QUESTION – What are the impacts of tourism on Lourdes?

IMAGES:



INFORMATION:

In Lourdes, the area of the esplanade around the religious buildings has been kept clear of development. Using a programme such as Google Earth, investigate the difference between the features to the west and south of the river Gave de Pau and those to the east over the bridge. The two images below show the contrast.

INFORMATION:

Another impact associated with religious destinations such as Lourdes is that of specialist tour operators which provide visits to the destination. Each of the crosses in the image below was left by a church group who visited Lourdes. Many of these groups would have used the services of a specialist tour operator.

