

Think before you travel, researcher says

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Muslim countries are caught between developing their tourism industries and making sure their culture is not eroded in the process, a leading researcher from The University of Queensland says.

Fear of cultural erosion is leading the governments of some [Muslim countries](#) to pick and choose the tourists they target in their marketing, School of Tourism senior lecturer Dr Noel Scott says.

This also reinforced the need for tourists to ensure they understood the nature of Islamic law and respected customs, Dr Scott said.

The comments follow the release of a paper Dr Scott wrote with Hassan Saad Sanad and Ayman Mounier Kassem from Minia University, Egypt.

“Tourism is a focus for change in society and I suspect tourism is a leading sector that is being used in Muslim countries to explore issues of how society should develop,” Dr Scott said.

Tourists were exposing people in Muslim countries to different values and beliefs because tourism was “a microcosm of everyday life”.

But western tourists needed to do their homework because acceptable behaviour differed from one country to the next.

“Saudi Arabia does not want western tourists to come along and offend local people. They want economic development from tourism, but they are not prepared to compromise their principles to have it.

“The more wealthy the country, the more they are able to determine what sort of tourism they want.

“Look at the different Muslim countries and you will see people developing [tourism](#) differently.”

Dr Scott said many Muslim countries had long been popular among tourists, including Egypt, Malaysia and Indonesia.

But tourists needed to respect the laws, customs and religious observances in such countries, he said.

“If you go to Egypt, for example, without a basic inclination of what you are going to see and do - and what to wear - you are more likely to have a bad experience because you might go there with the wrong attitude.

“It depends on how you approach it. It is a case of, you come to our place, you obey our laws.

“You can be very unlucky and have problems, but if you are respectful to people they will be friendly and you should be fine.

“Muslims have an obligation to respect visitors in their country or town. The tradition of Islam is that you take care of travelers.”

Dr Scott said tourists needed to understand that Muslim countries were unlikely to be suitable places to go for activities such as sunbathing in skimpy outfits.

“Why do you go on holidays? These are places you go to learn more about the country. You should wear reasonable clothing. It is probably more appropriate for the climate anyway.

“If a holiday is about freedom for young people to do whatever they want and they might wear short dresses, perhaps they should think about that before they go. There are other places you can go for that.”

Provided by University of Queensland

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