

Article

# Religious Experiences of Travellers Visiting the Royal Monastery of Santa María de Guadalupe (Spain)

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**Abstract:** The Royal Monastery of Guadalupe has been one of the most important religious destinations in Spain since the 14th century, when the black wooden sculpture of the Virgin Mary (sculpted in the 1st century AD) was found. It was declared a World Heritage Site by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO) in 1993 and is presently a tourism attraction of international interest. It is visited by more than 60,000 tourists annually, including pilgrims and other people interested in the cultural and natural heritage of the area. The aim of this study was to decipher ways that religiousness is experienced by tourists with different motivations, i.e., to better understand how religion is linked to tourism through embodied notions of godliness in different modalities of tourism. A total of 242 visitors were interviewed in the summer of 2017. They were asked about the main motivations for their visits, which were classified into five groups (religious, cultural, environmental, social, and educational reasons) and used as latent variables in a path structural equation model (SEM). The model showed strong predictive power ( $R^2 = 87.5\%$ ) reporting a significant positive influence of religious, cultural, and environmental motivations on religious tourism in this region.

**Keywords:** religious tourism; pilgrimage; motivations; environment; ancient paths; educational motivation

## 1. Introduction

The village of Guadalupe (Extremadura, Spain) has been widely regarded as one of the most important pilgrimage destinations for Catholicism ever since King Alfonso XI of Castile ordered the construction of the Royal Monastery in 1337 [1]. The original church was constructed in 1340 [2]. This site was built to commemorate the apparition of the Virgin Mary to a local shepherd named Gil Cordero in a nearby valley [3]. It is commonly accepted that the Monastery was constructed in the same place where Gil Cordero found the wooden sculpture of the Virgin Mary [4]. This image was sculpted in the workshop of Saint John the Evangelist in the 1st century and has the peculiarity of being coloured in black [5]. For the latter reason the Virgin of Guadalupe is known by Christians worldwide as the Black Virgin, Lady, or Madonna [6].

The site was declared a monastery in 1389 and occupied by 32 monks belonging to the Jerónimos Order [7,8]. It was managed by the Jerónimos until 1835 [9]. During this period of management of more than 400 years, the building was expanded, reaching 22,000 m<sup>2</sup> in size, and included different architectural characteristics such as Gothic, Mudejar, Renaissance, Baroque, and Neoclassical (Figure 1) styles [10]. The Jerónimos also managed facilities dedicated to healing the wounds of pilgrims [7]. In addition, devotion to the Black Virgin spread throughout the Iberian Peninsula, the Canary Islands,

and Latin America [11,12], with Guadalupe becoming one of the oldest centres of pilgrimage in Europe [13]. For example, the first known baptism of indigenous people brought from America took place in Guadalupe in 1496 [14].



**Figure 1.** The Royal Monastery of Santa María de Guadalupe (Spain).

In 1835 the Jerónimos were expelled from the Monastery and its monastic dependencies suffered abandonment and pillage [15]. In 1908 the administration of the Franciscans Order began, and the Order continues to manage the Monastery and its touristic visits to this day. They rehabilitated the architectural and artistic parts of the building, took charge of the cult of the Virgin, recovered many of the goods lost in the confiscation of 1835, and preserved many musical events [16]. Nowadays, some sections of the monastery can be visited, such as the Mudejar cloister of Los Milagros (14th century), the chapels of St. Jerónimo and St. Joseph (16th century), the sacristy (17th century), and the dressing room or *camarín* (18th century), as well as some museums dedicated to miniature books, embroidery, and sculptures and paintings by famous artists [17].

This sacred place was also declared a World Heritage Site by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural organization (UNESCO) in 1993 [18]. In addition, it is located in the heart of a region of about 2500 km<sup>2</sup> (Villuercas–Ibores–Jara) that was recognized as a Geopark of the European Network in 2011 [19]. Therefore, Guadalupe has become a tourist destination both for pilgrims and for other travellers interested in the architectural value of the monument, as well as in the natural heritage of the region [20]. In fact, according to official statistics, Guadalupe is visited by 60,000 tourists annually.

A pilgrim can be considered as an original spirit-seeker who visits publicly accessible places, such as monasteries, and is driven by religious motivations. Pilgrims desire to get closer to divinity, seek forgiveness for wrongdoing, worship ancestors and nature gods, and/or petition a deity for blessings [21] (p. 276), [22] (p. 8). Nowadays, it is very common to see people hiking on traditional pilgrimage paths, although many of them would not be considered pilgrims in a strict sense. Differences and similarities between tourists and pilgrims have been discussed [23]. Nevertheless, it should be noted that touristic sites do not only appeal to religious adherents and pilgrims; they also attract general cultural tourists. Hence, even for non-religious people, as-yet little-studied shared experiences based on religious values occur lead many travellers to visit shrines [24].

In the last decades, the Twelve Ancient Pilgrimage Paths of Guadalupe that link this place with important modern cities such as Madrid, Aranjuez, Toledo, Mérida (Emerita Augusta, capital of the Roman province of Lusitania), Cáceres, and Plasencia, with the Monastery of Yuste (where the Emperor Charles V died in 1558), or with the Christian communities who lived in the Arabic Al-Andalus (commonly known as Mozarabic) have been recovered thanks to a recent inter-territorial project named Itinere 1337 led by Asociación para la Promoción y el Desarrollo Rural del Geoparque Mundial de la UNESCO (APRODERVI). It is a rural organization to promote the UNESCO Geopark. It is located in Villuercas, Ibores, Jara (Extremadura, Spain) [25]. A rich cultural, archaeological, and natural integrity has been preserved. Furthermore, Guadalupe is well-connected by two important roads whose routes end on the Madrid–Lisbon motorway. Therefore, it is a tourism destination where travellers can arrive using different forms of transport, motivated by a large array of reasons. As a result, Guadalupe is an interesting case study where the attributes of a sacred place are mixed with interest in cultural and natural heritage.

Religion is not only an institutional field of representation but also a personal experience within a sacred site [26]. Therefore, taking into account the abovementioned factors, the main goal of this study was to better understand the motivations of the travellers who visit the Royal Monastery in order to better discern how religious, cultural, social, environmental, and educational drivers share common values linked to religious experiences (e.g., spiritual health, reflection, corporal sanitation, etc.). These features were measured using techniques and methods (see the Materials and Methods section) successfully tested in works on tourist satisfaction [27] to predict attitudes toward tourism development [28] and evaluate young residents' sense of belonging to a UNESCO world heritage site [29] and the impacts of tourism on community participation when comparing urban and rural world heritage sites [30].

The contribution of this paper should not only lie in analysing the connection between religious and tourist dimensions of visitors to the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe, but also what experienced tourists are looking for in this sacred place and whether there are religious, cultural, educational, environmental, and/or social motivations.

Notwithstanding the prevalence of theories and concepts based on tourism and religion, there are few studies that appropriately investigate educational motivation [31,32]. In the context of religious tourism, the educational perspective has played a secondary role, commonly included as a socio-demographic element of research [33–36]. The vast majority of religious tourism studies on tourist motivations do not mention the educational aspect [37–45]. Others refer to it in the theoretical section but not empirically [46–49].

The objective of this paper was not only to highlight religious tourists' motivations for visiting the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe, but also to delve into how educational ambitions might contribute to the promotion of religious tourism, whether sacred or not. Tourists' educational motivations can be effectively considered as a factor through which tourists can expand not only their knowledge but also their religious, cultural, and environmental experiences [50–52] during a visit to the Royal Monastery. Such perspectives will provide us with a better understanding of the reasons why tourists come to the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe, which offers them an historical and ancient legacy.

## 2. Literature Review

### *The Educational Motivation of Religious Journeys*

The religious journey in contemporary tourism has gradually expanded to involve an educational process [31,32]. This comes from the feelings of brotherhood among pilgrims [4], the impacts on hosts [53], and the management of their representation of religious heritage [54,55]. It is evident that tourism and religion are well-interconnected [21] (p. 87); believers can enliven their religiosity during the journey [26] through an active process of learning.

Scholars [56,57] have categorized tourists based on their motivations and experiences rather than extrapolating the complexities of a phenomenon that goes beyond strict categories [21] (pp. 272–273). These components—motivations and experiences—may collectively provide a conceptual framework to better understand what motivates travellers to visit sacred sites [58].

For many travellers, both tourists and pilgrims, the knowledge gained through travelling occurs parallel to formal or lifelong education [59]. Travelling for cognitive purposes is evident in religious tourism, where it offers the potential for cathartic experiences evoking learning and understanding. On the one hand, those experiences in Christian society remain mostly within the framework of the spiritual life of saints; that is, the inter-personal relationships which visitors establish with the legacy of saints by submerging themselves in spiritual experiences that spiritually approach the experiences of saints [31]. On the other hand, tourists also seek to gain knowledge for hedonistic purposes [42–61]. In other words, the educational motivation is related not only to religious but also cultural tourism.

Hence, from this perspective, visiting a religious place does not transform cultural tourists into religious ones [61]. Educational motivations can link both perspectives toward the same touristic destiny. Some researchers have addressed this phenomenon [32,57] mostly from experiences viewed from sociological and functional perspectives, highlighting not only spiritual but also the tourist elements [62] (pp. 3–4). Nonetheless, the answers to many research questions still remain unclear.

Delving into the answers based on that connection, religious tourism attracts tourists (believers of different faiths) that learn not only from religious topics but also from the historical, cultural, and artistic heritage of the areas they visit, resulting in enrichment with new knowledge [63]. Those experiences nurture them. Hence, tourists who explore monuments from different historical periods discover in them religious elements and look for an explanation of their meaning.

That is why, according to some authors [23,57,64], it is almost impossible to distinguish between ‘religious travellers’ and ordinary ‘vacationers’, since both are often linked to one another in a shared space of learning [65]. Along this line, Weidenfeld [64] supports the idea that there is no obvious dichotomy between pilgrims and tourists, other than the importance of pilgrim places in being able to fulfil religious obligations of pilgrims without hindrances while the tourist travels for hedonistic purposes.

This paper is essentially focused on eight hypotheses outlined to measure the impact of religious, cultural, environmental and rural, educational, and social motivation on religious tourism. Among the touristic motivations the paper highlights the relevance of educational ones as a crucial factor to promote religious tourism at the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe. Is the process of learning an important factor that determines whether or not people come to this sacred place, either as pilgrims or tourists? Sharing experiences (whether along the Twelve Ancient Pilgrimage Paths of Guadalupe or within the Royal Monastery) as well as being part of religious events may represent other forms of touristic motivation. In the context of the recent inter-territorial Itinere 1337 project, do environmental and rural motivations contribute to promoting religious tourism in this sacred place? The hypotheses are:

1. Hypothesis 1—Educational motivations (EDMs) positively influence religious tourism (RT)
2. Hypothesis 2—Educational motivations (EDMs) positively influence religious motivations (RMs)
3. Hypothesis 3—Educational motivations (EDMs) positively influence cultural motivations (CMs)
4. Hypothesis 4—Religious motivations (RMs) positively influence religious tourism (RT)
5. Hypothesis 5—Cultural motivations (CMs) positively influence religious tourism (RT)
6. Hypothesis 6—Environmental and rural motivations (ERMs) positively influence religious tourism (RT)
7. Hypothesis 7—Social motivations (SMs) positively influence religious tourism (RT)
8. Hypothesis 8—Educational motivations (EDMs) positively influence environmental and rural motivations (ERMs)



**Hypothesis 1 (H1)**—*Educational motivations (EDMs) positively influence religious tourism (RT)*

Religious tourism acts as a unique kind of cognitive tourism since it satisfies the gnoseological interest of travellers or tourists [66]. Observing, participating in religious processes, ceremonies, and rituals, and purchasing religious attributes or souvenirs are common elements nurturing the learning process for either pilgrims or tourists. Visitors can also educate themselves through conversations with monks, many of whom are highly educated. This is the case of the Royal Monastery's religious dwellers. Monks fulfil their pedagogical role by giving tours inside and along the borders of monasteries, explaining not only how Our Lady of Guadalupe was founded in 1337, but also the history of the Royal Monastery through religious stories. Moreover, they also try to outline the importance of repentance, prayer, fasting, and celibacy. Thus, for religiously motivated visitors their experience is primarily an opportunity to learn about Christianity, and, for many, to listen to esteemed monks that are identified as having 'charisma', this being a main reason for visiting the shrine.

Group discussions are initiated by monks where participants can ask questions concerning the history of the place, theology, and other related topics. This offers an experience that is educational in nature. In fact, some monks are considered well-experienced tour guides—they are able to provide interesting accounts about the history of the monasteries, and they can direct visitors to explore other relevant sites. Apart from visitors who are primarily motivated by specific research interests, visitors usually state that they learned a great deal about themselves when asked what they had learned from their visit. Although the experience of visiting the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe does not have a life-changing effect on all visitors, it certainly has a significant impact on personal growth and offers a highly educational experience.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2)**—*Educational motivations (EDMs) positively influence religious motivations (RMs)*

Educational motivations can also be linked to religious motivations. This is when religion plays a central role in shaping human behaviour. It is transmitted across generations as a pivotal issue in family life or school or becomes relevant to individuals as a result of mystical experiences. Thus, religious motivation is what defines visitors' spiritual identities. Travellers' religious motivation is understood as a way of increasing their faith by being involved in ceremonies, cults, and prayers, led by inner desires and supernatural experiences during religious performances. A set of religious doctrines is considered the key knowledge to create the link to the divine, and these doctrines encourage their adherents to travel to religious sites that are perceived to be spiritual landmarks [67]. Hence, from this perspective, educational motivation nurtures religious identity, preserving religious motivations over other types of motivations. That can explain why travellers are not really interested in acquiring general knowledge about the sacred setting or in developing skills and abilities by meeting new and diverse people. Rather, religious motivations enhance a new perspective on life through religious personal experience, which goes beyond personal satisfaction, attitudes, trust, perceived happiness, and affective emotions [68–72]. In other words, such internal factors turn into religious motivation when they allow the traveller to delve deeper into God's divine life.

Religious motivation offers the potential for broad religious experiences evoking learning and understanding. Such experiences in Christian society remain mostly within the lens of the spiritual life of saints and the inter-personal relationships of visitors with God. This is established by immersion in experiences that represent a deeply spiritual approach to religion [31].

**Hypothesis 3 (H3)**—*Educational motivations (EDMs), positively influence cultural motivations (CMs)*

Cultural tourism is related to monuments, building complexes, and sites that carry universal value in terms of history, art, religion, beliefs, everyday human attitudes and behavior, and/or science. In the religious framework it supposes visiting religious centers, functioning or memorable cults, and also museums and exhibitions.

Tourism scholars have found that religious tourists may visit sacred places for reasons such as educational and cultural enrichment [61]. This enrichment emerges throughout the religious tourists' experience as the cultural, social, and material worlds interact [73]. Trips usually have mixed secular and religious motivations, and can occur due to cult acts, holidays, and festivals taking place in a certain season. The relationship between cultural tourism and education also describe why tourists travel across countries to expand their knowledge through learning educational services. New touristic experiences can be obtained through visiting picturesque places, ancient cultures, or modern and attractive destinations. In the heart of those cultural travelling, education is a strong motivator.

The learning process also requires active participation on the part of the educational tourists. The tourists and tour providers co-create the desired experiences developed by reflective practices that occur on-site or during the tourism experience. This process of educational tourism through cultural landmarks encompasses pre- (and post-) travel considerations. Therefore, educational motivation overlaps not only with religious motivations but cultural ones.

**Hypothesis 4 (H4)**—*Religious motivations (RMs) positively influence religious tourism (RT)*

Religious tourism destinations are currently some of the most visited sites in the world [73–75] not only for pilgrims but for tourists in general [76]. Nolan and Nolan [76], for instance, mention places such as Knock (Ireland), Lourdes (France), Fátima (Portugal), and Getafe (Spain) as well as other several churches in France and Germany that have relatively high value as touristic attractions. Pilgrimage existed for hundreds of years before general tourism appeared [77]. Religiously motivated tourism is probably as old as religion itself [21] (p. 276). This is not an exceptional feature of Christianity, but rather a worldwide phenomenon [78]. For faith tourists, such a visit might evoke strong feelings of religious fervour, while for non-religious tourists visits to sacred sites arouse a sense of wonderment and cultural inspiration or satisfy curiosity. Certain religious centres are believed to generate a sense of magnetism in people's consciousness [79].

The pilgrim is portrayed as a person who finds a place of sacredness for reasons of personal piety [80]. This personal travel to a sacred site is generally understood to be religiously motivated and has been sanctified by the present or past action of divinity [77]. Religious motivations for spiritual tourism have largely been connected to a higher authority or deity which underlines the religious practice with outcomes beneficial to pilgrims. Spiritual motives and the observation of the rituals connect the pilgrims with their devotion to God. For them, the physical journey is secondary to the inner one and they are declared to have “pull motives” for their visit to “improve their religious faith”, “to strengthen their belief”, “to be in a sacred shrine”, “to get closer to God”, “to meditate”, “to venerate”, and “to pray”.

**Hypothesis 5 (H5)**—*Cultural motivations (CMs) positively influence religious tourism (RT)*

Cultural heritage attracts the attention of visitors due to architectural [81] or artistic value [82,83]. Rinschede [84] considers religious tourism as a subgroup of cultural tourism that is fully connected. In fact, in the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe the visitor feels impressed not only by the frescoes, but also by the ancient arches, vaults, altarpiece, high altar, pictures, mosaics, art miniatures, old icons, ancient manuscripts, and ecclesiastic utensils. These treasures are on display in the museums of the monasteries that open only on special occasions and with proper devotion. Thus, experience of culture is a main element for most visitors.

For many visitors, the presence of monks in their monastic dress going about their day-to-day routines plus the opportunity to live their ‘authentic’ primitive life unspoiled by the ravages of the external world was a unique cultural experience. Thus, many visitors tempted to experience communal life in the shrine were critical and suspicious of anything that appeared ‘spoilt’ or ‘touristic’. The quest for authentic experiences was being fulfilled, since most respondents used the words

‘authentic’, ‘genuine’, ‘pure’, ‘virgin’, ‘original’, ‘traditional’, ‘primitive’, ‘remote’, and ‘untouched’ when recounting their experience at Royal Monastery of Guadalupe.

**Hypothesis 6 (H6)**—*Environmental and rural motivations (ERMs) positively influence religious tourism (RT)*

The Twelve Ancient Pilgrimage Paths of Guadalupe are combined with an environmental itinerary. Networks of roads that are both cultural and natural form part of an architectural heritage that has an immaterial oral tradition which is still present today. Therefore, these cultural itineraries must be justified in the context of a unique ancient tradition. The justification for each road lies in recovering their religious, touristic, or cultural origins.

The privileged territory and enormous natural and scenic richness can be linked to social and economic development in rural areas. The stabilization of rural heritage for touristic goals represents a viable solution to be achieved through sustainable development [85]. Since this rural area covers a wide area with significant natural, historical, cultural, and human heritage, it is possible maintain the touristic integrity of these rural areas, contributing to the growth and progress of rural tourism as well as sustainable development. This objective can be linked to the tangible and intangible heritage allied to the ancient paths that lead to the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe. They hold numerous attractions and are rich in various touristic and cultural ways, for example through the diverse natural resources of the land and subsoil (especially in Villuercas–Ibores–Jara Geopark and other protected areas), the diverse landscape of hills, valleys, etc., and the renowned vineyards, wineries, parks and natural reservoirs, biodiversity, extended agricultural areas, etc.

In order to promote these legacies, it is important to know what can be found by the tourists and pilgrims along each of the Twelve Ancient Pilgrimage Paths of Guadalupe. Churches, environmental landmarks, educational centres, historical places, museums, shrines, caves, palaces, bridges, etc., are some of the more important landmarks to be found along the paths. All of the above landmarks give value to the rural touristic heritage of this area and can be seen in the following inventory of Twelve Ancient Pilgrimage Paths of Guadalupe.

The ancient roads of Guadalupe have the potential to expand the emotional experience based on a spectacular, artistic and visual environment. The challenge is to provide a positive emotional response for the tourist that can be provided through a mechanism of negotiation, a dialogue of ideas and concepts by religious representatives and by local and regional state experts in tourism and local culture. Therefore, the environmental motivation allied with understanding the rich heritage of this area, including the current state of many historical and religious sites in and around Guadalupe, should be fully appreciated.

**Hypothesis 7 (H7)**—*Social motivations (SMs) positively influence religious tourism (RT)*

Socialization might be another essential element for many travellers who visit sacred places. People’s emotional relationships with the place are based not only on physical and objective environments [86], but on their experiences and on the socially constructed location [87]. Religious tourism is closely related to other types of tourism [63] based on the environmental and cultural heritage of each place [84]. Hence, multiple motivations, interests, and activities that have nothing to do with religion are directly connected with holiday-making or with journeys undertaken for social and cultural reasons [72].

Although religious events associated with saint’s days are almost the only social happenings in everyday life, staying at the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe has serious social implications. The overwhelming environment that surrounds the place and the communal nature of accommodation and monastic life encourage social interaction and visitors adapt to the communal lifestyle by being more open and talkative with strangers than they would be in their normal home environment. While visitors look at the journey as a leisurely activity, the monks receiving them should be prepared for a large influx of visitors who characteristically behave differently from them.

**Hypothesis 8 (H8)**—Educational motivations (EDMs) positively influence environmental and rural motivations (ERMs)

In the context of the Twelve Ancient Pilgrimage Paths of Guadalupe, the process of learning is not only encapsulated within the walls of this sacred place. The sense of being open to God through the petition to deity for blessings can not only be fulfilled at the sacred site but also along the journey within the touristic paths. Hence, pilgrimage is not limited to devotional visits and historical shrines [88]. Spiritual learning processes can also be gradually increased along the environmental paths through petitions and veneration.

Belhassen et al. [73] pointed out that an authentic experience for pilgrims to the Holy Land is conceptualized as a function of a belief-action-toured place, and may also be seen as being contingent on a combination of the objective environment (i.e., the countryside setting and paths) and the interactions of tourists with the setting. From this perspective, religious participants can be motivated either in part or exclusively by religious causes on the way to the sacred site [84].

The sense of being close to God and the petition to deity for blessings is not only fulfilled at the site but also along the journey. Therefore, religious tourist experiences should be looked at from a wider perspective in order to explore the personal understandings of religion. These petitions and veneration usually culminate at the sacred site due to the religious ambience [89] or place identity [90]. A good example of the importance of the religion-based journeys is the *Camino de Santiago* leading to the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela (Galicia, Spain), where the holy tomb of the Apostle Saint Jacob lies.

### 3. Materials and Methods

#### 3.1. Model Development

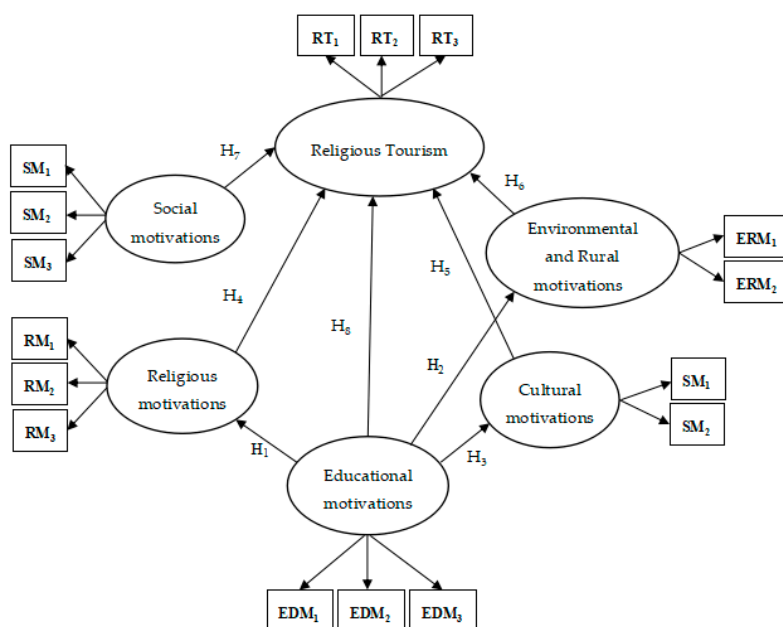
Structural equation modelling (SEM) can test theoretically supported linear and additive causal models [86–91]. Unobservable constructs or groups of variables are hard to measure. However, these latent variables can be used in SEM. Based on this methodology, the partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) method seems to be ideal to measure these variables through variance. PLS-SEM has already been applied to tourism research analysis related to tourist satisfaction [27] to predict attitudes toward tourism development [28] and the impacts of tourism on community participation across urban and rural world heritage sites [30].

Religious motivation is a concept that cannot be directly measured. Therefore, it is necessary to use different observable variables to do so. One methodological solution often used in market research is the use of structural equation models (SEMs) [92], particularly the use of partial least squares (PLS) analysis [91,93]. In an SEM analysis both latent variables and unobservable constructs, which are measured using PLS through variance and their relationship with the different variables, are used in the path scheme. This methodology is especially consistent because it can test theoretically supported linear and additive causal models [94,95].

The model conveyed in this paper has considered religious tourism (RT) as a dependent variable. It can be influenced by five other latent variables or constructs considered as independent, as shown in Figure 2. These represent different types of motivations: religious (RM), cultural (CM), social (SM), environmental and rural (ERM), and educational (EDM).

The numerical value of each of these variables was provided by calculating two indicators based on the results obtained from a questionnaire survey filled out by 242 visitors at the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe during summer 2017 (Table 1). This methodology allowed the identification of three different types of religious tourism: (RT<sub>1</sub>)—Pilgrims not interested in tourism attractions; (RT<sub>2</sub>)—Tourists interested both in religious and tourism attractions; and (RT<sub>3</sub>)—Tourists only interested in tourism attractions. It used a ten-point scale ranging from 1 (“it is not important to me at all”) to 10 (“it affects me greatly”) based on similar studies [56,61].





**Figure 2.** Conceptual scheme of the structural equation model utilized. SM: social motivation; RM: religious motivation; CM: cultural motivation; EDM: educational motivation; ERM: environmental and rural motivation.

**Table 1.** Latent variables and the elaborated questionnaire.

Constructs	Indicator	Question	Authors
Religious Tourism	RT <sub>1</sub>	Is praying the main reason to come to the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe?	Belhassen et al. [73], Blom et al. [74], Coleman [79], Edensor [26], Fleischer [23], Griffiths [78], Lois González [75], Nilsson and Tesfahuney [77], Nolan and Nolan [76], and Rinschede [84]
Religious Tourism	RT <sub>2</sub>	Did you have a combined religious and touristic motivation to come to the Royal Monastery?	
Religious Tourism	RT <sub>3</sub>	Are you only interested in visiting the Royal Monastery for touristic purposes but not religious ones?	
Educational motivations	EDM <sub>1</sub>	Have you come to learn from monks' experiences?	Nyaupane et al. [32], and Sarris [31]
Educational motivations	EDM <sub>2</sub>	Have you come to learn from the Monastery's written legacy?	
Educational motivations	EDM <sub>3</sub>	Did you come to the Royal Monastery to learn from tradition and values?	
Religious motivations	RM <sub>1</sub>	Have you come to pray to our Lady of Guadalupe?	Coleman and Eade [79], Dubisch [81], Feifer [82], Lanczkowski [80], and Timothy and Olsen [21]
Religious motivations	RM <sub>2</sub>	Have you come to learn from the religious legacy of other saints?	
Religious motivations	RM <sub>3</sub>	Did you come to the Sanctuary to recover your faith?	
Cultural motivations	CM <sub>1</sub>	Have you come to visit the ancient building of the Monastery?	Kavoura [83], and Kot and Ślusarczyk [96] Rinschede [84], Stamboulis and Skayannis [72], and Timothy and Boyd [63]
Cultural motivations	CM <sub>2</sub>	Would you like to visit sites located in the 12 ancient paths?	
Environmental motivations	ERM <sub>1</sub>	Have you come to visit the Villuercas–Ibores–Jara Geopark?	Belhassen et al. [73], Cuvelier [85], and Sharpley and Jepson [86]
Environmental motivations	ERM <sub>2</sub>	Have you come to visit rural areas and stay in rural hotels?	
Social motivations	SM <sub>1</sub>	Have you come to share experiences with other known people?	Eade and Albera [62], and Stedman [87]
Social motivations	SM <sub>2</sub>	Have you come to socialize with new people known in the trip?	
Social motivations	SM <sub>3</sub>	Did you come to Guadalupe to be part of the central religious events on special religious days?	

SM: social motivation; RM: religious motivation; CM: cultural motivation; EDM: educational motivation; ERM: environmental and rural motivation.

### 3.2. Questionnaire Surveys

A total of 242 visitors over 18 years of age were interviewed from July to September 2017 in front of the main door of the Monastery of Guadalupe and at the Municipal Tourism Office (see questions in Table 1). This sampling period was selected because summertime is the preferential touristic period in Spain. In addition, in August and September Guadalupe attracts many tourists because of the celebrations of street bull races (the third week of August) and the birth of our Black Madonna (8 September; official bank holiday of the Autonomous Community of Extremadura). The questionnaire was previously validated through five qualitative interviews conducted during two focus groups organized in June 2017 involving important stakeholders belonging to the private and public sectors.

### 3.3. Questionnaire Survey Description

Descriptive analysis revealed that 55.4% of respondents were female and 44.6% were male (Table 2). Most visitors were between the ages of 26 and 59 (81%); they travelled with family and/or friends without children (89.7%) and worked either in the public or private sector (59.9%). About 61.6% of respondents answered the questionnaire in Spanish, followed by 12.5% in English, 7.9% in French, and 6.2% in Portuguese. Tourists revealed what living experiences guided them to this sacred site, which included religious and secular motivations.

**Table 2.** Demographic information.

Information	N = 242	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	108	44.6
Female	134	55.4
	242	100%
<b>Age</b>		
25 years of age or younger	46	19.0
26–44 years of age	82	33.9
45–59 years of age	65	26.9
60 years of age and above	49	20.2
	242	100%
<b>Type of visitor</b>		
Single	25	10.3
Family and/or friends with children	80	33.1
Family and/or friends without children	137	56.6
	242	100%
<b>Main occupation</b>		
Student	31	12.8
Working in the public sector	69	28.5
Working in the private sector	76	31.4
Other	66	27.3
	242	100%
<b>Language</b>		
Spanish	149	61.6
English	31	12.8
French	19	7.9
Portuguese	15	6.2
Italian	11	4.5
Other	17	7.0
	242	100%

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Analysis of the Measurement Model

The indicators utilized showed a high individual reliability expressed as indicator loads ( $\lambda$ ). All of them registered values of  $\lambda > 0.7$  with respect to the respective construct of each one [97] (p. 113) (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Loads ( $\lambda$ ) of the item with the construct.

	CM	EDM	ERM	RM	RT	SM
CM <sub>1</sub>	0.723					
CM <sub>2</sub>	0.934					
EDM <sub>1</sub>		0.780				
EDM <sub>2</sub>		0.789				
EDM <sub>3</sub>		0.832				
ERM <sub>1</sub>			0.848			
ERM <sub>2</sub>			0.823			
RM <sub>1</sub>				0.720		
RM <sub>2</sub>				0.719		
RM <sub>3</sub>				0.791		
RT <sub>1</sub>					0.736	
RT <sub>2</sub>					0.743	
RT <sub>3</sub>					0.882	
SM <sub>1</sub>						0.815
SM <sub>2</sub>						0.943
SM <sub>3</sub>						0.786

In addition, Table 4 analyses the construct reliability or composite (CR), i.e., the internal consistency of each construct. This determines whether items measuring a construct are similar in their scores, i.e., it evaluates how rigorously the manifest variables are measuring the corresponding latent variables [98]. Cronbach's alpha and rho A test values are above 0.7. The effectiveness of each construct was also validated using the composite reliability (CR); each was also above the level of acceptance of 0.7 in all the cases.

**Table 4.** Construct reliability and validity.

	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_A	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
CM	0.806	0.844	0.820	0.698
EDM	0.842	0.844	0.843	0.641
ERM	0.822	0.822	0.822	0.698
RM	0.787	0.790	0.788	0.554
RT	0.831	0.840	0.832	0.624
SM	0.886	0.894	0.887	0.724

The reliability of the model was also measured through the average variance extracted (AVE). The square root of the AVE was higher than the relationship between RT and the rest of the constructs of the model. Therefore, in our model the constructs share more variance with their indicators than with the other constructs, as is recommended [99]. All the constructs utilized in the model explained more than 50% of the total variance.

The existence of significant differences between constructs was analysed through the discriminant validity which gives us a value that means to what extent a construct is different from the others using the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratio. A value higher than 0.85 [99] should be interpreted as a weak correlation between constructs. A significant difference between them guarantees the consistency

of the model and the individuality of each construct. Table 5 shows that the HTMT ratio was valid because to their values were all less than 0.85. In our case this requirement was fulfilled.

**Table 5.** Heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT).

	CM	EDM	ERM	RM	RT	SM
CM						
EDM	0.613					
ERM	0.672	0.395				
RM	0.650	0.669	0.530			
RT	0.768	0.738	0.745	0.830		
SM	0.280	0.482	0.209	0.357	0.393	

Criteria: discriminant validity is established at HTMT.

#### 4.2. Structural Model Analysis

Standardized path coefficients ( $\beta$ ) indicate the extent to which predictor variables contribute to the explained variance of endogenous variables [100]. Table 6 shows the structural analysis of the coefficients and their statistical significance. It allowed us to compare the proposed research hypotheses. Chin [93] considers that a value of  $\beta$  is considered acceptable if it is greater than or equal to 0.2. According to  $\beta$ , the author's educational motivation (EDM) positively influenced several variables, such as religious tourism (RT), religious motivation (RM), cultural motivation (CM) and environmental and rural motivation (ERM). Hence, H1, H2, H3, and H8 show significant data since those hypotheses are supported in the research with a confidence level of 99.9%. Far from the scarce relevance scholars recently have given to educational motivation [37–45], travellers who visit the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe pay special attention to this motivation. The rest of the hypotheses presented lower but still significant values with the exception of social motivations.

Table 6 also shows the confidence intervals along with  $t$ -values. These intervals have the advantage that they form a completely non-parametric approach and are not based on any type of distribution. If a confidence interval for an estimated path coefficient does not include the value zero, then the coefficients are significant and the hypothesis is validated [101]. This test confirms the path coefficient's statistical tests.

**Table 6.** Coefficients path and statistical significance.

Hypotheses	Path Coefficients	5.0%	95.0%	$\beta$	T Statistics	$p$ Values
H <sub>1</sub>	EDM $\geq$ RT	0.134	0.344	0.247	3.663	0.000 ***
H <sub>2</sub>	EDM $\geq$ RM	0.461	0.629	0.669	10.770	0.000 ***
H <sub>3</sub>	EDM $\geq$ CM	0.406	0.620	0.608	7.828	0.000 ***
H <sub>4</sub>	RM $\geq$ RT	0.225	0.411	0.400	5.545	0.000 ***
H <sub>5</sub>	CM $\geq$ RT	0.044	0.300	0.105	2.238	0.013 *
H <sub>6</sub>	ERM $\geq$ RT	0.198	0.399	0.362	4.963	0.000 ***
H <sub>7</sub>	SM $\geq$ RT	−0.016	0.118	0.025	1.235	0.108
H <sub>8</sub>	EDM $\geq$ ERM	0.210	0.449	0.393	4.536	0.000 ***

Notes: For  $n = 5000$  subsamples. Based on Student's  $t$  (499) distribution of a queue: \*  $p < 0.05$  ( $t$  (0.05; 499) = 1.64791345); \*\*  $p < 0.01$  ( $t$  (0.01; 499) = 2.333843952); \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$  ( $t$  (0.001; 499) = 3.106644601).

The goodness-of-fit for the model was estimated from the  $t$ -statistics and  $p$  values resulting from applying the bootstrap resampling test to 5000 subsamples. As shown in Figure 3, only H<sub>7</sub> is not statistically significant, meaning that socialization is not an essential element for many travellers who visit the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe.



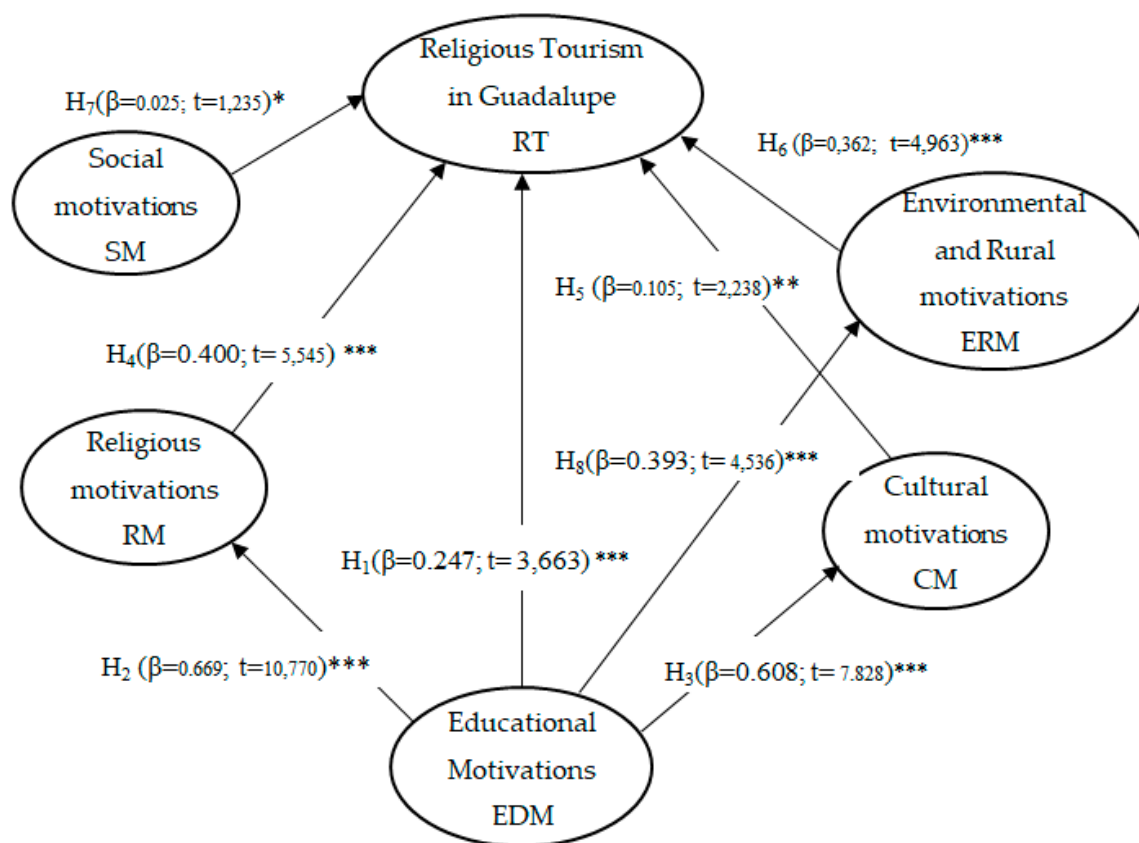


Figure 3. Path coefficients of the model. \*, \*\*, \*\*\* are significant at 95%, 99%, and 99.9%, respectively.

### 4.3. Predictive Relevance and Effect Size

The predictive power of the model in terms of the variance explained is measured by the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ). It provides a value for the amount of variance explained by the endogenous constructs. It was strong at 0.67, moderate at 0.33, and weak at 0.19 [93]. Table 7 shows the explained variance ( $R^2$ ), which was 87.5% of the total variance. In addition, the predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ) of the latent variables was also determined. The  $Q^2$  values of 0.02, 0.15, and 0.35 denote small, medium, and large predictive relevance [102]. Religious tourism was found to have large predictive relevance, as determined by a  $Q^2$  value (0.465) greater than 0.35.

Effect sizes reflect the statistical power of the research model, and there are two types of them. Effect size ( $f^2$ ) assesses the extent of the contribution an exogenous latent variable makes to the  $R^2$  value of an endogenous latent variable. The effect sizes of the endogenous latent variables are also reported in Table 7. The effect size is small at  $f^2 < 0.02$ , medium at  $0.02 < f^2 < 0.15$  and large at  $f^2 > 0.35$  [95]. EDM, RM, and ERM had large effect sizes and CM was medium.

Table 7. Value of endogenous variables.

	$R^2$	$Q^2$	$f^2 *$
CM	0.370	0.203	0.034
EDM	-	-	0.212
ERM	0.155	0.084	0.554
RM	0.447	0.193	0.563
RT *	0.875	0.465	-
SM	-	-	0.004

\* RT is the dependent variable.

## 5. Discussion

To understand what motivates travellers to visit the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe it is important to take into account the key role of educational motivation (EM) in relation to other perspectives. As Rysbekova et al. [66] have pointed out, religious tourism is a unique kind of cognitive tourism since it satisfies a gnoseological interest for travellers and tourists. History, ancient traditions, and architectural heritage can be discovered within the monastery or along the roads leading to the sanctuary. These cultural itineraries are usually justified in the context of a unique ancient tradition. This is the case of the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe, as it is one of the oldest centres of pilgrimage in Europe [13]. The justification for each old road lies in the valuable heritage from religious, tourist, or cultural perspectives.

The key role of the educational motivation (EM) explains a multiple mediation effect with other latent variables, such as religious, cultural, and environmental ones. EM also has a significant direct effect on religious tourism. Hypotheses from H1 to H4 are supported at a 99.9% confidence level [95]. This reflects the strong influence of educational motivation (EM) on religious motivation (RM) ( $\beta = 0.546$ ;  $t = 10.443$ ), cultural motivation (CM) ( $\beta = 0.503$ ;  $t = 7.747$ ), environmental and rural motivation (ERM) ( $\beta = 0.328$ ;  $t = 4.504$ ), and religious tourism (RT) ( $\beta = 0.235$ ;  $t = 3.784$ ). This explains how an educational process is involved in the religious journey to Guadalupe, as Sarris [31] and Nyaupane et al. [32] have reported. The influence of the mediation effects on the dependent variable RT will be studied in future research.

With respect to the amount of variance explained by each construct, according to Chin [93], RT showed a strong level of explanatory power (87.5%), while CM (26.3%) and RM (29.8%) had a moderate level. The model also evidenced a large predictive relevance ( $Q^2$ ): RT (0.465), CM (0.203), RM (0.193), and ERM (0.084). Those results are validated by the  $Q^2$  values, which for RT denote large predictive relevance [102].

These findings are helpful for overcoming the common belief that tourist attractions such as the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe only attract visitors driven by religious motivations. From the information provided in the questionnaires, it can be confirmed that religious motivations are accompanied by (secular) environmental and cultural motivations, and educational motivation plays a very relevant role. Hence, our results suggest that travellers to Guadalupe are also driven by cognitive purposes based on learning and education. These findings align with those of Courtney [88] who states that pilgrimage is not only limited to devotional visits to historical shrines. Environmental landmarks as well as activities connected with holiday activities undertaken for cultural reasons are key to understanding journeys to these kinds of places [72].

From the sociological and political points of view, these results should be useful to stakeholders and decision-makers involved in inter-territorial projects such as Itinere 1337. Our findings suggest that not only religious, cultural, and environmental motivations should be promoted, but also educational ones in the campaigns to attract hikers to the Twelve Ancient Pilgrimage Paths of Guadalupe. It could even be interesting to think about a campaign to obtain the World Heritage Site designation by UNESCO for these paths, as occurred with the *Camino/s de Santiago*, because of their inherent cultural and natural heritage. Moreover, these educational reasons are well-supported by the valuable cultural richness of the monument: frescoes, arches, vaults, altarpieces, paintings, manuscripts, and ecclesiastic utensils. Educational purposes could be applied to live monastic experiences based on the traditional monk's lifestyle.

The personal tourist patterns observed provided evidence that tourists are quite curious in terms of historical, religious and environmental knowledge. However, they are also interested in a genuine lifestyle that has almost disappeared from the modern world. The Franciscan community that lives in the monastery is a good example of this endangered way of living. Finally, tourists are also motivated by UNESCO labels such as World Heritage Site or Geopark.

## 6. Conclusions

Even though the vast majority of religious tourism studies do not mention educational motivation among the motivations that are frequently cited, it is one of the main reasons that travellers visit the Sanctuary of Guadalupe. Visitors to Guadalupe quench their thirst for learning through three main perspectives. The first perspective is the religious one, as they question the monks concerning the history of the place, theology, and so on. The monks are considered to be well-experienced tour guides who offer an experience that is educational in nature. They also provide interesting stories about the history of the monasteries. This certainly has significant impact on personal growth and an overall educational improvement. The second perspective is the spiritual learning process that can also gradually progress when travelling along the paths through petitions and venerations. Then, the sense of being close to God and the petition to deity for blessings cannot only be fulfilled at the site but along the journey to reaching it. The third perspective relates to the Royal Monastery of Guadalupe, which also represents a broad and rich resource for visitors. Culturally, they feel impressed by the architectural and artistic heritage and, as a result, experiencing culture can also be considered an important element for most visitors.

Educational motivation allows travellers to observe the magnificent and ancient Monastery of Guadalupe through old religious traditions, museums, and exhibitions. It provides them a sense of improvement, whether their approach is from a religious, cultural, or environmental perspective. However, the results of this study also showed that social reasons did not positively influence religious tourism because the religious experiences expected by travellers are more closely related to internal processes.

Finally, based on the findings of this study, travel agencies and public institutions in Guadalupe should more adequately promote educational motivations among the tourist services packages that are offered. Further research should be directed towards exploring how educational motivation is able to affect religious tourism, and its positive influence on cultural motivation as well as environmental and rural motivation.

## 7. Limitations

Firstly, this article constitutes the first study at a religious-tourism site in Guadalupe after the restoration of the Twelve Ancient Pilgrimage Paths of Guadalupe. For this reason, important future work will be put into effect as has been done at other destinations such as *Camino de Santiago* to compare the contrasting findings with the new ones obtained.

Secondly, this study did not collect questionnaires at the completion stage of the pilgrimage journey. Being aware that pilgrim experiences by foot occur over a long journey, future studies could explore the pilgrims' experiences. Those perceptions can be measured at regular intervals over the duration of the pilgrimage.

Thirdly, the data collection was during the peak of the tourist season and spanned a period of two months. The questionnaire survey was only conducted in summertime of 2017. It is commonly known that seasonality affects the tourist profile. The collection of data over the course of a full year with a view to ensuring representativeness is needed and would guarantee more reliable and valid data collection. A prospective future study will assess the value orientation of those that travel the Twelve Ancient Pilgrimage Paths of Guadalupe over the course of a full year.

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