

[Paper]

Sacred World Heritage Sites and Their Representations within Travel Information Sources Aiming at International Tourists

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Abstract

Islands are one of the frequently represented images of tourism. Often seen by Western tourists in particular as a symbol of paradise that offers beaches, sea, and relaxation, islands are also places of cultural and religious heritage and in some cases, actively being promoted as Island of God(s) by tourism boards. In general, sacred places are often marked as tourist sites within travel information sources. Tourists from various religious backgrounds and belief systems visit these with different motivations. Hence, information becomes an integral part of making sacred places understandable. Yet little research has been found on how sacred places in general are represented within travel information sources. Therefore, this study aims to explore their representation at two World Heritage Sites in Japan. Both sites are on or include islands that are considered sacred and are home to the shrines of Itsukushima Jinja and Munakata Taisha. A variety of travel guidebooks, tourism association websites, the shrines themselves, and UNESCO were chosen as travel information sources, as these represent the views from within and outside the destination. Through content analysis, it was possible to classify the information, and it was found that Japanese sources have a stronger focus on the religious elements of the sites while Western sources are rare on Munakata Taisha, and in the case of Itsukushima Jinja, they focus on the landscape of the island and promote it as a highlight of Japan. That has implications for the sacred sites since information about their religious character is not consistent across the sources and needs further exploration of how tourism impacts the religious and sacred activities of the shrines and their worshippers.

Keywords

Content analysis, religious tourism, travel guidebooks, shrines, island tourism

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Introduction

Sacred places are frequently mentioned as tourist attractions among travel information sources like travel guidebooks or tourism association websites. In Japan's case, some of these are sacred islands. Islands are often associated with sand, beaches, and relaxation (Cywiński 2015) but also rely on their cultural value to attract tourists (Poort et al. 2021; Yao et al. 2020). Yet little research was found that looks into the cultural heritage of islands. When these are places of worship, they become contested by worshippers and tourists alike. Research shows that sacred places are visited by tourists for a variety of reasons, ranging from religious motivation to appreciation of the history or architecture of the place (Idris 2019). For tourists originating from a place with a similar belief, a religious or sacred site might be easier to comprehend, but as Jimura (2019) points out: "images of Buddhist temples in China, South Korea, and Japan would be difficult for Westerners to differentiate, particularly if they have never been to any of these countries" (55–56). Hence, tourists will need information if they want to understand the deeper meaning of a site. Munro (2019) emphasises the importance of information about a sacred place being relevant and understandable to visitors with a different faith. Besides Western societies being exposed to a variety of religions like Christianity, Islam, or Judaism, these quite differ from religions of Eastern societies like Buddhism or Shintoism. While Buddhism and Shintoism are widely practised in Japan, the latter one is mainly practised in Japan, with some exceptions of overseas shrines in larger Japanese communities like in Hawai'i or Brazil. Hence, Western societies have little to no exposure to Shintoism and the concept of a variety of deities "may be difficult to understand or accept for followers of monotheistic religions" (Jimura 2019, 150). In terms of religious places, Stausberg (2011) noted that travel guidebooks might be "one of the genres of literature in which most people obtain information about religions other than their own" (201). Thus, the provision of information plays an important role to present another religion and culture to tourists. However, research on travel information sources and sacred places has mainly focussed on how religion as a general topic is presented but less on the individual sacred places themselves, as the literature review will show.

Therefore, the objective is to explore how sacred places within an island setting are being represented to international travellers among travel information sources from within and outside the destination country. Specifically, trying to understand how two World Heritage (WHS) inscribed Shinto shrines and their islands are being presented within Japanese and Western travel information sources while adding a third layer of information through the WHS. In the case of this research, these two shrines are Itsukushima Jinja (Hiroshima) and Munakata Taisha (Fukuoka).

To achieve the research objective and questions, this research applies content analysis as a methodology, which has shown to be beneficial in previous studies on place representations and travel information sources (Bender, Gidlow, and Fisher 2013; Lew 1991; Sima 2017; Stepchenkova and Morrison 2006). Through building on previous applica-

tions of content analysis, this study tries to structure information from a variety of sources and representation styles, which allows classifying the provided representations as clear markers of religious and sacred places or ones of a tourist attraction within an island setting.

Literature Review

The literature on sacred islands is scarce and therefore was extended to heritage tourism on islands, which revealed some studies in this area. Further, as the introduction already addressed, tourism at sacred places can be regarded as a form of religious tourism and therefore, that is also being reviewed. Last, previous research on travel information sources is being reviewed.

Island Tourism

Research addressing the aspects of island tourism is widespread, but only a few studies were found that address the topic of heritage or sacred places on islands that are part of a country. This is supported by Povilanskas et al. (2016), who found only a few studies about heritage tourism on islands that are neither autonomous nor sovereign countries. Hence, their overall governing and the management of tourism differs from so-called island states. The literature review also found a gap in research on how islands are represented in travel information sources. While tropical islands are often a synonym of paradise among Western tourists (Cywiński 2015), tourist destinations, as in the case of Bali, use wording in their marketing such as “The Island of God in Paradise Welcomes you back” (Wonderful Indonesia 2021), building on the commonly known catchphrase within the tourism industry that refers to Bali as the “Island of Gods.” This picture of Bali is further reinforced through visuals of sacred sites along with the sea and beaches. The latter one is maybe the strongest identification element of islands, as research of Govers, Go and Kumar (2007) found when asking tourists to describe in their own words the Canary Islands. Almost 50% of the respondents stated “beaches,” about 30% “water/sea,” while “culture” was at 13% and nature at 10% (Govers, Go, and Kumar 2007). These images of islands shape the perceptions of tourists, and through this, tourism can alter the function of sacred places on islands, as research on Central Java by Cywiński (2015) shows. In his research on the Borobodur Temple, Cywiński found the temple was transformed into a tourist attraction that requires tourists to wear sarongs when visiting the temple, not out of religious respect but as part of the attraction and tourist experience itself. A similar transformation of a religious site was found by Zhang and Jacobsen (2021) on the island of Meizhou, China, where the temple was modified in its architecture and liturgy to accommodate worshippers and tourists alike. They found that the modification “involved the reconstruction of traditional rituals and religious performances for religious tourism to promote the temple as the unadulterated expression of an intangible cultural heritage” (1). While these studies address a variety of aspects of how tourism can impact the island and its sacred places, little research was found on how external sources, like travel infor-

mation, represent the sacred sites. In a study of Tinos Island in Greece, famous for its church, Torzidou et al. (2019) investigated how visual media affects religious tourists' destination image and choice. They found that frequent projection on TV significantly reinforced the status of Tinos as a sacred island.

Religious Tourism

One of the most founded citations about defining religious tourism within the academic literature is the one by Rinschede (1992): "Religious tourism is that type of tourism whose participants are motivated either in part or exclusively for religious reasons" (52). However, he also clarifies that religious tourism is connected to other forms of tourism, like cultural tourism, as in the past "religious journeys always were multi-functional journeys" (65), even though the religious aspect of it was stronger than nowadays. Rinschede's clarification shows that the term "religious tourism" is under debate, and a consensus on a concrete definition does not exist (Dallen and Olsen 2006; Tripathi, Choudhary, and Agrawal 2010).

The visit of sacred sites can be for multiple reasons: religious pilgrimage, pilgrimage for cultural or nostalgic reasons, or just for various forms of tourism, including culture or even adventure (Ebadi 2014; Musa et al. 2017). Stausberg (2011) found that tourists' curiosity "appears as the main motive for visiting churches" (76) and reflects factors that can be applied to a variety of aspects that are mirrors of "cultural heritage, history, identity, and memory, as locations of specific soundscapes (such as silence) and aesthetical density" (77) within religious places. In the case of Japan, "temples and shrines worked very actively to attract visitors" (Funck 2013, 13) in its history. Nowadays, international and Japanese travellers are encouraged by guidebooks, Japanese tourist organisations, or their Japanese friends to visit various shrines and temples, whether in big tourist cities or rural areas (Reader 1991). Further, the majority of Japanese cultural WHS include shrines and temples (UNESCO World Heritage Center n.d.b). Hence, religious, cultural, traditional, spiritual, and landscape patterns can be a motivation to recommend or visit a religious site or event (Durán-Sánchez et al. 2018). However, to avoid conflict with the host community, it cannot be overlooked that cathedrals, mosques, or shrines are places for practising one's belief (Raj and Griffin 2017). Therefore, it needs to be understood how sacred places are represented to tourists, especially as these are actively promoted by various players in the tourism industry (Dallen and Olsen 2006).

Travel Information Sources

Previous research on place representation mainly focussed on travel guidebooks as an information source (Bender, Gidlow, and Fisher 2013; Bhattacharyya 1997; Kraft 2007; Lew 1991; Siegenthaler 2002), while in recent years, the web-presence of tourism associations has grown, with some offering smartphone applications for having information on-the-go, as well as a broad spectrum of user-generated content. The amount of different available information sources has led tourists to become hybrid consumers, as Mieli and

Zillinger (2020) found during their literature research. However, it was also found that “efficiency value lies in the curation of guidebooks, which helps overcome online confusion and mitigate the cognitive effort of using the Internet for information search” (Mieli and Zillinger 2020, 39). In a further study, Zillinger (2020) supported the findings of Pirolli (2016) and Steen Jacobsen (2018) that “parallel information search behaviours in analogue and digital channels” (514) exist. Thus, to understand place representation, it is necessary to look at different travel information sources. The significance of information sources is also supported by Young (2009), who found that text can conciliate between the traveller and the culture one travels within.

Despite a broad spectrum of academic research on place representations and destination images within travel guidebooks and online content, less focus was found on the representation of individual religious places, as the following section shows.

Various researchers took the Lonely Planet guidebook series as the substance of their research. Tödter (2014) analysed how religion is presented as a general topic within a multicultural city—Singapore—and addressed this issue with the Lonely Travel Guidebook Singapore to establish the role of guidebooks in the religious context. Her findings are that the travel guidebook and its representation of religion take the role of interpreter or guide, and only through its interpretation, religion becomes an extraordinary experience. Kraft (2007), in her study on spirituality and religion within Lonely Planet India, analysed how religion and the information about it are presented by considering the “voice” being used by the authors and the “religious dimensions of travelling and the traveller, including so-called spiritual resources offered to travellers” (230). In comparing Lonely Planet California and the fact that Californians are also statistically religious people with the guidebook’s treatment of Thailand, Kraft (2007) found that there was a much larger emphasis on religious motives within Lonely Planet Thailand. Maćkowiak (2017), building on the works of Kraft, discussed the position of religion and spirituality as being represented in two Lonely Planet Guidebooks, for Indonesia and Thailand. Through content analysis, she found differences in the representation of global religions and local, folk, and animistic beliefs between the Lonely Planet Thailand and Indonesian guides, and while they are prominent in public discourse in both countries, they were not mentioned in the Indonesian version.

Other research focussed on historical guidebooks (Bond 2014; Kelly 2015) or pilgrimage guidebooks (Lachapelle 2020; Lutton 2017), but overall, academic research is limited in the fields of travel information sources, religious tourism, heritage islands, as well as in combining a variety of information sources. This finding is supported by Peel and Sørensen (2016), who researched the use of travel guidebooks within the academic field and found that “studies which draw on a range of guidebook types taking account of a diversity of readers are few” (59). Hence, this study analyses various information channels to get a richer picture of place representation of sacred islands. The comparison of different sources of origin further becomes important to understand place representation since travel guides to non-Western countries are typically written by Westerners; Bhat-

tacharyya (1997), in her study on *Lonely Planet India*, found a strong Western discourse in the representation. Therefore, it is seen that it is important to analyse both local and foreign sources of travel information.

Case Sites

The following section gives a brief introduction of the two islands and Shinto shrines of this study: Itsukushima Jinja on Miyajima Island and Munakata Taisha, which stretches over the islands of Oshima and Okinoshima. They have in common that the islands are regarded as sacred, enshrine the same three female deities, and were inscribed as World Heritage Sites in 1997 and 2017, respectively, (UNESCO World Heritage Center n.d.b). Itsukushima Jinja is located on Itsukushima Island, but which is commonly known as Miyajima Island, in Hiroshima Prefecture. Munakata Taisha comprises three sites within the Munakata District of Fukuoka Prefecture, one on the mainland, one on the island of Oshima, which is inhabited and can be visited, and one on the island of Okinoshima, which is not accessible by visitors but if weather permits, can be seen from Oshima. One of the major differences between the inhabited islands of Miyajima and Oshima is their infrastructure. Miyajima Island offers a range of accommodations, ranging from guest-houses to larger hotel complexes, and during the day there is a lively shopping street for souvenirs and restaurants. In contrast, Oshima has a few guesthouses, some restaurants, and a souvenir shop at the harbour. The image of Oshima is that most of its life centres around the harbour and fishing, while fishing boats are hardly seen on Miyajima Island.

Methodology

This study aims to explore the representation of the two WHS Itsukushima Jinja and Munakata Taisha in various travel information sources. The research wants to answer the question of what similarities and differences exist between travel information sources that are produced within the destination country and those produced outside. Through this, it seeks to understand how the shrines and sacred islands are presented to the reader in terms of their sacred and touristic characters. The information extracted from these sources is labelled according to themes, which in this study include information being provided about the sites' history, whether they are a place of worship, their natural environment, or if they are considered a "must-see" place for tourists, among others. Thus, the information sources include the official tourism association websites (broken down from national to local level) and foreign travel guidebooks about Japan. Guidebooks were chosen because as shown in the literature review, they are still being used as a rich source of information and a source that informs its readers about the religions of other cultures. To enrich the data, the websites of the shrines themselves and the UNESCO website presentation of the two sites are also included.

Content analysis, the chosen method, is defined as "a research technique for making

replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use.” (Krippendorff 2004, 18). It can be applied to both quantitative and qualitative approaches to textual analysis for describing and explaining characteristics of embedded messages and is a popular form of analysis with religious studies (Nelson and Woods 2011) as well as in the context of travel information sources like guidebooks and online content (Bender, Gidlow, and Fisher 2013; Choi, Lehto, and Morrison 2007; Lew 1991; Piñeiro-Naval and Serra 2019; Sima 2017; Stepchenkova and Morrison 2006). Since a variety of travel information sources differ in structure and the way content is presented, content analysis is supportive in this aspect, as it makes the management of “unstructured information [easier] than other research methods” (Nelson and Woods 2011, 111),

Sample

The sampling was influenced by the research site, i.e., sources that contained information about the site but also the languages used, i.e., English and German being the Western languages used by the author. Therefore, purposive sampling with a non-probability sample was used, which is often found in studies with a particular area of interest (Riffe et al. 2019). In terms of the travel guidebooks, the requirement was that they cover all of Japan, and the tourism association sites were broken down from a national to a local level. Given the large amount of travel information sources, limiting the number of publications also made the study more manageable (Riffe et al. 2019).

In terms of the travel guidebooks, the sampling was done by looking into guidebooks from countries that are targeted for tourism promotion by the “New Tourism Strategy to Invigorate the Japanese Economy” (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism 2016), which include the EU, the USA, and Australia. Therefore, travel guidebooks were sampled from the American, Australian, English, and German Amazon Homepages. Amazon was chosen because it has a rich repertoire of books and is also available in all four markets. Keyword for the search was “Japan travel guidebook,” but for cross-checking, different combinations were also included, i.e., “Japan travel guide” and “Japan travel guide book.” The German site was searched with the entry “Japan Reiseführer,” the equivalent term for a travel guide, as its German meaning, “book” was included in the bookstore context. Results were displayed by the standard Amazon sorting—“Sorted by Amazon”—and the first ten guidebooks that covered all of Japan according to the title were selected (see Appendix for a country list). All books were purchased either through the Amazon page or the publisher’s site, depending on which store provided the ebook version. Of the twenty-four book titles found, three were excluded, as one included neither Itsukushima Jinja nor Munakata Taisha, another was not available as an ebook, and the third one was in the style of a photo album with very limited textual information about the sites. The reason that ebooks were favoured is twofold. In terms of the digital age, an ebook can be carried much more easily and allows note-taking capabilities, which keeps the charm of a conventional book. Second, it also allows electronic coding. Of the twenty-one travel guidebooks, eight were independently published. All the other guidebooks

belonged to international publishing houses. The tourism association websites were broken down from the national to regional to prefectural and local levels, except for Munakata City, whose site only offers a computer-translated English version and was for linguistic reasons excluded. As the shrines only have one official website, the whole population was sampled. In terms of the shrines, only the website of Itsukushima Jinja is included since Munakata Taisha's website is only available in Japanese. However, the Preservation and Utilization Council of "Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region" of Fukuoka Prefecture (PUC Okinoshima n.d.) has a dedicated site about Munakata Taisha and its World Heritage Site that is included in this study. Table 1 shows the sources being used for Itsukushima Jinja and Munakata Taisha.

TABLE 1. Travel information sources being grouped by shrine and sorted in alphabetical order.

Site	Title	Publisher	Origin
Itsukushima Jinja	<i>Itsukushima Shrine</i>	Itsukushima Shrine (<i>Official Homepage</i>)	Japanese
	<i>Itsukushima-jinja Shrine</i>	Japan National Tourism Organisation (<i>national level</i>)	Japanese
	<i>Itsukushima Shinto Shrine (UNESCO)</i>	Japan National Tourism Organisation (<i>national level</i>)	Japanese
	<i>About Itsukushima Shrine</i>	Visit Hiroshima (<i>regional level</i>)	Japanese
	<i>Itsukushima Shrine</i>	Miyajima Tourist Association (<i>local level</i>)	Japanese
	<i>O-torii</i>	Miyajima Tourist Association (<i>local level</i>)	Japanese
	<i>Itsukushima Shinto Shrine</i>	UNESCO World Heritage Centre	Western
	<i>Insight Guide Japan</i>	Apa Publications UK Ltd	Western
	<i>Berlitz Pocket Guide Japan</i>	Apa Publications UK Ltd	Western
	<i>DK Eyewitness Japan</i>	Penguin Random House Company	Western
	<i>14 Days in Japan: A First-Timer's Ultimate Japan Travel Guide</i>	IDtravelling	Western
	<i>MARCO POLO Reiseführer Japan</i>	Mairdumont	Western
	<i>Fodor's Essential Japan</i>	Fodor's Travel	Western
	<i>NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC Reisehandbuch Japan</i>	National Geographic Partners	Western
	<i>Stefan Loose Reiseführer Japan</i>	DuMont Reiseverlag	Western
	<i>Lonely Planet Best of Japan</i>	Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd	Western
	<i>Low Budget Reiseführer Japan</i>	Vincent Valentine	Western
	<i>Japan: The Ultimate Japan Travel Guide By A Traveler For A Traveler</i>	Lost Travellers Guides	Western
	<i>I Love Japan (Japan Reiseführer)</i>	Seraina Giger	Western
	<i>Baedeker Japan</i>	Mairdumont	Western
	<i>Moon Japan</i>	Hachette Book Group	Western
	<i>Lonely Planet Japan</i>	Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd	Western
	<i>Japan in 60 Easy Steps</i>	Axel Schwab	Western
	<i>Insight Guides Pocket Japan.</i>	Apa Publications UK Ltd	Western
	<i>Japan Travel Guide 2020</i>	like nowhere else	Western
	<i>The Rough Guide to Japan</i>	Rough Guides Ltd	Western
	<i>Must-See Japan</i>	Tom Fay	Western
	<i>Super Cheap Japan</i>	Matthew Baxter	Western
Munakata Taisha	<i>Munakata</i>	Japan National Tourism Organisation (<i>national level</i>)	Japanese
	<i>Okinoshima Island</i>	Japan National Tourism Organisation (<i>national level</i>)	Japanese
	<i>Sacred Island of Okinoshima & Associated Sites in the Munakata Region (UNESCO)</i>	Japan National Tourism Organisation (<i>national level</i>)	Japanese
	<i>Munakata Taisha Shrine</i>	Kyushu Tourism Promotion Organization (<i>regional level</i>)	Japanese
	<i>Munakata Taisha Shrine</i>	Fukuoka Prefecture Tourist Association (<i>regional level</i>)	Japanese
	<i>Munakata Taisha</i>	Munakata Tourist Association (<i>local level</i>)	Japanese
	<i>World Heritage</i>	Munakata Tourist Association (<i>local level</i>)	Japanese
	<i>The Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region</i>	Preservation and Utilization Council of "Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region"	Japanese
	<i>Sacred Island of Okinoshima and Associated Sites in the Munakata Region</i>	UNESCO World Heritage Centre	UNESCO
	<i>Japan Travel Guide 2020</i>	like nowhere else	Western

Coding

The coding process is explained in detail, since Krippendorff (2004) emphasises that findings should be replicable, and therefore it is important to understand how the sole coder, the author, applied the coding process. Based on the research question and to analyse the texts with an explorative mindset to identify meaningful themes for comparison, the coding is based on inductive reasoning, as suggested by Bengtsson (2016).

The coding and analysis of the text were performed with MAXQDA Analytics Pro 2020, a software for qualitative and mixed methods research. The software allows uploading the pdf versions of the travel guidebooks and the content from online sources.

The coding process started with the travel guidebooks, read in their entirety, as the respective shrines might be mentioned within different parts of the book, especially since the structures of the various travel guidebooks vary. This process differed from the tourism association websites, where the shrine was directly selected, either through a drop-down field or as a search result. The texts about the respective shrines were copied into a separate document for each information source and each shrine, grouped into Japanese sources, Western (travel guidebook) sources, and UNESCO.

Once the information was extracted from information sources, each document was read four times, the first time to become more familiar with the texts and their segments to answer the research questions. The second time was to create codes according to the information contained, like describing the architecture of the shrine. A code memo was attached that stated what kind of text was applied to the respective code, e.g., in the case of “architecture,” the building style or architectural features. This was followed by a third time to ensure that all sources were coded in the same way. The fourth reading followed two to three weeks after the previous coding sessions to avoid codes being missed or miscoded due to the fatigue of reading large amounts of text.

The codes representing a similar theme were grouped under a main heading, which meant that all shrine-related themes were grouped under that specific heading and all the tourism-related themes to the tourism category, as shown in table 2. The themes under the “general category” were grouped together because those themes could also be found for any other place of interest and were related to the countries’ history and mythology.

TABLE 2. Final list of codes with code memos and their grouping to a main category

Main Category	Theme (Inductive Code)	Code Memo
Shrine	Deity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • name of kami • dedication, e.g. god of marriage, business
	Donation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • donating torii • mentioning that people donate money to be blessed
	Etiquette	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how to pray / wash hands • not to take photos • where to walk
	Festivals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • shrine-related festivals
	General information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • torii (shrine gate) • shrine building explanation (e.g., what is a honden) • function of the building
	Pilgrimage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pilgrimage to a shrine / sacred site
	Prayer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentioning that people go to the shrine to pray • hoping for blessing
	Ritual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kagura • offerings • re-building of shrines
	Regulations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shrine related regulations • no entry • pictures are forbidden
	Shrine / Shinto Highlight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentioned as important / sacred / holy / famous shrine or Shinto site of Japan
	Spirituality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Talking spiritual aspects of the site
Tourism	Local / Regional Highlight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have to visit when within the area / city
	National Highlight	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • most important • most famous • most photographed • most recognised symbol
	Time to visit	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • season, hour, days • how much time to spent
	World Heritage Site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentioning it as WHS
General	Architecture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • building style • architectural features
	History	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • when it was founded • age of buildings
	Mythology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kami Pantheon • Mythological creation of Japan
	Nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighting aspects of nature, buildings interacting with nature
	SNS / Photo Opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides great opportunity for social media posting (instagram, pinterest) • photo opportunity
	Visitor behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no enter private roads or properties

Through the creation of the main categories, the themes were grouped into three categories. The themes that focus on religion and sacredness were grouped under the shrine category, those texts that refer to a site as a touristic highlight were placed in the tourism category, and information that could also be found with all sorts of other tourist attractions, like architecture or history, were assigned to the general section.

Analysis and Results

The data used in this study were created for the practical purpose of providing travelers with a variety of information about the tourism destination Japan and its various tourism sights. Therefore, it was not possible to guide the data creation with a scientific

research interest background (Müller 2021). While travel guidebooks and tourism information websites generally use easy-to-understand language, their structures and information can substantially differ. While most travel guidebooks structure their content by destination, Baedeker, for example, structures it in an index style, sorting the tourist sites alphabetically. The tourism information websites also show various approaches, for example, the Visit Hiroshima site has all information about Itsukushima on one page, while the Miyajima Tourist Association handle the shrine and the shrine gate on separate pages.

To get an overview of the coded data, Müller (2021) suggests starting with the use of visual tools, as “they allow to unveil thematic structures” (56). The three main categories of shrine, tourism, and general were visualised to get an overview of how the themes discovered through the inductive coding were applied within each source group, i.e., Japanese sources (shrine homepage and tourism information websites), Western sources (international travel guidebooks), and UNESCO.

Itsukushima Jinja

Japanese and Western sources were coded with a similar number of codes, while the UNESCO document received far fewer codes since it was a comparison group for the other two groups and also the one with the shortest (total group) text length. MAXQDA allowed for correcting these varying document lengths by calculating the code frequencies by column. How often a theme was coded is reflected in the size of circles, as shown in figure 1, for each information source group.



FIGURE 1. Code frequency visualisation of Itsukushima Jinja; the size of the circle shows the times a code was applied.

The visual representation of the code frequencies reveals three noticeable patterns. First, among all three sources, most codes were attributed to the general section, with an emphasis on nature and history. Second, Japanese sources addressed all the themes that are related to the sacred and religious character of the shrine, while Western sources put less importance on communicating these attributes to their readers. Finally, the spirituality code had a rather high frequency within the UNESCO document in comparison to the other two. It has to be noted that the code World Heritage had no attributions in the UNESCO source, as in its nature, the inscribed place is only mentioned because of its world heritage status.

To elaborate on these findings, the code frequency was analysed across all individual documents. As coded segments within one information source group and the number of documents differed, Müller (2021) recommends calculating percentages per column to even out the differences. The analysis of code frequencies across the themes and groups

confirmed the findings from the visual overview, as seen in table 3, across all documents within the source group.

TABLE 3. Itsukushima Jinja—Code frequency

		UNESCO	Japanese sources	Western sources
Themes	Shrine	30.4%	37.1%	17.3%
	Tourism	0.0 %	9.9%	31.8%
	General	69.6%	53.0%	50.9%

Across all three source groups, the general category frequency is above 50% of all codes, i.e., more than half of the provided information deals with themes that can be found with all kinds of tourist attractions.

However, Japanese sources tend to focus on the history and architecture of the shrine within the general category (table 4), while Western sources (table 5) and UNESCO (table 6) focus a major part of their information on nature-related elements: almost 30% of all their coded texts are in the nature theme.

TABLE 4. Itsukushima Jinja—Japanese travel information sources: Details of how the individual sources presented the site.

	JP-CH-IJ	JP-MI-IJ	JP-MI-OT	JP-VH-IJ	JP-IJ	JP-JN-WH-IJ	JP-JN-IJ	Total
Shrine								
Deity	0	7.6%	0	10.2%	13.6%	14.3%	0	8.9%
Donation	0	3.8%	0	0	0	0	0	1.5%
Etiquette	0	0	0	2.0%	0	0	0	0.5%
Festivals	0	2.5%	0	4.1%	4.5%	14.3%	0	3.5%
General information	0	12.7%	0	4.1%	13.6%	0	0	8.9%
Pilgrimage	0	1.3%	0	2.0%	0	0	0	1.0%
Prayer	0	3.8%	0	12.2%	2.3%	0	6.7%	5.4%
Regulations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ritual	0	6.3%	0	0	2.3%	0	0	3.0%
Shrine / Shinto Highlight	0	0	0	8.2%	0	14.3%	0	2.5%
Spirituality	0	1.3%	0	0	0	0	20.0%	2.0%
Tourism								
Local / Regional Highlight	0	0	25.0%	0	0	0	6.7%	1.0%
National Highlight	0	3.8%	0	6.1%	2.3%	14.3%	6.7%	4.5%
Time to visit	25.0%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.5%
World Heritage Site	25.0%	0	0	6.1%	4.5%	14.3%	6.7%	4.0%
General								
Architecture	25.0%	19.0%	25.0%	12.2%	31.8%	0	0	18.3%
History	0	29.1%	50.0%	14.3%	20.5%	14.3%	26.7%	22.8%
Mythology	0	1.3%	0	0	4.5%	0	0	1.5%
Nature	25.0%	7.6%	0	16.3%	0	14.3%	20.0%	9.4%
SNS / Photo opportunity	0	0	0	2.0%	0	0	6.7%	1.0%
Visitor behaviour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

(JP-CH-IJ Chugoku Region Tourism Guide; JP-MI-IJ Miyajima Tourist Association; JP-MI-OT Miyajima Tourist Association—Shrine Gate; JP-VH-IJ Visit Hiroshima; JP-IJ Itsukushima Jinja Official Website; JP-JN-WH-IJ Japan National Tourism Organization—World Heritage Site; JP-JN-IJ Japan National Tourism Organization—General Site).

TABLE 5. Itsukushima Jinja—Western travel information sources: Details of how the individual sources presented the site.

	DE-BD-IJ	DE-IL-IJ	DE-LB-IJ	DE-MP-IJ	DE-NG-IJ	DE-SL-IJ	EN-BP-IJ	EN-CJ-IJ	EN-DK-IJ	EN-FO-IJ	EN-IN-IJ	EN-IP-IJ	EN-JT-IJ	EN-LB-IJ	EN-LP-IJ	EN-MO-IJ	EN-MS-IJ	EN-RG-IJ	Total
Shrine																			
Deity	7.1%	0	0	0	6.7%	15.0%	0	0	0	5.9%	6.3%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3.7%
Donation	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Etiquette	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Festivals	7.1%	0	0	0	20.0%	10.0%	0	0	0	12.5%	0	0	0	7.7%	0	0	15.8%	6.1%	6.1%
General information	10.7%	0	0	0	0	5.0%	0	0	7.1%	0	12.5%	0	0	0	0	6.7%	0	5.3%	4.2%
Pilgrimage	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7.7%	0	0	0	0.5%
Prayer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5.6%	0	0	0	0	0	0.5%
Regulations	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ritual	0	0	0	0	0	0	16.7%	0	0	0	20.0%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.9%
Shrine / Shinto Highlight	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20.0%	0	0	1.4%
Spirituality	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Tourism																			
Local / Regional Highlight	7.1%	0	0	0	0	5.0%	0	0	0	5.9%	12.5%	0	5.6%	0	7.7%	0	0	0	3.7%
National Highlight	10.7%	20.0%	33.3%	42.9%	13.3%	15.0%	16.7%	50.0%	7.1%	11.8%	18.8%	20.0%	27.8%	0	7.7%	13.3%	40.0%	15.8%	16.4%
Time to visit	0	0	0	0	0	0	16.7%	0	21.4%	11.8%	0	20.0%	5.6%	33.3%	7.7%	6.7%	20.0%	15.8%	7.5%
World Heritage Site	0	0	33.3%	0	0	5.0%	0	0	7.1%	0	6.3%	0	16.7%	0	7.7%	0	0	5.3%	4.2%
General																			
Architecture	17.9%	20.0%	0	0	13.3%	0	16.7%	0	0	5.9%	0	0	0	0	0	13.3%	0	10.5%	6.5%
History	14.3%	0	0	28.6%	26.7%	10.0%	16.7%	0	14.3%	17.6%	12.5%	20.0%	5.6%	16.7%	23.1%	13.3%	0	15.8%	14.5%
Mythology	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nature	25.0%	40.0%	33.3%	28.6%	20.0%	35.0%	16.7%	50.0%	42.9%	23.5%	18.8%	20.0%	33.3%	50.0%	30.8%	26.7%	40.0%	15.8%	28.0%
SNS / Photo opportunity	0	20.0%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17.6%	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1.9%
Visitor behaviour	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

(DE-BD-IJ Baedeker Reiseführer Japan; DE-IL-IJ I love Japan Reiseführer; DE-LB-IJ Low Budget Reiseführer Japan; DE-MP-IJ Marco Polo Japan; DE-NG-IJ National Geographic Japan; DE-SL-IJ Stefan Loose Reiseführer Japan; EN-BP-IJ Berlitz Pocket Guide Japan; EN-CJ-IJ Cool Japan Guide; EN-DK-IJ DK Eyewitness Japan; EN-FO-IJ Fodors Essential Japan; EN-IN-IJ Insight Guides Japan; EN-IP-IJ Insight Guides Pocket Japan; EN-JT-IJ Japan Travel Guide; EN-LB-IJ Lonely Planet Best Of Japan; EN-LP-IJ Lonely Planet Japan; EN-MO-IJ Moon Japan; EN-MS-IJ Must-see Japan; EN-RG-IJ The Rough Guide to Japan).

TABLE 6. Itsukushima Jinja—UNESCO: Details of how the individual sources presented the site.

	UN-IJ
Shrine	
Deity	0
Donation	0
Etiquette	0
Festivals	0
General information	8.7%
Pilgrimage	0
Prayer	4.3%
Regulations	0
Ritual	0
Shrine / Shinto Highlight	4.3%
Spirituality	13.0%
Tourism	
Local / Regional Highlight	0
National Highlight	0
Time to visit	0
World Heritage Site	0
General	
Architecture	21.7%
History	13.0%
Mythology	0
Nature	34.8%
SNS / Photo opportunity	0
Visitor behaviour	0

Although the nature theme mentions in the Japanese materials are only 9.8%, compared to 28% in the Western ones and 34.8% in the UNESCO sources, the message is the same, as can be seen from table 7: the admiration and harmony between nature, humans, and the shrine. However, UNESCO is the only source that connects the worship of nature in its description of Itsukushima Jinja, where a “mountain or natural object becomes the focus of religious belief to be worshipped from a shrine” (UNESCO World Heritage Center n.d.a).

TABLE 7. Quotations from various sources on the nature theme.

	UNESCO	Japanese sources		Western sources	
‘Nature’ Theme	“... outstanding examples of the ancient type of shrine architecture integrated with the surrounding landscape, the physical manifestation of humankind’s worship of nature.” (UNESCO, 2021)	“Each season has different charms; cherry blossoms in spring, colored leaves in autumn and occasional snowfall in winter. The shrine looks different, depending on the season you visit.” (Chugoku Region Tourism Guide, 2021)	“With its blue sea in front, the green of the virgin forest of Mount Misen behind” (Visit Hiroshima, 2021)	“Felling trees is forbidden so the island has maintained its virgin forest and provides a home to a variety of flora and fauna, while tame deer roam freely.” (DK Eyewitness Japan, 2019)	“Many Japanese enjoy the harmony between land and sea – and so everyone knows their Sankei – Japan’s three famous landscapes.” (Baedeker, 2018 – translated from German)

For the Western sources, the travel guidebooks frequently highlight the aspect of island landscape as one of Japan’s three scenic views, making it one of the most coded texts for the “national highlight” theme, just as for the Japanese sources in this context. The three scenic views all comprise an island or coastal landscape with a religious site. Another strong contributor to this theme is the statement that Itsukushima Jinja’s shrine gate is one of the most photographed symbols of Japan within the travel guidebooks. The focus of the Western sources on the sea with the “floating shrine (gate)” and green surroundings follows a typical pattern within the tourism industry of portraying island locations as a mixture of culture and nature. Even without accompanying visuals, this sets a scene that can be easily imagined and attracts a broad range of traveller types.

In contrast to the focus of Western sources on nature and tourism highlights, the Japanese sources provide an arguably more cultural dimension by also providing information for travellers who are interested in cultural heritage, as is often found in organised tours, especially those belonging to the segment of educational tourism, and offer a deeper understanding of the places, people, and culture to their customers. This argument is supported by the “shrine” category, which is more frequently coded in Japanese than Western sources. It can be argued that the Japanese sources are aware of different belief systems and therefore want to make the practices of the shrine understandable to people of another belief and enrich their knowledge about the culture and religion of the host country.

A comparison of the shrine category in tables 4 and 5 shows that despite not all Japa-

nese sources having descriptions, the majority address a variety of themes, while one-third of the travel guidebooks do not address these themes at all. To understand the concept of having various deities and the deeper meaning of the shrine, it might be helpful for the international traveller if the enshrined deities were introduced, but the majority of information sources do not mention them. Only one travel guidebook mentions the theme “prayer” in its description of Itsukushima Jinja by referring to the island as a place that has “been the object for worship since the ancient era” (Miyazawa 2019, 1044). However, one theme that breaks out from all others is the one of “spirituality” within the UNESCO document. In its description, it connects spirituality with religion and Japan through recurring phrases linking Itsukushima Jinja to the “general tradition of Shinto shrine architecture in Japan [that] provide[s] invaluable information for the understanding of the evolving spiritual culture of the Japanese people” (UNESCO World Heritage Center n.d.c, par. 8). The connection between worship and spirituality is also placed as an introduction to the origin of Itsukushima Jinja as “from ancient times, people have sensed the spiritual sanctity of Miyajima, and have revered and worshipped the island itself as goddesses” (Miyajima Tourist Association n.d.a, par. 6) but also in more vague terms and a likely reference to the “floating shrine”: “A sanctuary for the spirit, floating on the tides” (JNTO n.d.a, par. 1). Through using spirituality, a distance might be gained from the controversial topic of religion in Japan, but it also attracts those tourists who have less interest in religion but want to feel the spirituality of a place and embark on spiritual tourism, an aspect that will need future investigation and would be beyond the scope of this study.

In summary, the theme analysis of Itsukushima Jinja reveals that Western travel information sources present a message of nature, of being a tourism highlight of Japan, but also explain a site’s history. They use features in their representation that are common for islands as found in previous studies (Cywiński 2015; Govers, Go, and Kumar 2007) as well as other typical elements of guidebooks to guide the reader to the “must-see” places (Peel and Sørensen 2016). In contrast, Japanese information sources have a deeper and wider focus on the sacred and religious elements of Itsukushima Jinja; even so, most of the text refers to history and architecture. This builds on strengthening the cultural heritage aspects of the island and its shrine, as the cultural value could affect tourist revisit intentions, as found in a study by Yao et al. (2020). Itsukushima Jinja’s website, belonging to the group of Japanese sources, certainly contributes to the fact that religious aspects are more strongly represented within the group, but it also has to be noted that the shrine itself has information that represents itself as a national highlight, which, even though not aimed directly at tourists, certainly will attract some.

Munakata Taisha

The visual representation of the code frequency of Munakata Taisha (fig. 2) shows that the Japanese sources focus on themes within the shrine and general categories, while the UNESCO source focuses on the shrine category. Further, all three sources have the theme “regulation” in common.

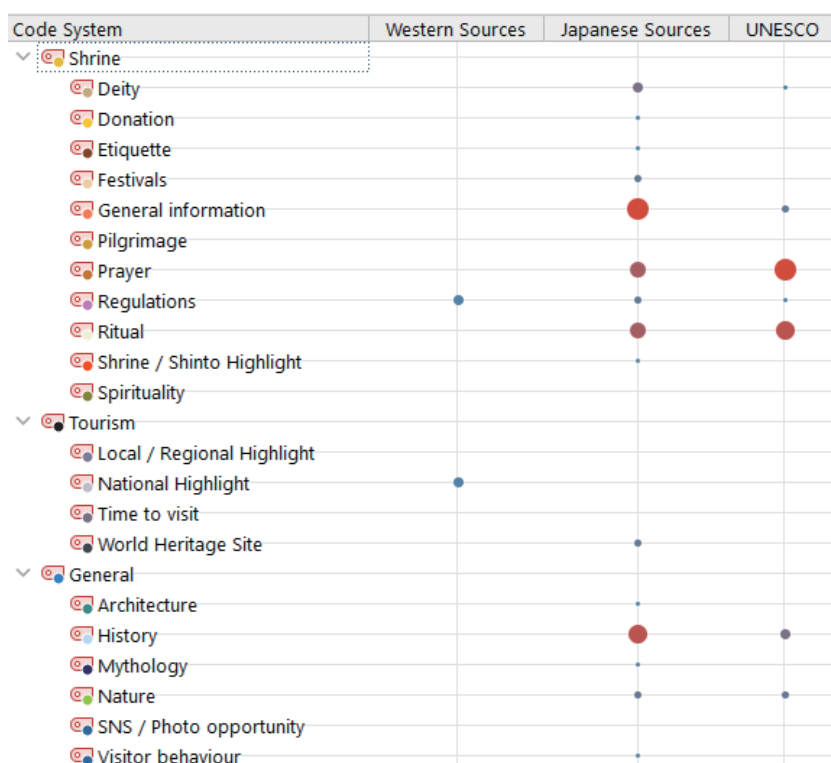


FIGURE 2. Code frequency visualisation of Munakata Taisha; the size of the circle shows the times a code was applied.

As in the case of Itsukushima Jinja, the code frequency across all individual documents was calculated, and the findings from the visual representation were confirmed (table 8).

TABLE 8. Munakata Taisha—Code frequency

		UNESCO	Japanese sources	Western sources
Themes	Shrine	79.2%	69.0%	50.0%
	Tourism	0.0 %	5.2%	50.0%
	General	20.8%	25.8%	0.0%

In the case of Munakata Taisha, a detailed comparison is only possible between Japanese and UNESCO sources, as only one travel guide mentions the shrine (tables 9–11).

Over two-thirds of all codes are applied within the shrine category, which emphasises information about the religious and sacred elements of the islands and shrines. Like in the case of Itsukushima Jinja, the World Heritage theme, under the tourism category, was not applied by UNESCO and was only mentioned in the Japanese sources.

TABLE 9. Munakata Taisha—Japanese travel information sources. Details of how the individual sources presented the sites.

	<i>JP-OT-MT</i>	<i>JP-VK-MT</i>	<i>JP-JN-MT-MU</i>	<i>JP-JN-MT-OK</i>	<i>JP-JN-MT-WH</i>	<i>JP-VF-MT</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Shrine</i>							
<i>Deity</i>	11.3%	12.5%	0	0	0	20.0%	8.9%
<i>Donation</i>	2.0%	0	0	0	0	0	1.4%
<i>Etiquette</i>	2.0%	0	0	7.7%	0	0	1.9%
<i>Festivals</i>	1.3%	0	0	23.1%	0	20.0%	2.8%
<i>General information</i>	19.9%	37.5%	38.5%	15.4%	30.4%	0	22.1%
<i>Pilgrimage</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Prayer</i>	16.6%	12.5%	0	7.7%	0	20.0%	13.1%
<i>Regulations</i>	3.3%	0	0	0	0	0	2.3%
<i>Ritual</i>	14.6%	0	7.7%	15.4%	21.7%	20.0%	14.6%
<i>Shrine / Shinto Highlight</i>	0	12.5%	0	0	8.7%	20.0%	1.9%
<i>Spirituality</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Tourism</i>							
<i>Local / Regional Highlight</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>National Highlight</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Time to visit</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>World Heritage Site</i>	3.3%	12.5%	23.1%	15.4%	0	0	5.2%
<i>General</i>							
<i>Architecture</i>	0	0	0	0	4.3%	0	0.5%
<i>History</i>	19.2%	12.5%	30.8%	15.4%	21.7%	0	19.2%
<i>Mythology</i>	2.0%	0	0	0	0	0	1.4%
<i>Nature</i>	4.0%	0	0	0	13.0%	0	4.2%
<i>SNS / Photo opportunity</i>	0	0	0	0	0	0	
<i>Visitor behaviour</i>	0.7%	0	0	0	0	0	0.5%

(JP-OT-MT PUC Okinoshima; JP-VK-MT Visit Kyushu; JP-JN-MT-MU Japan National Tourism Organization—Munakata; JP-JN-MT-OK Japan National Tourism Organization—Okinoshima; JP-JN-MT).

TABLE 10. Munakata Taisha—Western travel information source. Details of how the individual sources presented the site. (EN-JT-MT Japan Travel Guide)

	<i>EN-JT-MT</i>
<i>Shrine</i>	
<i>Deity</i>	0
<i>Donation</i>	0
<i>Etiquette</i>	0
<i>Festivals</i>	0
<i>General information</i>	0
<i>Pilgrimage</i>	0
<i>Prayer</i>	0
<i>Regulations</i>	50.0%
<i>Ritual</i>	0
<i>Shrine / Shinto Highlight</i>	0
<i>Spirituality</i>	0
<i>Tourism</i>	
<i>Local / Regional Highlight</i>	0
<i>National Highlight</i>	50%
<i>Time to visit</i>	0
<i>World Heritage Site</i>	0
<i>General</i>	
<i>Architecture</i>	0
<i>History</i>	0
<i>Mythology</i>	0
<i>Nature</i>	0
<i>SNS / Photo opportunity</i>	0
<i>Visitor behaviour</i>	0

TABLE 11. Munakata Taisha—UNESCO. Details of how the individual sources presented the site.

UN-MT	
<i>Shrine</i>	
<i>Deity</i>	4.2%
<i>Donation</i>	0
<i>Etiquette</i>	0
<i>Festivals</i>	0
<i>General information</i>	8.3%
<i>Pilgrimage</i>	0
<i>Prayer</i>	33.3%
<i>Regulations</i>	4.2%
<i>Ritual</i>	29.2%
<i>Shrine / Shinto Highlight</i>	0
<i>Spirituality</i>	0
<i>Tourism</i>	
<i>Local / Regional Highlight</i>	0
<i>National Highlight</i>	0
<i>Time to visit</i>	0
<i>World Heritage Site</i>	0
<i>General</i>	
<i>Architecture</i>	0
<i>History</i>	12.5%
<i>Mythology</i>	0
<i>Nature</i>	8.3%
<i>SNS / Photo opportunity</i>	0
<i>Visitor behaviour</i>	0

Under the shrine category, the most frequently coded theme was general information. A detailed look into the coded elements reveals that this is partially related to the geographical structure of Munakata Taisha across three sites but also the explanation and guidance for the reader to cover the different buildings and sites. This was followed by the theme “rituals” and had a strong connection to the history theme since a reoccurring topic in the information sources is the rituals and how they developed in the past (table 12).

TABLE 12. Interconnection of ritual and history themes across different sources: quotes.

	UNESCO		Japanese sources	
‘Ritual’ & ‘History’ Theme	<p><i>“Island of Okinoshima is an exceptional repository of records of early ritual sites, bearing witness to early worship practices associated with maritime safety.”</i> (UNESCO, 2021)</p>	<p><i>“Rituals on the island were first conducted atop gigantic rocks, then in the shadows of these rocks, and finally in flat open-air parts of the island; in the process, faith in the Three Goddesses of Munakata began to take shape.”</i> (Munakata section: JNTO, 2021)</p>	<p><i>“Hetsumiya Shrine (known as Munakata Taisha), a site believed to be used for some of the first formal Shinto practices in Japan.”</i> (WHS section: JNTO, 2021)</p>	<p><i>“The current shrine buildings have their foundations in the 12th century, but it is believed that the site was used for some of the earliest Shinto practices in the 7th or 8th centuries.”</i> (PUC Okinoshima, 2021)</p>

As can be seen from the table, not only is the connection between ritual and history of what is nowadays known as Munakata Taisha clearly emphasised but so too is referring to Okinoshima as one of the founding corners of Shinto practices, therefore making a clear connection between the site and its religious significance in Japanese history.

Another recurring aspect, especially within the Japanese sources, is the theme “regu-

lations.” The only Western mention combines three interesting aspects: “The most sacred place in this country is called a treasure island, where nobody can enter for [its] protection” (Miyazawa 2019, 69), i.e., its sacredness, its history, and that it is taboo to enter it. However, it does not elaborate on these meanings, especially calling it a treasure island, which can therefore be assumed to refer to the vast number of ancient objects found on the island, which is how it is described within the Japanese sources, hence, marking this site as an important place in Japanese history.

In all three sources, the sacred character of Okinoshima and Munakata Taisha is highlighted, and in the Japanese sources, that is frequently accompanied by regulations and taboos. This is an interesting point of view for tourism; while all sites have some restricted areas, in the case of Munakata Taisha, one of the major features of its status and place in history is that visitors are not allowed on Okinoshima Island. This ban might be one of the reasons for it not being mentioned in the Western sources under analysis, as even the latest editions from 2021 do not include Munakata Taisha.

In summary, the information sources emphasise the sacred and religious character of Munakata Taisha and combine that with information about its history, presenting it as a unique place in Japan.

Differences of Themes between Itsukushima Jinja and Munakata Taisha

While Japanese sources have more of a focus in their representation of Itsukushima Jinja as a place of sacredness and religion compared to Western sources, this aspect is more strongly emphasised for Munakata Taisha within the Japanese sources. The role of nature is also differently highlighted. Japanese sources do not focus on this aspect as strongly as Western sources for Itsukushima Jinja, in which the island and the water become a major and reoccurring topic. While an exact correlation between the representation of nature within Japanese and Western sources cannot be made, it can be argued that while the sea and island setting is similar between the two shrines, Itsukushima Jinja’s setting on the water seems to be a pulling factor to focus on the natural elements. This frames Miyajima in the light of the Western image of islands, as also shown in the literature review. On the other hand, while a comparison to Western sources is not possible, the findings on the representation of Munakata Taisha suggest that these information sources aim at attracting visitors who have a deeper interest in a sacred place, understand the island’s place in history, and through visiting this site gain a better understanding of the shrine and island as cultural heritage.

Conclusion

The objective of this research was to explore the representations of two sacred island shrines within Japan across various travel information sources with different origins. As was found from the literature, there is a gap in research on sacred island tourism as well as in place representation that draws onto a variety of information sources. Hence, this

study explored two World Historical Sites on sacred islands and assessed various travel information sources that are relevant for the key inbound tourist markets in Japan.

Since the information was extracted into themes, and these were coded with human involvement to establish an understanding of which information, like history or prayer, is used in the presentation of each shrine, this can result in a limitation on the replicability of the methodology; however, through the documentation of the process, the manner in which the coding and analysis were structured was detailed.

The results clearly show differences between the Japanese and Western sources, as was found in a study by Stepchenkova and Morrison (2006) comparing US and Russian websites portraying Russia as a tourism destination.

In conclusion, the Itsukushima Jinja theme analysis reveals that Western travel information sources convey a message of nature serving as a tourism highlight of Japan while also explaining its history. In contrast, Japanese information sources place a greater emphasis on the sacred and religious aspects of Itsukushima Jinja, even though most of the text focuses on the history and architectural aspects of the shrine. This finding is similar to the one from Stausberg (2011), who found that despite there being a variety of information available about religious sites, it does “not necessarily emphasise their religious dimension, but often highlights the artistic and historical features of the respective sites” (193). On the other hand, the religious and sacred character of Munakata Taisha is one of the key messages within Japanese sources and also in UNESCO’s representation. While also providing historical facts, both sources present the shrine as a unique site in Japan that contributed to its religious development.

This study shows that the presentation of similar sites can vary, but this also needs to be further researched since the study considered only two island shrines, one that has had only marginal exposure in foreign travel information sources, limiting the opportunity for comparison, and the other one being widely represented as a typical image of Japan. Therefore, it is necessary to extend the study to more sites that have similar settings, which would allow for a richer comparison of different religious sites.

The polytheistic nature of the shrines is not a topic in much of the Western information, where only one-third mention the enshrined deities or explain the functions of the different shrine buildings, which could enhance the understanding of the shrine and its religious character, as pointed out by Jimura (2019), which are often difficult for followers from monotheistic religions to understand. However, this also raises the question of how much and what kind of information tourists would like to receive about the shrines as well as their motivations for visiting them. Even if detailed information about the religious aspects is being presented, it is unclear “to what extent consumers absorb the cultural messages of their guidebooks” (Peel and Sørensen 2016, 56), or how they behave to them. Therefore, future research could incorporate these topics within the context of religious sites.

Since the focus of the research was on information provided for international travelers, the study did not consider information sources in Japanese, like the homepage of

Munakata Taisha, which would limit the number of international travellers who could read it. However, future research could use this research structure to incorporate Japanese-language sources since that would enrich the data through adding the domestic target audience and shed light on how Japanese present the same place to different target groups.

In general, the inconsistent representation across various travel information sources can also have implications on the sites covered. It will be unlikely that travellers would read through vast information sources like in this study, and depending on the source chosen, they would receive different images of a sacred site; ranging from an explanation of its religious role to being merely a photo opportunity. Therefore these images could have an impact on to the extent that visitors view the site as an religious one and its function as a place of worship. Furthermore, since islanders are generally known for having a strong community, the impact of tourism on their lives with a shrine and the respect towards sacred islands has to be further explored, as the island might have a very different status compared to the goals of leisure-seeking tourists.

The differences in representation also have implications on the tourism management of the islands, as in the case of Itsukushima Jinja. It can be argued that the Japanese and Western sources target different groups. Hence, the expectations and experiences of tourists can vary on the island. It also shows that further research is needed to understand the motivations of tourists and their sources of information in the context of WHS islands. On the other hand, we also need to understand how tourist destinations intend to market their island to outsiders and the kind of exposure they want to tourists from abroad.

By comparing various sources about Itsukushima Jinja and Munakata Taisha through content from the Japanese tourism association websites, the shrine website itself, travel guidebooks, and the descriptions from UNESCO, it was possible to do a multi-source analysis and narrow the gap within the field of travel information sources regarding sacred island tourism.

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Appendix

Travel guidebook search results on Amazon of the respective country pages as of July 2020.

Rank	USA	Australia	Deutschland	United Kingdom
	<i>Sorted by Amazon</i>	<i>Sorted by Amazon</i>	<i>Sorted by Amazon</i>	<i>Sorted by Amazon</i>
1	Lonely Planet Japan (2019 ed)	Lonely Planet Japan (2019 ed)	Stefan Loose Reiseführer (2018 ed)	Lonely Planet Japan (2019 ed)
2	Fodor's Essential Japan (2019 ed)	Japan Travel Guide: Things I wish I knew before going to Japan (2019)	Baedeker Reiseführer (2018 ed)	DK Eyewitness Japan (2019 ed)
3	Japan Travel Guide: Things I wish I knew before going to Japan (2019)	Lonely Planet Best of Japan (2019 ed)	Lonely Planet Japan (2019 ed)	Japan Travel Guide: Things I wish I knew before going to Japan (2019)
4	DK Eyewitness Japan (2019 ed)	Insight Guides Pocket Japan (May 2020 ed)	National Geographic (2019 ed)	Lonely Planet Best of Japan (2019 ed)
5	Super Cheap Guides: Japan (ed 2017)	DK Eyewitness Japan (2019 ed)	Marco Polo Japan (2016 ed)	Super Cheap Guides: Japan (ed 2017)
6	Moon Japan: Plan your trip, avoid the crowds, and experience the real Japan (2020)	Japan Travel Guide 2020: Fully-Digitalized (2019)	Japan der illustrierte Guide (2019 ed)	Fodor's Essential Japan (2019 ed)
7	Japan Travel Guide 2020: Fully-Digitalized (2019)	Japan in 60 Easy steps: The compact and comprehensive travel guide (2019 ed)	Low Budget Reiseführer Japan (2019 ed)	The Rough Guide to Japan (2017)
8	Cool Japan Guide (2015)	14 days in Japan: A first-timer's ultimate travel guide (2018)	Japan spielend in 60 Schritten (2019 ed)	Beritz Pocket Guide Japan (2017) (2020 version available)
9	Must-See Japan (2016 ed)	Japan: The Ultimate Japan Travel Guide by A traveler for a traveler (2016)	I love Japan Reiseführer (2019 ed)	Marco Polo Japan (2016)
10	14 days in Japan: A first-timer's ultimate travel guide (2018)	The Rough Guide to Japan (2017)	Vis-a-vis Reiseführer (DK) (2020 ed)	Insight Guides Japan (2020)