

SAN SALVADOR MANIFIESTO

For a Religious Tourism that humanizes, transforms, and develops territories

In the city of San Salvador, where history, faith, and resilience converge, we proclaim this Manifesto within the framework of the *International Congress on Religious Tourism – Land of Living Faith – El Salvador 2026 (July 8–10, 2026)*, as a declaration of commitment to religious tourism understood as a transformative force for individuals, communities, and territories. We recognize in this practice a profound expression of human mobility that, far from being limited to physical displacement, represents a process of inner search, encounter, and meaning.

Here is a polished, publication-quality English translation appropriate for an international declaration, academic paper, or institutional report. It preserves the original meaning while employing natural, formal English.

Religious tourism is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses spiritual, cultural, social, and economic dimensions. It is not merely about visiting sacred sites but about engaging in experiences that connect individuals with the transcendent, the historical memory of peoples, and the rich symbolic heritage of their traditions. When experienced authentically, religious tourism has the potential to foster personal transformation and strengthen community bonds.

From this perspective, we affirm that religious tourism is a strategic instrument for holistic development. Its economic contribution is evident: it stimulates local economies, creates employment opportunities, encourages entrepreneurship, and promotes economic diversification. Communities that welcome pilgrims and visitors become key participants in a system where hospitality, culture, and service assume a central role. When managed responsibly, this dynamism can help reduce social inequalities and foster resilient, sustainable local economies.

Nevertheless, we caution that economic development must not take precedence over the spiritual essence of this practice. The excessive commercialization of sacred spaces risks undermining their profound significance. It is therefore essential to establish management models that foster respect for the sacred character of these places, ensuring that sites of faith do not become mere tourist attractions devoid of their deeper meaning.

From a social perspective, religious tourism fosters encounter among cultures, promoting dialogue, mutual understanding, and peaceful coexistence. Visitors do not merely observe; they engage with living communities that transmit values, traditions, and distinctive ways of understanding the world. This exchange strengthens the social fabric and contributes to the development of a civic culture grounded in solidarity and mutual respect.

Religious tourism also reinforces the cultural identity of territories and communities. Religious celebrations, pilgrimages, and expressions of faith provide spaces for collective participation that facilitate the intergenerational transmission of knowledge, traditions, and beliefs. In this sense, religious tourism serves as a key instrument for preserving historical memory and strengthening a shared sense of belonging.

Its contribution to cultural heritage is equally significant. Religious heritage, both tangible and intangible, finds in religious tourism an important means for its conservation and appreciation. Churches, sanctuaries, pilgrimage routes, and living traditions are sustained through the interest and engagement of those who visit them. However, this process of heritage enhancement must be guided by authenticity, avoiding the folklorization or distortion of cultural and religious practices.

We also recognize the spiritual dimension as the very core of religious tourism. Beyond its tangible impacts, it offers individuals the opportunity to pause, reflect, and reconnect with what is most essential. In a global context characterized by increasing speed and fragmentation, these spaces of silence, contemplation, and spiritual renewal acquire immeasurable value.

It is also important to distinguish between religious tourism and pilgrimage. Pilgrimage is characterized by an explicitly spiritual motivation, marked by devotion, sacrifice, and the journey itself as a transformative experience. Religious tourism, by contrast, encompasses a broader spectrum of motivations, including cultural, historical, and educational interests. Rather than being mutually exclusive, these two phenomena are complementary and can mutually enrich the visitor's experience.

In light of today's challenges, we warn against the growing risks of trivialization. Overtourism, the loss of spiritual meaning, and indiscriminate commercialization can strip this practice of its profound human and spiritual value. It is therefore imperative to promote sustainable management models that prioritize the quality of the visitor experience, the capacity-building of all stakeholders, and respect for host communities, while safeguarding the sacred and cultural integrity of the places that give religious tourism its unique significance.

In this context, we assume the following commitments:

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- Promote public policies that integrate religious tourism as a pillar of sustainable territorial development, recognizing its capacity to generate economic well-being and strengthen social cohesion.
- Strengthen the capacity-building of local stakeholders in tourism management, cultural heritage conservation, and visitor services, incorporating ethical principles and sustainability considerations.
- Foster the participation of local communities in decision-making processes, recognizing their role as custodians of cultural heritage and key actors in sustainable development.
- Advance the conservation of religious heritage through partnerships among the public, private, and community sectors, ensuring its transmission to future generations.
- Promote integrated tourism experiences that bring together the spiritual, cultural, and social dimensions of religious tourism, avoiding fragmented or superficial approaches.
- Promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue as a means of fostering peace, mutual understanding, and peaceful coexistence.

- Establish evaluation mechanisms to assess the impacts of religious tourism, promoting its sustainability and supporting continuous improvement.
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This **San Salvador Manifesto** is presented as an invitation to rethink religious tourism from a holistic, ethical, and humanistic perspective. Its purpose is not merely to attract visitors, but to create meaningful experiences that transform individuals and strengthen communities.

We call upon governments, religious institutions, civil society organizations, the private sector, and academia to work collaboratively in building a model of religious tourism that is inclusive, sustainable, and respectful of human dignity.

Thus, we hereby declare.