

**International Conference on Religious Tourism:
*Fostering sustainable socio-economic development in host communities***

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Session 1: Understanding religious tourism - motivations and trends

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Bio:

Josep Maria Mallarach is an independent environmental consultant, based in Catalonia, Spain, with over 30 years of experience, working for public agencies and private organizations, at international, national, and local levels, in Western Europe, North Africa, North and South-America.

His fields of expertise include protected areas planning, management and evaluation; sacred natural sites, landscape, and strategic impact assessment. His academic background is in environment and natural sciences.

Since 2010 he has represented the IUCN World Heritage Programme in the UNESCO Initiative of World Heritage Sites of Religious Significance. Since 2003 he has been a member of the IUCN World Commission of Protected Areas; a member of the Steering Committee of its Specialist Group on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas; and joint-coordinator of The Delos Initiative, aiming to promote sacred natural sites in technologically developed countries.

He has authored or edited 18 books, and more than 200 papers, 60 of them included in books.

Abstract:

As the numbers and diversity of religious and spiritual tourists are growing almost all over the world, the potential threats and negative impacts for both the tangible and intangible values of sacred natural sites are becoming a matter of growing concern. At the same time, however, when properly managed, religious and spiritual tourism has the potential to enhance the development of local economies, to improve governance and increase resilience vis-à-vis existing or new threats. IUCN is mostly concerned in two dimensions of this issue: conservation of the sacred natural sites heritage and improving the environmental management of pilgrimages.

Since 2003, IUCN and its WCPA have adopted a number of resolutions and recommendations to improve the conservation and governance of sacred natural sites and local communities related to them. In particular, the WCPA Specialist Group on Cultural and Spiritual Values of Protected Areas is actively working to promote and support the engagement of religious and spiritual traditions, including indigenous and traditional peoples and communities belonging to all faiths, in conserving their valuable heritage for current and future generations.

IUCN's own experience on policies and actions integrating culture in nature conservation, such as the protection of sacred natural sites, shows the value of this integrated and inclusive approach that empowers the communities who are custodians of those valuable places. The development of the IUCN-UNESCO Best Practice Guidelines on Sacred Natural Sites and the UNESCO Initiative of World Heritage Sites of Religious Interest will be discussed.