ABSTRACT

Pilgrimage, whether traditional and religious or modern and secular, is experiencing an increase around the world. A major tourist destination in the eastern state of Bihar in India, Bodhgaya, is struggling to absorb an influx of these types of visitors. This research is a study of visitors opinions on tourism’s impact on Bodhgaya as a sacred site with regard to visitor type, nationality and religion. The greater the exposure of the site to visitors the greater is the potential for negative visitor impact.

The researcher used surveys with 217 respondents at the Mahabodhi temple, Bodhgaya from 17th-22nd August, 2009. Visitors were categorized by the following characteristics: visitor type, religion and nationality. Awareness of the visitor profile helps to ensure success. The findings of the study disclosed that the majority of the respondents in the distinct groups were concerned about the sustainability of Bodhgaya, the negative impact on the environment, on the local community and on the visitors themselves.

This study recommends the Bodhgaya Temple Management Committee (BTMC) to pay urgent attention to enhance the quality of the temple visitation experience, protecting the site, train the staff, moderating the impact of visitors on-site while still enabling them to come on-site and bringing real benefits to local residents, visiting pilgrims and tourists. Visitors can be informed about the impacts connected with a certain activity, or given information that encourages the use of certain areas over threatened areas.

**Keyword:** Religious tourism, impacts, visitor management, Buddhism, Bodhgaya