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UK Pilgrimage Tourism to Poland

1. The appeal of pilgrimage tourism to Poland

For Poland, the UK travel market is one of the most attractive markets in Europe. We measure the value of each market by the number of arrivals, length of stay and amount of money spent locally. These figures allow us to rank individual markets. Considering these indices, spending in particular, Britain is near the top of the European list. The British use hotel accommodation, particularly the more luxurious type, more often than other visitors.

Poland can offer to the UK visitors following attractions:

- Culture (objects of material culture, artistic events and indigenous culture);
- Nature, national parks;
- Active holidays;
- Meetings & incentive tourism

As well as:

- Pilgrimages for Polish ex-patriates and Jewish communities.

The high ranking of Poland's culture was confirmed by the result of a poll organised by The Sunday Times in November 1998. Asked to choose the world's most attractive country to foreign visitors for culture and national heritage, the Sunday Times readers pointed to Poland.

Culture motivated tourism brings visitors mostly to large cities having a direct air link with the UK, such as Cracow, Warsaw, Gdańsk and Zakopane (easily accessed by coach from Cracow). These trips broadly fall into the category of city breaks. Touring holidays encompass a wider range of places and attractions. The most popular routes are:

- Gdańsk – Warsaw – Częstochowa – Auschwitz – Cracow – Wrocław – Poznań – Toruń;
- Gdańsk – Toruń – Warsaw – Częstochowa – Auschwitz – Cracow – Zakopane;

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- Warsaw – Zakopane – Cracow – Auschwitz – Częstochowa;
 - Wrocław – Cracow – Auschwitz – Zakopane;
 - Berlin – Poznań – Warsaw;
 - Cracow – Łagiewniki – Auschwitz – Wadowice – Kalwaria Zebrzydowska – Zakopane.

City breaks and touring holidays almost invariably include visits to cultural sites, usually associated with religious themes. These may be churches, monasteries and places of worship related to the Roman-Catholic faith, such as Częstochowa, Licheń, Łagiewniki, Cracow, Wadowice, Warsaw (the grave of Father J. Popiełuszko), Gdańsk, Święta Lipka.

UK visitors, being predominantly of Anglican rather than Catholic denomination, are infrequently motivated to come to Poland for pilgrimages. Nevertheless, while visiting Poland they are very keen to see the great monuments of the Roman-Catholic Church.

The major segment of the UK market showing interest in pilgrimage trips belongs to the Polish ex-patriates resident here. The number of trips to Poland made by ex-patriate Poles peaked during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. During these years they mostly arrived in organised groups.

Currently the number of tourists travelling in groups is decreasing, as more people prefer to come on the individual basis. Only a few Catholic centres in the UK organise trips to Poland for groups of 40-50 people to places such as Częstochowa, Łagiewniki and Licheń.

2.1 Organisers and promotion

In May 2000 the Marian Fathers Centre is organising a trip to pilgrimage sites. The visit has been publicised by placing advertising spots in such publications as “Zwiastun Miłosierdzia” and English language papers – “Catholic Herald” and “Catholic Times”.

In this particular case the offer is aimed at the British market, but also at members of the resident Polish community. If a pilgrimage is meant to attract mainly members of the local Polish community, then the usual parish “information channels” are supplemented by advertising in the “Polish Daily”, the largest Polish paper with 5000 circulation.

Pilgrimage motivation is also supported by the Polish national Tourist Office through advertising in the “Catholic Herald” and additionally through:

- Day- to-day distribution of promotional materials;
- Presentation of posters and materials at travel shows;
- Presentations at seminars for the travel trade.

Tour operators offering in their catalogues trips to Jasna Góra promote Częstochowa and the Jasna Góra monastery in the course of the usual advertising. For instance, this is how Page & Moy, a major UK tour operator, advertised in January 2000 in *Western Mail* (Cardiff) their tours of Warsaw, Berlin and Cracow, which last ten days and cost £749.00. The itinerary includes sightseeing the three cities, with a highlight on the visit to the Jasna Góra monastery and a Chopin concert in Warsaw. It may not be a typical pilgrimage, still in a broad sense it fulfils this aim too.

Similarly, the March issue of *The Belfast Telegraph Travel* carried advertising aimed at the residents of Northern Ireland for a trip from Belfast to Warsaw, Cracow, Jasna Góra and Wrocław. Duration: ten days, price: £869.00.

It is interesting to note that both offers do not make a mention the town of Częstochowa, only Jasna Góra, the site of the monastery.

At present, Jasna Góra as a destination for UK tourists is featured by the following tour operators:

- Donnybrook Travel
- Macunia Travel
- Concord Travel
- Polorbis ravel
- Bogdan Travel
- STA Travel
- Page & Moy
- Fregata (till January 2000)
- Rosary Pilgrimage Apostolate in the *Fantastic Catholic Pilgrimages* catalogue.

The Rosary Pilgrimage Apostolate specialises in organising pilgrimage tours. They feature Poland in their catalogue under the “Poland & Divine Mercy” slogan. The tour programme includes Craców, Łagiewniki, Auschwitz, Wadowice, Kalwaria Zebrzydowska and Zakopane, last eight days and costs £559.00.

2.2 Attracting the Jewish community

The Jewish community in the UK can be seen as a yet untapped potential for religious motivated tours. Members of the community, due to their social position and wealth, belong to the higher strata of the British society. In 1999, out of over 26 000 quires received from the public by the Polish National Tourist Office in London, one half was related to cultural tourism, with 14% callers enquiring about Holocaust trips. Henceforward, a large number of queries were related to Auschwitz and other former concentration camps: Majdanek, Treblinka and Stuthoff.

At present, Jews travel to Poland mainly to visit places of martyrdom during World War II. Apart from the former concentration camps, they also show interest in former ghettos and cemeteries, mainly in cities such as Cracow, Warsaw and Łódź. Recently more visits have been made to holy places, such as Kock, Góra Kalwaria, Koźnice, Leżajsk and Rymanów, associated with the lives of the famous Chassidic rabbis.

In order to attract more Jewish visitors to Poland the Polish National Tourist Office in London aims to increase contacts with those tour operators who specialise in such type of travel and understand the requirements of this market segment.

The leading tour operator, Peltrours, receives support of the Polish NTO, i.a. through advertisement of tourism to Poland in the Jewish Chronicle.

It is the aim of the Polish NTO to attract tourists coming to Poland for reasons of Jewish history, culture and religion, also to visit other places significant for Poland's history as a whole. Although some progress has been made, we are not oblivious of the particularly sensitivity of the Jewish community to the current developments on the social and political scene in Poland.

Another major problem is the lack of a comprehensive offer for kosher food. Only some of Poland's leading hospitality centres can offer adequate menus for this type of clientele. This poses a problem for the expansion of the programme to Poland's smaller towns. Inadequate supply of accommodation in the towns favoured by Jewish visitors is another problem.

Moreover, the Polish NTO should step up its promotional effort in order to make Poland more attractive to this group of visitors.

3. Conclusions

1. To increase the number of pilgrimage trips more effort is required to promote religious themes in conjunction with local attractions.
2. Promotional materials are required to provide information on such subjects as:
 - maps with routes for pilgrimages;
 - maps with Jewish interest sites;
 - brochure for holy places;
 - brochure for Jewish interest sites;
 - posters;
 - video cassettes;
 - CD-ROMS for presentations.
3. Presentations should be organised for parish clergy responsible for organising pilgrimages.

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4. More advertising is needed in selected Catholic publications.
 5. A series of presentations should be proposed to the local Jewish community.
 6. A press release for the UK media and tour operators should be prepared to highlight:
 - places of worship and pilgrimage;
 - places commemorating Jewish history, culture and religion, and above all those that present the role of Jews the context of Poland's traditions, history and culture;
 7. Kosher menu and suitable accommodation is required in the towns preferred by Jewish visitors.

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