
Religious Tourism in Senegal: Towards a Destination Branding Tool.

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Abstract

Senegal's tourism image has traditionally emphasized the Atlantic coast, cultural heritage, and teranga, while its religious landscapes remain less visible in formal destination positioning. This article examines whether Sufi and wider religious heritage can support a distinctive destination brand without subordinating sacred institutions to tourism promotion. It combines scholarship on pilgrimage, place branding, and Senegalese religion with comparative evidence from Touba and Tivaouane, including the 2026 impact study of the 2025 Grand Magal, mixed-method research on the Gamou, and a thematic analysis of the September 2025 Tivaouane forum on religious tourism. The evidence shows that large-scale religious mobility depends on households, religious associations, public services, media, and transnational networks. It also identifies a practical agenda: balance sacred authority with tourism service requirements; address physical, informational, and cultural access; integrate community and commercial accommodation; involve travel intermediaries; inventory heritage; and create authorized year-round itineraries. The article argues for a networked model linking sacred cities, pilgrimage calendars, devotional arts, intellectual traditions, and community hospitality. Its credibility requires religious authority over representation, plural inclusion, multilingual guiding, reliable transport and sanitation, visitor protocols, crowd-safety planning, locally retained value, and transparent measurement. Religious heritage can strengthen Senegal's destination identity only when living practice and community governance remain primary.

Keywords Senegal; religious tourism; destination branding; Sufi Islam; Grand Magal; Gamou; living heritage; sacred-site governance

Résumé

L'image touristique du Sénégal privilégie traditionnellement le littoral atlantique, le patrimoine culturel et la *teranga*, tandis que ses paysages religieux demeurent moins visibles dans le positionnement institutionnel de la destination. Cet article examine dans quelle mesure le patrimoine soufi et, plus largement, religieux peut soutenir une marque de destination distinctive sans subordonner les institutions religieuses à la promotion touristique. Il associe les travaux sur le pèlerinage, la construction des marques de destination et les religions au Sénégal à des données comparatives sur Touba et Tivaouane, notamment l'étude d'impact publiée en 2026 sur le Grand Magal de 2025, des recherches à méthodes mixtes sur le Gamou et une analyse thématique du forum de Tivaouane sur le tourisme religieux de septembre 2025. Les résultats montrent que les mobilités religieuses de grande ampleur reposent sur les ménages, les associations religieuses, les services publics, les médias et les réseaux transnationaux. Ils dégagent plusieurs priorités opérationnelles : concilier l'autorité religieuse et les exigences des services touristiques ; améliorer l'accessibilité physique, informationnelle et culturelle ; articuler hébergement communautaire et hébergement commercial ; associer les intermédiaires du voyage ; inventorier le patrimoine ; et concevoir des itinéraires autorisés, accessibles toute l'année. L'article défend un modèle en réseau reliant les villes saintes, les calendriers de pèlerinage, les arts dévotionnels, les traditions intellectuelles et l'hospitalité communautaire. Sa crédibilité repose sur la maîtrise des représentations par les autorités religieuses, l'inclusion des différentes traditions, le guidage multilingue, la fiabilité des transports et de l'assainissement, des protocoles de visite, la planification de la sécurité des foules, le maintien local des retombées économiques et la transparence de l'évaluation. Le patrimoine religieux ne peut renforcer l'identité touristique du Sénégal que si les pratiques vivantes et la gouvernance communautaire demeurent prioritaires.

Mots-clés : Sénégal ; tourisme religieux ; construction de la marque de destination ; islam soufi ; Grand Magal ; Gamou ; patrimoine vivant ; gouvernance des sites sacrés.

Introduction

The often-repeated observation that "Senegal is a religious country" captures a defining feature of the nation's history and public life. Senegal has hosted two summits of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation in 1991 and 2008 as well as major gatherings of African and international Muslim scholars. Its religious landscape is not exclusively Islamic. Pope John Paul II's visit in 1992 highlighted the country's dynamic Christian community and long tradition of interfaith dialogue. Senegal is also a major centre of Sufism: it hosts influential branches of the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya, while the Muridiyya and Layene movements were founded in the country. It has become a major West African destination for Tijani pilgrimage. Relative political stability and social cohesion are frequently associated with the peaceful coexistence of Muslims and Christians and with generally harmonious relations among the Sufi brotherhoods. Léopold Sédar Senghor, the country's first president from 1960 to 1980, was a Christian in an overwhelmingly Muslim society. This history provides a strong basis for examining religious tourism and pilgrimage-based destination branding. In fact, religion in Senegal is not confined to formal worship or the annual calendar of holy days. It is encountered as a lived, visible, and audible social practice. Portraits of Sufi shaykhs appear on buses, taxis, shopfronts, household walls, and office doors; mosques structure urban skylines; calls to prayer and devotional music shape the soundscape; and dahiras, or religious associations, gather for study, recitation, and collective remembrance. These forms communicate affiliation, memory, moral authority, and belonging. Research on urban Sufi arts, religious associations, popular music, and female religious leadership shows how devotion circulates through public culture and everyday life (Diop 1981; McLaughlin 1997; Roberts and Roberts 2003; Hill 2018; Camara 2020). For visitors, religion is therefore not a marginal attraction. It is one of the principal ways in which Senegal is seen, heard, and socially experienced.

This prominence has deep historical and institutional roots. The Tijaniyya, Muridiyya, Qadiriyya, and Layene traditions have shaped education, commerce, migration, welfare, political mediation, and urban development. Relations among disciples, religious authorities, colonial administrations, and the postcolonial state have also influenced citizenship and social organization (Cruise O'Brien 1971; Villalón 1995; Robinson 2000; Mbacké 2005; Babou 2007; Glover 2007; Diouf and Leichtman 2009). Religious belonging is neither uniform nor static. Each tradition contains distinct lineages and institutions, and each has its own sacred centres, ritual calendar, aesthetic forms, and transnational connections. Senegal's Catholic communities and pilgrimage sites further widen this religious geography.

Senegal's tourism image, by contrast, has usually emphasized the coast, climate, historical heritage, cultural diversity, and the ethic of hospitality expressed through *teranga*. Beach and resort

development has been concentrated along the Petite Côte and in Casamance, while cultural and nature-based itineraries draw on Gorée, Saint-Louis, the Sine-Saloum Delta, the Bassari cultural landscape, and national parks. Dakar and the Thiès region remain major gateways for leisure, business, and conference travel (Dehoorne and Diagne 2008; Diombéra 2022). These assets are substantial, but the concentration of the offer around a limited set of coastal and heritage products raises a strategic question: which nationally grounded resources could support a more distinctive and geographically distributed tourism identity?

Religious heritage is one possible answer to the need to build a distinctive tourism destination brand in Senegal, hence the main motivation behind this article. I believe that the resource base including Touba and the Grand Magal; the Tijani centres and Mawlid celebrations of Tivaouane, Medina Baye in Kaolack, and Ndiassane; Layene sites in Yoff and Cambérène; the Marian pilgrimage at Popenguine; and religious sites and memories in Saint-Louis, can conceive of an overarching religious brand while maintaining geographical and Sufi varieties. Such resource base also encompasses mosques, mausoleums called shrines by Eric Ross (2024), cemeteries, libraries, Arabic and Ajami manuscripts, calligraphy, devotional poetry, religious dress, sacred architecture, and practices of hospitality. Studies of Touba show how pilgrimage, migration, urban development, and transnational discipleship have made a sacred city into a global node (Bava and Guèye 2001; Guèye 2002; Ross 2011, 2023; Abbou 2022). Research on women, family networks, music, visual culture, and religious learning demonstrates that this heritage cannot be understood through monuments alone (Roberts and Roberts 2003; Buggenhagen 2012; Hill 2018).

The article, titled, *Religious Tourism in Senegal: Towards a Destination Branding Tool*, addresses a gap between two substantial bodies of scholarship. International research on pilgrimage and religious tourism examines motivation, sacred-site management, commodification, and destination development (Shackley 2001; Timothy and Olsen 2006; Collins-Kreiner 2010; Raj and Griffin 2015). Scholarship on Senegalese religion offers detailed accounts of Sufi orders, sacred authority, mobility, gender, aesthetics, education, and urban life. These literatures are seldom brought together to ask how locally grounded religious knowledge might inform destination branding or how tourism promotion might alter the meanings and governance of sacred places. Their combination permits a more precise assessment of both opportunity and constraint.

The study asks three related questions:

1. Which material, visual, sonic, performative, and institutional features of Senegal's religious heritage can support a distinctive destination identity?
2. How might these features be interpreted for domestic, African, Muslim, diasporic, and wider cultural-tourism audiences without reducing living traditions to promotional imagery?

3. Which governance, ethical, infrastructural, and safety safeguards are required for religious tourism to create locally shared value while protecting sacred meanings and community authority?

These questions require a cautious understanding of tourism value. Mosques, mausoleums, religious cities, and mass gatherings are first sites of worship, learning, memory, and community obligation. Their possible tourism function is secondary. Commercial framing can detach practices from their social meanings, privilege visitor expectations over worshippers' needs, and distribute benefits unevenly (Olsen 2003; Shepherd 2002). Major events also compress very large flows into limited times and spaces, making transport, sanitation, emergency planning, accommodation, accessibility, and crowd safety central rather than peripheral concerns (Shackley 2001; Raj and Griffin 2015).

The central argument is that Senegal can derive a credible comparative advantage from religious tourism only if it treats religious heritage as community-governed living culture. The article aims to contribute to the development of a prospective destination brand that would draw strength from the relationship among sacred places, devotional events, everyday visual and sonic culture, transnational networks, and teranga. Its credibility would depend on co-production with religious and host communities, representation across traditions, careful interpretation, and sustained investment in visitor management.

The article is articulated around eight main sections. The first establishes the conceptual framework linking religious tourism, destination branding, and living heritage, while the second presents the materials, methods, and scope of the study. The third traces Senegal's religious pluralism and the historical formation of its sacred centres. The fourth examines religious events and mobility, focusing on Touba and Tivaouane within a wider network of pilgrimage destinations. The fifth assesses religious heritage as a resource for destination branding, and the sixth considers visitor markets, route design, and seasonality. The seventh addresses governance, ethical safeguards, visitor management, and local economic benefits. The eighth discusses the findings, their implications for a networked destination identity, and the study's limitations, before the conclusion identifies priorities for community-governed religious tourism.

1 Religious Tourism and Destination Branding

1.1 Religious Tourism and the Pilgrim–Tourist Continuum

Religious tourism encompasses travel motivated by devotion, pilgrimage, spiritual inquiry, education, heritage interest, family obligation, or combinations of these motives. The same person may pray, visit relatives, attend a religious lecture, purchase devotional objects, and explore a city during one journey. Research therefore rejects a rigid opposition between pilgrim and tourist and treats the two as positions on a continuum shaped by motive, practice, and self-understanding (Badone and Roseman 2004; Timothy and Olsen 2006; Collins-Kreiner 2010). This approach is particularly

appropriate in Senegal, where pilgrimage events are also moments of hospitality, commerce, family reunion, learning, and transnational return.

Religious tourism should also be distinguished from halal tourism. Halal tourism generally concerns services and environments compatible with Islamic requirements, including food, prayer, privacy, and conduct. Religious tourism centres on sacred places, histories, events, and experiences, whether Muslim, Christian, or associated with other traditions (Battour and Ismail 2016). Halal-compatible services can support a Senegalese religious-tourism offer, but they are not its defining content. The distinctive resource lies in Senegal's sacred geographies, devotional cultures, intellectual histories, and living institutions.

This distinction has practical consequences on many accounts. First, pilgrims who already belong to a religious community may need little explanation but require access, transport, sanitation, and accommodation. Second, diasporic visitors may combine devotion with family and identity-based travel. And last, domestic or international heritage visitors may need multilingual interpretation and explicit guidance on dress, photography, gendered spaces, and appropriate conduct. A destination strategy must therefore respond to several relationships with the sacred rather than assume one homogeneous religious-tourism market.

1.2 Place-Brand Co-creation and Living Religious Heritage

Destination branding is more than a slogan, logo, or advertising campaign. It is a strategic promise that links projected images with local identity and with the experience actually delivered to visitors (Morgan, Pritchard, and Pride 2011; Pike and Page 2014). Identity-based approaches further show that place brands emerge through interaction among residents, institutions, businesses, visitors, and public authorities rather than through the unilateral decisions of a marketing agency (Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013). A credible brand must therefore arise from meanings that local communities recognize and from a sense of place that visitors can encounter (Campelo et al. 2014).

Religious heritage makes this requirement unusually demanding. The people represented in a campaign are also worshippers, custodians, teachers, residents, and owners of knowledge. Their authority cannot be replaced by the tourism administration's control of promotional channels. Religious institutions must help determine which places and practices may be interpreted, when access is appropriate, which images may circulate, and how revenue or other benefits should return to host communities. Co-creation is therefore a governance arrangement, not a public-relations exercise.

The relevant brand resource is not a ready-made inventory of sacred objects. It is the relationship among place, memory, ritual, scholarship, hospitality, and mobility. A monumental mosque may be visually distinctive, but its meaning depends on the history of the community that built and uses it. A

pilgrimage may attract a large temporary population, but its value cannot be reduced to attendance or expenditure. Devotional poetry, manuscripts, dress, food distribution, and voluntary service may be less visible in conventional tourism promotion, yet they explain how a sacred centre is inhabited and sustained. Branding must make such relationships intelligible without turning worship into spectacle.

1.3 Analytical Criteria

The article evaluates potential brand resources through five connected criteria. Distinctiveness asks whether a place, practice, or narrative expresses a recognizable feature of Senegal's religious history. Community authority asks who may represent it and set conditions of access. Interpretive legibility asks how its meaning can be explained across languages and levels of prior knowledge. Operational capacity concerns transport, sanitation, accommodation, accessibility, safety, and the protection of worship. Local value asks who performs the work, controls the narrative, and benefits economically or institutionally. A resource is strategically useful only when these criteria can be addressed together. This framework also separates evidence from recommendation. The existence of transnational religious networks does not by itself demonstrate tourism demand, and the presence of sacred architecture does not automatically justify visitor access. Primary evidence must establish how religious authorities, residents, pilgrims, guides, businesses, and prospective visitors understand these possibilities. Market surveys, expenditure studies, and pilot evaluation are then required before demand, impact, or return on investment can be estimated.

2 Materials, Method, and Scope

The study uses an interpretive qualitative design and comparative case analysis. Its secondary corpus combines research on destination branding, pilgrimage, religious tourism, and Senegalese religious history with recent evidence on Touba and Tivaouane. Oral accounts, press and documentary material, repeated visits to religious centres, and attendance at major gatherings provide contextual observations; no population-level inference is drawn from them.

The quantitative foundation for Touba is the 2026 study by Université Alioune Diop (UAD) and Université Cheikh Ahmadou Khadim de Touba (UCAK). It reports 5,425 questionnaires across households, pilgrims, dahiras, traders, transport operators, artisans, and money-transfer services and combines those surveys with administrative records and an input-output model (UAD and UCAK 2026, 17-18, 89-91). Evidence for Tivaouane comes principally from Marega's mixed-method doctoral study, which uses interviews, participant observation, documentary analysis, and mapping of religious markers, and from Bekkar-Lacoste's ethnographic account of ritual, commerce, migration, and public regulation (Bekkar-Lacoste 2012; Marega 2024).

A second evidence layer was coded thematically: the complete audiovisual record of the 2 September 2025 Tivaouane forum, lasting more than five hours; the November 2025 religious-tourism special

issue of *Le Journal de l'économie*; Mawlid and Magal reporting by RTS, 2STV, TFM, Touba TV, Malikia TV, and Asfiyahi; and organizing-committee reports. These sources identify stakeholder diagnoses, institutional positions, and recommendations. They are not treated as representative opinion surveys, proof of implementation, or independent economic-impact evaluations. The comparison is organized around sacred authority, mobility, hospitality, access, public representation, infrastructure, commerce, and the distribution of benefits. Quantitative claims retain their source, year, unit, and methodological limits.

3 Religious Pluralism and the Formation of Sacred Centres in Senegal

Senegal is widely known for the public prominence of Sufi Islam. That description is accurate but incomplete. Many Senegalese Muslims identify with a Sufi order, but affiliation varies in intensity and intersects with family, occupational, neighbourhood, and regional ties. Catholic communities have maintained parishes, schools, pilgrimage traditions, and civic institutions, while local religious practices continue to inform relationships with ancestry, land, healing, and ritual authority. A national tourism strategy must therefore avoid presenting Senegal as religiously uniform (Mbacké 2005; Diouf and Leichtman 2009; de Benoist 2008).

The strongest historical scholarship also rejects two reductive explanations of Senegalese Islam. One attributed its expansion mainly to colonial policy, as though African Muslims were passive beneficiaries of French rule. The other described Sufi orders primarily as political machines built on unquestioning obedience. Historical and ethnographic research instead shows scholars, farmers, traders, women, migrants, and students building religious communities for intellectual, devotional, social, and economic purposes. Relations with rulers and governments mattered, but they formed part of a wider history of teaching, mobility, textual production, and institutional adaptation (Robinson 2000; Babou 2007; Diouf and Leichtman 2009; Hill 2018).

3.1 Islam before Colonial Rule

Islamic presence in the region predates European colonial expansion by many centuries. Muslim merchants and scholars travelled along Saharan and Sahelian routes linking North Africa to the Senegal River valley. By the eleventh century, rulers of Takrur had adopted Islam, and Muslim specialists served as teachers, jurists, diplomats, and commercial intermediaries. Conversion remained uneven: courts and trading communities could be Muslim while rural populations maintained other ritual systems, and Muslim clerics often lived within states whose political culture was not defined by Islamic law (Robinson 2004; Ware 2014).

Qur'anic learning was central to this history. The daara was not simply a school modelled on a modern classroom; it joined recitation, memorization, discipline, service, and ethical formation known as the Suwarian clerical tradition (Sanneh 1997). Teachers sustained networks across Senegambia,

Mauritania, and the western Sudan, while students carried texts, litanies, legal knowledge, and devotional lineages between communities. Arabic served scholarship and correspondence, and African languages written in Arabic script later became important vehicles for religious teaching (Ware 2014; Ngom 2016). This history complicates any claim that Islam arrived with either European conquest or the nineteenth-century Sufi orders.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries nevertheless brought major political and religious change. Reform movements in Futa Toro and the campaigns associated with al-Hajj Umar Tall and Maba Diakhou Ba joined religious reform to contests over political legitimacy, warfare, slavery, and commerce. Their effects differed by region. In the Wolof kingdoms and Sine-Saloum, rulers, Muslim clerics, warriors, enslaved people, and peasant communities made competing choices as French power expanded. Islamization was therefore neither a single jihad nor a smooth diffusion; it emerged from conflicts within African societies and from the colonial conquest that followed (Klein 1968; Searing 2002).

3.2 Sufi Expansion and French Colonial Rule

The broad popularization of Islam accelerated from the late nineteenth century into the colonial period. French conquest weakened several royal institutions and transformed land, labour, and trade. Railways and the groundnut economy opened new corridors of settlement, while Muslim teachers created villages and communities that offered education, moral authority, and social protection. These conditions helped Sufi orders attract followers beyond older clerical and commercial elites, but Senegalese religious actors directed the expansion through their own teachings and priorities (Cruise O'Brien 1971; Searing 2002).

French policy toward Muslim leaders combined surveillance, coercion, and selective cooperation. Administrators feared autonomous religious movements and sometimes treated mobility, large followings, or correspondence as signs of revolt. Ahmadou Bamba was arrested and exiled, while other scholars were monitored or displaced. Officials nevertheless relied on Muslim intermediaries and later negotiated with leaders who could facilitate local administration and agricultural production. Robinson (2000) describes this changing relationship as accommodation: religious leaders accepted limits on direct political sovereignty while defending substantial autonomy in education, worship, social organization, and economic life.

Accommodation should not be confused with simple collaboration. Leaders differed in theology, strategy, and regional position, and their relations with the state changed over time. Babou's study of Ahmadou Bamba, for example, places religious pedagogy and the greater jihad of moral self-discipline at the centre of Murid history rather than defining the movement only through resistance

or cooperation (Babou 2007). This approach restores intellectual and spiritual agency while retaining the coercive colonial setting in which Senegal's modern sacred centres developed.

3.3 Major Sufi Traditions and Sacred Centres

Senegal's Sufi traditions share practices such as attachment to a spiritual guide, collective remembrance of God, pilgrimage, and chains of authorization. They are not centralized denominations in the modern bureaucratic sense. Each includes branches, family lineages, local teachers, women's groups, youth associations, and diasporic networks. Table 1 identifies the principal formations discussed here without implying uniformity within them.

3.3.1 The Qadiriyya and Ndiassane

The Qadiriyya is the oldest major Sufi order represented in Senegal. Founded around the memory and teachings of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani of Baghdad (d.1078), it reached western Africa through Saharan scholarly and commercial networks. As mentioned by Eric Ross,

Two branches of the Qadiriyya that developed in the southern Saharan emirates (Trarza, Brakna, and Hawdh in modern-day Mauritania) were attracting disciples from south of the Senegal River by the mid-nineteenth century. These were the branches established by Shaykh Muhammad al-Fadhil (1212–1286/1797–1869) and Shaykh Sidiyya al-Kabir (1194–1285/1780–1868) (2024-264).

The third branch which settled in Ndiassane came from the Kunti Centre of Mali. Mauritanian teachers and Kunta lineages helped establish Qadiri authority along the Senegal River and across western Senegambia. In Senegal, Ndiassane became the leading centre under the Kunta family. Although the order did not acquire the same national numerical weight as the Tijaniyya or Muridiyya, its scholarship, networks of authorization, and practices of mediation shaped the religious environment in which later orders expanded (Robinson 2000; Mbacké 2005).

3.3.2 The Tijaniyya at Tivaouane and Medina Baye

The Tijaniyya, founded by Ahmad al-Tijani(d. 1815) in North Africa in the late eighteenth century, became the most geographically extensive Sufi tradition in Senegal. Al-Hajj Umar Tall (d. 1864) gave the order major prestige in the nineteenth century, but its later Senegalese expansion did not depend on one political project. El Hadji Malick Sy (d. 1922) established a durable scholarly and devotional centre at Tivaouane. His teaching, writing, and appointment of muqaddams connected rural communities with Saint-Louis, Dakar, and other growing towns. The Sy tradition's dahiras, daaras, and structures of spiritual authority remain central to its educational life (Mbacké 2005; Diallo 2011).

A second influential Tijani formation developed around Abdoulaye Niasse and, above all, his son Ibrahim Niasse in Kaolack. In 1929 Ibrahim Niasse(d. 1975) announced the Fayda, or spiritual flood, which emphasized experiential knowledge of God through structured spiritual training. From Medina

Baye, the movement spread across West Africa and later into Europe and North America. Its history shows that Senegalese Sufism has been a producer of transnational Islamic thought and authority, not merely a local reception of ideas from North Africa or the Middle East (Seesemann 2011). The contrasting histories and networks of Tivaouane and Medina Baye also caution against treating the Tijaniyya as a single tourism market.

3.3.3 The Muridiyya and Touba

The Muridiyya was founded in Senegal by Ahmadou Bamba Mbacké (d. 1927) during the upheavals of the late nineteenth century. Bamba developed a programme of Qur'anic learning, ethical discipline, devotional writing, and attachment to the Prophet Muhammad. French authorities regarded his following as a political threat and exiled him to Gabon from 1895 to 1902, then restricted him in Mauritania and Diourbel. His refusal to lead an armed revolt became central to Murid memory, while his Arabic poetry and pedagogical practice supplied the movement with a substantial intellectual corpus (Babou 2007; Ngom 2016).

Touba developed into the movement's sacred city and institutional centre. The Grand Magal commemorates Bamba's departure into exile and joins prayer, visitation, recitation, hospitality, service, family reunion, and commerce. Murid dahiras and migrant networks connect Touba to Dakar, other African cities, Europe, and North America, while disciples continue to invest materially and symbolically in the city (Bava and Guèye 2001; Guèye 2002; Diouf 2000; Ross 2011; Abbou 2022). Touba therefore offers unusually strong evidence for the relationship among pilgrimage, migration, urbanization, and place identity. The recent impact study also documents the scale of infrastructure and crowd-management pressures generated by the Grand Magal (UAD and UCAK 2026).

3.3.4 The Layene Landscape of Yoff and Cambérène

The Layene movement emerged among Lebou communities on the Cape Verde Peninsula. During the 1880s, Seydina Limamou Laye (d. 1909) proclaimed a religious mission articulated through Mahdist and prophetic expectations. The community subsequently developed around Yoff, Cambérène, Malika, and neighbouring settlements. White clothing came to symbolize ideals of purity, humility, and equality. Although numerically smaller than the Tijaniyya and Muridiyya, the Layene have had a lasting influence on the religious identity and urban geography of Greater Dakar (Mbacké 2005; Thomas 2012).

The Layene case is important for both the history and the tourism argument. It demonstrates that Senegalese Sufism includes locally founded movements whose teachings and institutions cannot be reduced to imported brotherhood structures. It also places a sacred landscape within the country's main metropolitan gateway. Yoff and Cambérène could connect religious history, Lebou heritage,

architecture, pilgrimage, and coastal urban change, but any interpretation would have to follow community protocols and avoid treating distinctive dress or ritual as visual spectacle.

3.3.5 Catholic Pilgrimage and a Plural National Religious Geography

A national strategy should not equate religious tourism with Sufi Islam alone. Catholic institutions have formed part of Senegal's educational, architectural, and civic history since the colonial period, with important communities in Saint-Louis, Dakar, the Petite Côte, and Casamance (de Benoist 2008). Popenguine is the country's best-known Catholic pilgrimage centre. Its Marian shrine, annual pilgrimage, youth walking traditions, and links with nearby coastal destinations make it a necessary case for examining how devotion, mobility, and visitor services intersect outside the Sufi orders.

Including Popenguine and other Christian sites would do more than diversify an itinerary. It would prevent the national brand from being captured by one order or religious family and would make religious plurality part of the destination narrative. The same principle applies within Sufi Islam: Touba, Tivaouane, Medina Baye, Ndiassane, and the Layene centres should be interpreted through their differences as well as their shared place in Senegalese history. A networked approach is therefore analytically and ethically preferable to a single flagship brand.

These centres and events form overlapping sacred geographies rather than a finished tourism product. The comparative evidence that follows examines how religious meaning, mobility, hospitality, commerce, governance, and infrastructure shape the visitor experience and the conditions under which a national destination narrative could be credible.

4 Sacred Centres Religious Events and Mobility

Senegal's religious geography is organized through cities, neighbourhoods, pilgrimage calendars, and networks of disciples rather than through isolated attractions. Touba and Tivaouane provide the strongest evidence because their principal gatherings have been studied in detail. Medina Baye, Ndiassane, the Layene centres, Popenguine, and Saint-Louis extend the national map and demonstrate that religious mobility cannot be represented by a single brotherhood or event.

4.1 Touba and the Grand Magal

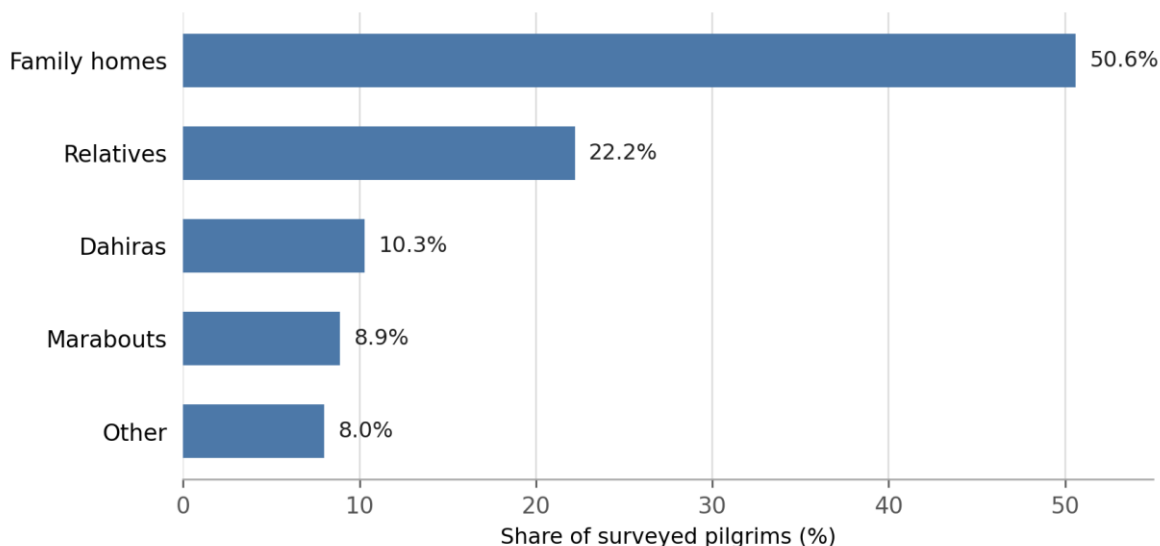
The Grand Magal commemorates Ahmadou Bamba's (d.1927) departure into exile and is understood by Murid authorities and disciples as an act of gratitude to God. Prayer, recitation of Bamba's Arabic poems, visits to sacred places, teaching, hospitality, and voluntary service give the gathering its meaning. Commerce and mobility are extensive, but they occur within this devotional framework; they do not define the event's primary purpose (Bava and Guèye 2001; Abbou 2022).

The most substantial recent quantitative source is the 2026 impact study by Université Alioune Diop and Université Cheikh Ahmadou Khadim de Touba. It combines 5,425 questionnaires across households, pilgrims, dahiras, traders, transport operators, artisans, and money-transfer services with

administrative and national economic data. The study estimates that 5.1 million pilgrims attended the 2025 Magal and calculates combined direct, indirect, and induced expenditure effects of 629.622 billion FCFA (UAD and UCAK 2026, 17, 91). The latter figure is a modelled estimate of expenditure effects. It should not be presented as tourism receipts, local value added, or a contribution to GDP. A second 2025 access-count estimate, reported in *Le Journal de l'économie*, gives 6,583,278 total participants. Its own decomposition identifies 5,129,891 travellers and 1,443,387 residents of Touba and surrounding communes (*Le Journal de l'économie* 2025, 41-42). The apparent difference from the 5.1 million estimate is therefore mainly definitional: one figure approximates incoming pilgrims, while the other adds residents present in the event territory. Published totals should specify whether they count visitors, residents, or all participants.

The survey depicts a predominantly domestic and collectively organized flow. Dakar and Thiès accounted for 60.2 percent of reported origins; 58.06 percent of respondents used public transport, and 42.6 percent travelled for more than five hours (UAD and UCAK 2026, 37, 39-40). Accommodation depended chiefly on social and religious networks: 50.6 percent stayed in family homes, 22.2 percent with relatives, 10.3 percent with dahiras, and 8.9 percent with marabouts (38). Host households reported average Magal expenditure of 3.934 million FCFA, with food representing 61.64 percent (86-87). These figures show that hospitality is an infrastructure of pilgrimage sustained by households, religious associations, and communal meals.

Figure 1. Accommodation of surveyed 2025 Grand Magal pilgrims



Source: UAD and UCAK 2026, p. 38. Other is the residual share calculated from the four published categories.

In terms of food and beverage, Murids use the Wolof term *berndé* for the freely offered communal meals that give sacred hospitality a material form, especially in Touba. Private secondary residences

and houses maintained by dahiras also expand peak-event capacity. These practices complicate a simple choice between commercial accommodation and staying with residents. The evidence supports a mixed portfolio in which community hosting remains central, while registered hotels, guesthouses, and residences provide an optional layer for visitors who lack kinship or religious networks, travel outside event periods, or require specific accessibility and service standards (Tivaouane Forum 2025; UAD and UCAK 2026, 25, 38).

In contrast, this hosting system operates under exceptional pressure. The 2025 response mobilized 15,074 public agents, while daily waste volume during the Magal rose to roughly eight times its normal level. More than one-quarter of surveyed pilgrims reported no access to toilets, and 68 percent considered public or mobile toilets insufficient (UAD and UCAK 2026, 67, 77-80). Water, sanitation, road safety, payment security, traffic, and waste collection are therefore integral to Touba's destination credibility. Promotion cannot compensate for failure in these basic services.

Touba also has a transnational religious presence. Murid dahiras, diaspora communities, Bamba Day commemorations, and Keur Serigne Touba institutions connect the city to other African countries such as Gabon where the shaykh was exiled, and Mauritania, Europe, and North America (Diouf 2000; Ross 2011). The 2025 impact study, however, does not quantify foreign pilgrims or diaspora returnees. International reach is well established as a network, but the size and characteristics of an international visitor market remain to be measured. Such measures are applicable to other events and religious cities like Tivaoune.

4.2 Tivaouane and the Gamou

Tivaouane's Gamou commemorates the birth of the Prophet Muhammad and is inseparable from the scholarly and devotional legacy of El Hadji Malick Sy. Marega associates the event's institutionalization in Tivaouane with Sy's arrival in 1902, while noting uncertainty over the exact date of the first celebration. Sources count the ritual cycle differently, but both describe ten days of dhikr followed by days devoted to receptions and intensified Qur'anic and burda recitation (Bekkar-Lacoste 2012, 302; Marega 2024, 152-158). The event is therefore best interpreted through religious practice and transmission rather than through attendance alone.

Tivaouane municipality is cited as estimating annual attendance at between two and three million pilgrims (Marega 2024, 374). This is a reported estimate without an audited counting method. The spatial evidence is more precise. The Gamou is distributed across three principal venues in Kogne Diaka and Ndiandakhoul, linked by mosques, zawiyas, mausoleums, reception spaces, markets, transport nodes, pedestrian routes, and emergency facilities (Marega 2024, 166, 173-174, 375-381). Tivaouane thus functions as a sacred route system rather than as a single monumental attraction.

Event governance is similarly distributed. The khalifal family, COSKAS, municipal authorities, state services, neighbourhood leaders, security forces, health personnel, businesses, and host households share responsibilities. Marega reports that COSKAS has 5,000 active members organized through 70 commissions and 23 subcommissions, including 10 abroad (2024, 373). Its work covers security, health, accommodation, catering, culture, youth, and scholarly programming. This institutional capacity makes religious organizations operational producers of the destination experience, not ceremonial consultees.

The Gamou also generates a temporary economy of street commerce, food, clothing, devotional goods, communications, rentals, and transport. Bekkar-Lacoste documents migrants' financial and material contributions and the work of women's groups that pool funds, travel, and source merchandise in advance (2012, 303-308). Marega records negotiated motorcycle-taxi fares rising from 600-1,000 FCFA in ordinary periods to 2,500-3,500 FCFA during the event (2024, 387). These examples establish market activation and service pressure, not an average fare or aggregate impact. Both sources explicitly leave the Gamou's total economic contribution unmeasured.

Tivaouane also supports year-round visitation. The El Hadji Malick Sy mausoleum, Babacar Sy mosque, daaras, libraries, family residences, and religious markers carry historical and symbolic value beyond the event period. Bekkar-Lacoste notes that private travel circuits linked to the Tijaniyya already included such sites in the early 2010s (2012, 302). Their interpretation requires authorization, accurate historical narration, and a clear distinction between spaces open to visitors and spaces reserved for worship, residence, or study.

On 2 September 2025, the Cellule de la Zawiya Tijaniyya (CEZAT), in partnership with the ASPT, convened a forum in Tivaouane bringing together religious authorities, tourism professionals, public officials, and community representatives. The formal organizers identified spiritual, cultural, and intellectual heritage as the basis of tourism development. COSKAS belonged to the wider institutional preparation: in June 2025 it established a steering committee to examine spiritual-tourism development and visitor reception in conformity with the city's values (Tivaouane Forum 2025; RTS 2025; COSKAS 2025; *Le Journal de l'économie* 2025, 31-32).

The forum's most useful contribution was its operational diagnosis. Panelists repeatedly returned to the need for a careful balance between the sacred character of place and tourism requirements; they distinguished physical access, informational access, and cultural access; questioned how commercial accommodation should coexist with hosting by residents; called for the involvement of travel agencies and tour operators; and proposed professional multilingual guiding, a comprehensive heritage inventory, and year-round sacred itineraries. Adama Ndiaye presented the state's role as accompaniment through multi-actor frameworks adapted to each religious centre, while religious

authorities and internal bodies would define the governing guidelines. That position treats COSKAS, Touba Ca Kanam, event commissions, and related community structures as implementation partners rather than as peripheral consultees (Tivaouane Forum 2025; RTS 2025; Le Journal de l'économie 2025, 20-21, 31-32).

4.3 A Wider Network of Sacred Centres

Medina Baye, Ndiassane, the Layene centres, Popenguine, and Saint-Louis broaden the geography established by Touba and Tivaouane. Medina Baye's importance lies in the pan-African and transatlantic expansion of Ibrahim Niasse's Fayda Tijaniyya, which connects Kaolack to disciples across West Africa and beyond (Seesemann 2011). Ndiassane draws authority from Kunta scholarly lineages and Saharan networks. Their value cannot be judged by mosque size or event attendance alone; libraries, teaching, manuscripts, genealogies, and transnational discipleship are central resources.

The Layene landscape of Yoff, Cambérène, and Malika places a Senegal-founded religious movement within the country's principal metropolitan gateway. Popenguine adds a Catholic Marian pilgrimage and long-distance walking tradition, while Saint-Louis connects Islamic scholarship, Catholic history, colonial urbanism, and memories of the Murid Magal (de Jong 2010; de Benoist 2008; Thomas 2012). Together, these cases support a plural national narrative and reduce the risk that destination branding will privilege one order, family, or ritual calendar.

5 Religious Heritage as Destination Brand Resources

The comparative evidence identifies three groups of resources: sacred places and routes; intellectual, visual, and sonic heritage; and networks of hospitality and mobility. Their value lies in the relationships among them. A mosque becomes intelligible through the community that built and uses it; a manuscript belongs to a history of teaching and recitation; a pilgrimage route joins religious memory to present-day service and obligation. Treating these elements separately would weaken both interpretation and brand credibility.

5.1 Sacred Places and Route Systems

Touba and Tivaouane show that a sacred destination is organized by movement among sites. Pilgrims travel between mosques, mausoleums, libraries, residences, reception areas, markets, and transport points. During major gatherings, barriers and pedestrianization alter access; outside peak periods, the same city can support quieter educational visits. Route interpretation should therefore explain why people move, which practices occur at each site, and when visitor access is appropriate. It should not turn a ritual itinerary into a sequence of photo stops.

A national network can connect these local route systems without erasing their differences. Touba represents Murid memory and scholarship; Tivaouane and Medina Baye express distinct Tijani

histories; Ndiassane reflects Qadiri and Kunta lineages; Yoff and Cambérène carry Layene and Lebou meanings; Popenguine anchors Catholic pilgrimage. The destination proposition is therefore a connected religious geography, not a standardized trail in which every place offers the same experience.

The forum proposed moving beyond event-centred promotion through biographical and sacred itineraries. One Tijani route could connect Gaé, also known as Gaya, the birthplace of El Hadji Malick Sy; Ndiarndé, a major teaching stage; Tivaouane, the institutional centre; and Fass-Diacksao, associated with retreat, agriculture, and spiritual formation. Saint-Louis and the spiritual relationship with Fez could extend the narrative at national and transnational scales (Tivaouane Forum 2025; APS 2026). A route should begin with an exhaustive inventory recording ownership, custodianship, sacred status, conservation condition, accessibility, permitted uses, authorized narratives, and local service capacity. The special issue's Senegal-Mauritania partnership around the itineraries of Ahmadou Bamba and Cheikh Saadbouh offers a parallel model based on signposting, documentation, digitization, local training, and guided visits (Le Journal de l'économie 2025, 27-28).

5.2 Knowledge Arts and Sensory Heritage

Senegal's religious distinctiveness also resides in Arabic and Ajami manuscripts, devotional poetry, Qur'anic learning, calligraphy, architecture, clothing, music, sermons, recitation, and the visual presence of religious leaders in public space. These forms make belief perceptible in daily life and connect scholarship with performance (McLaughlin 1997; Roberts and Roberts 2003; Ngom 2016; Camara 2019). Interpretation should present them as knowledge practices with named authors, lineages, languages, and contexts, rather than as anonymous folklore.

This intellectual dimension is particularly important for Tivaouane, Medina Baye, Ndiassane, and Touba, whose authority rests heavily on teaching and textual production. Libraries, exhibitions, guided reading sessions, translation, and digital catalogues could make this heritage more legible, provided that custodians determine access and reproduction. Multilingual interpretation should include French and English where useful, while recognizing Wolof, Arabic, and other languages as part of the heritage itself rather than as obstacles to visitor communication.

Religious and national media form part of this interpretive infrastructure. Touba TV, Malikia TV, and Asfiyahi can explain ritual meaning, transmit guidance from religious authorities, archive sermons and ceremonies, and provide practical orientation. RTS, 2STV, and TFM extend reach during the Mawlid and Magal. Their role should not be reduced to publicity: coordinated broadcasts, verified route and safety information, multilingual segments, and searchable archives can address informational and cultural access. Editorial protocols remain essential because coverage that

privileges spectacle over religious meaning can damage both sacred dignity and brand credibility (Tivaouane Forum 2025; Le Journal de l'économie 2025, 44).

5.3 Hospitality Networks and Transnational Connections

Teranga gains analytical precision in these cases through concrete practices: opening homes, preparing communal meals, organizing water, receiving strangers, coordinating volunteers, and financing collective service. The Magal data show the scale of household and dahira contributions, while research on the Gamou describes comparable forms of hosting and association. Hospitality is therefore both a moral practice and a material system. Its cultural value should be recognized without converting every act of generosity into a commercial product.

Accommodation policy should therefore avoid a binary choice between market lodging and staying with residents. The measured core is non-commercial: family homes and relatives accommodated 72.8 percent of surveyed Magal pilgrims, while dahiras and marabouts hosted a further 19.2 percent. Commercial lodging can fill defined gaps for international guests, people without a host network, families seeking privacy, and visitors with mobility or health requirements. A common information system could list authorized hotels and residences alongside community reception points without pricing berndé or other acts of voluntary service (UAD and UCAK 2026, 38; Tivaouane Forum 2025). Diaspora institutions extend this system across borders. They circulate funds, people, devotional goods, media, and organizational models and can support information, fundraising, and return travel. Yet network reach is not the same as measured tourism demand. A destination strategy should distinguish the religious community that already travels from prospective heritage visitors whose motivations, expectations, and service needs remain unknown.

6 Visitor Markets and Route Design

The evidence supports differentiated visitor groups rather than a single religious-tourism market. Domestic pilgrims form the largest measured flow at the Grand Magal. Regional African disciples are especially relevant to Medina Baye and Ndiassane; diaspora returnees connect several centres to Europe and North America; domestic heritage visitors may travel outside pilgrimage periods; and international cultural visitors may approach the sites through architecture, history, music, manuscripts, or interfaith interest. These categories can overlap within one journey, but their information and service requirements differ.

6.1 Domestic Pilgrimage and Event Travel

Peak-event travel requires a service model centred on access, dignity, and safety. The Magal survey shows long journeys, dependence on public transport, collective travel, and non-commercial accommodation. At Tivaouane, vehicle restrictions and the dispersion of venues make last-mile movement decisive. Event communication should prioritize routes, arrival windows, pedestrian

access, water, sanitation, medical points, lost-person services, safe payments, and emergency instructions. Conventional attraction marketing is secondary during these periods.

6.2 Diasporic Regional and Cultural Visitors

Diasporic and regional visitors may combine devotion with family reunion, business, study, and identity-based return. Cultural visitors are more likely to require historical interpretation, language support, explicit conduct guidance, and access outside major events. Existing research confirms the breadth of transnational networks but provides few comparable data on origin, length of stay, repeat visitation, expenditure, satisfaction, or willingness to visit several centres. Market development should therefore begin with targeted visitor research rather than with projections based on follower numbers.

The forum also identified an asymmetry in the travel economy. Senegalese travel intermediaries are more established in outbound religious travel to Mecca and Medina for the Hajj and Umrah, and in Tijani travel to Fez, than in receiving or circulating visitors through Senegalese sacred centres. This existing competence in group transport, documentation, booking, risk management, and religious accompaniment can be adapted to domestic, regional, and inbound itineraries. Travel agencies and tour operators should nevertheless distribute routes designed and authorized locally; they should not define sacred content or treat different religious centres as interchangeable products (Tivaouane Forum 2025; *Le Journal de l'économie* 2025, 16-17).

6.3 Route Design and Seasonality

Route design should operate at three levels. Within each city, authorized circuits can connect sacred, intellectual, and service sites. Between cities, optional itineraries can explain differences among Murid, Tijani, Qadiri, Layene, and Catholic traditions. Across the year, a digital calendar can distinguish major events from quieter periods suitable for educational visits. Peak pilgrimages should not be repackaged as sightseeing events without religious authorization; year-round interpretation offers greater scope for small groups, guides, museums, libraries, and local enterprise while reducing pressure on ritual moments.

Pilots should be deliberately modest: one locally approved Tivaouane itinerary, one Touba itinerary, and one inter-city or cross-border route, each tested with small groups outside peak periods. Evaluation should record accessibility, guide quality, visitor comprehension, resident response, time spent, local purchasing, and any disturbance to worship or study. Scaling should follow evidence of religious approval and operational reliability, not simply promotional demand.

7 Governance Ethical Safeguards and Visitor Management

Religious-tourism development will be credible only if sacred authority, public responsibility, and local livelihoods are aligned. Touba and Tivaouane already demonstrate forms of co-governance, but

tourism introduces additional questions about representation, access, imagery, payment, and benefit. These questions should be resolved before a campaign or itinerary is launched.

The 2025 forum clarifies a workable division of responsibility. The state, through the ASPT and related services, can finance enabling infrastructure, training, promotion, information systems, and evaluation. Religious authorities establish substantive and ethical guidelines. Internal institutions and commissions - including COSKAS in Tivaouane, Touba Ca Kanam, the Magal Organising Committee and event committees in Touba, and their equivalents elsewhere - translate those guidelines into operations. Municipalities, communities, travel professionals, and local firms then deliver defined services. State accompaniment should strengthen this architecture rather than displace it (Tivaouane Forum 2025; RTS 2025; Le Journal de l'économie 2025, 20-21, 31-32).

7.1 Religious Authority and Representation

Religious authorities and site custodians should determine which spaces may be visited, which narratives are authorized, when photography or recording is permitted, how gendered areas are managed, and whether rituals may be observed by non-participants. Community participation must extend beyond consultation after a brand has been designed. It should include control over interpretation, image licensing, guide accreditation, scheduling, and the treatment of sacred texts and objects.

Plural representation is equally important. A national platform should make the distinct histories of the major Sufi traditions and Catholic pilgrimage visible and should recognize internal diversity within each. The objective is not numerical parity but accurate representation and a transparent process through which communities decide how they appear in public tourism communication.

7.2 Visitor Management and Dignity

Service quality is part of the ethical treatment of pilgrims. Insufficient toilets, unsafe roads, waste accumulation, water shortages, fraud, and unclear access rules compromise dignity as well as destination reputation. Event plans should integrate religious organizations, municipalities, transport operators, health and security services, utilities, waste agencies, and communications providers. Information should be available through mobile channels and at physical arrival points, with formats accessible to elderly people and visitors with disabilities.

Year-round visitation requires a different operating model. Small visitor groups need trained local guides, clear opening arrangements, interpretation in appropriate languages, modest rest facilities, and protocols that prevent disruption of worship and teaching. Separating peak-event management from ordinary visitation allows infrastructure and staffing to match actual conditions rather than applying one tourism model throughout the year.

Professional multilingual guiding is the bridge between physical presence and cultural access. Accreditation should combine local recruitment, religious-history training, first aid, visitor care, language ability, and assessment by site custodians. Guides should be able to explain why an area is restricted, how to behave during prayer or recitation, and how a site fits a wider intellectual itinerary. The same information must be available through low-bandwidth mobile formats and physical signs for visitors who cannot rely on live media or smartphones.

7.3 Local Value and Economic Governance

Local value should be assessed through who supplies transport, food, guiding, crafts, interpretation, accommodation, sanitation, and digital services, and through how income is distributed. The evidence from both cities highlights households, women traders, artisans, informal transport operators, dahiras, and volunteer organizations. Support for these actors may include transparent pricing, basic registration, safe payment systems, microfinance, hygiene standards, and training that respects existing forms of organization.

Forum proposals make this agenda concrete. Local enterprises could produce quality prayer rugs, prayer beads, books, calligraphy, textiles, modest souvenirs, food products, and digital interpretation, while young people could work in guiding, transport coordination, translation, media production, and heritage documentation. Product development should use local procurement and agreed quality standards, avoid unauthorized sacred imagery, and distinguish devotional goods from generic destination merchandise (Tivaouane Forum 2025; Le Journal de l'économie 2025, 37-38).

Economic claims also require discipline. Gross household expenditure is not household income; modelled expenditure effects are not tourism receipts; annual municipal turnover is not event impact; and diaspora presence is not a market-size estimate. Clear measurement boundaries protect the article's credibility and prevent promotional claims from outrunning the evidence.

8 Discussion

8.1 A Network of Living Religious Places

The findings support a networked rather than a flagship model of destination branding. Touba has the largest measured event flow and the most substantial recent economic study, but scale alone does not represent Senegal's religious identity. Tivaouane contributes Tijani scholarship, a multi-site sacred geography, and a mature co-governance system; Medina Baye and Ndiassane add pan-African and Saharan networks; the Layene centres and Popenguine make locally founded Islam and Catholic pilgrimage visible. The network's distinctiveness lies in this plurality and in the coexistence of living institutions, not in a single promotional icon.

This conclusion refines identity-based approaches to place branding. The relevant identity is produced through ritual, teaching, service, migration, architecture, and everyday public culture. It cannot be

authored by a destination-management organization alone (Kavaratzis and Hatch 2013; Campelo et al. 2014). In Senegal's sacred cities, co-creation is an allocation of interpretive and operational authority among religious institutions, residents, public agencies, and economic actors.

8.2 Brand Credibility as Operational and Ethical Capacity

The comparison also shows that destination image depends on operational capacity. The Magal's sanitation and waste data and Tivaouane's route, water, market, and last-mile pressures connect abstract reputation to concrete conditions. A promise of hospitality becomes credible when visitors can arrive safely, find water and sanitation, understand rules, and receive appropriate care. Brand management is therefore inseparable from public service and religiously grounded hospitality.

Commercial activity does not automatically displace sacred meaning. At the Gamou, trade, donations, fashion, food, and transport are embedded in religious time and social obligation; at the Magal, household expenditure and market activation support mass hospitality. The central issue is not whether exchange occurs but who governs it, how benefits circulate, and whether commerce obstructs worship or turns religious difference into spectacle (Olsen 2003; Shepherd 2002; Bekkar-Lacoste 2012).

The forum sharpens this point into a design principle: tourism requirements should be dosed rather than maximized. More signage, rooms, guides, bookings, and media are useful only when they improve access and understanding without weakening religious authority, voluntary service, or the temporal rhythm of worship. *Berndé*, household hosting, and commission-based organization are not service deficits waiting to be commercialized; they are core institutions to which selected tourism tools can be added.

8.3 Evidence Limits and Research Priorities

The evidence remains uneven. Touba has a large recent survey and modelled impact estimate, whereas Tivaouane is documented mainly through mixed-method territorial research and ethnography. Other centres have strong historical scholarship but limited visitor and service data. None of the studies reviewed measures destination image, brand awareness, international market size, or comparable visitor satisfaction across sites. Attendance figures also rely on different counting practices and should not be used as a league table.

The forum recording, television reports, special-issue journalism, and organizing-committee documents broaden the institutional evidence but do not remove this limitation. They reveal how panelists, khalifal representatives, public officials, and media actors frame problems and solutions; they do not establish representative community consent, project completion, service quality, or economic impact. Their recommendations should therefore be treated as propositions for co-designed pilots and evaluation.

Future research should use common instruments across several centres and distinguish event periods from year-round visitation. Priority variables include origin, motive, affiliation, travel party, length of stay, accommodation, expenditure category, language, accessibility needs, information source, satisfaction, perceived sacredness, and willingness to visit other sites. Interviews with religious authorities, residents, women and youth groups, guides, businesses, and public services are also needed to evaluate acceptable representation and the distribution of benefits.

Conclusion

Senegal's religious heritage can support a distinctive destination identity because it joins sacred cities, major pilgrimage calendars, scholarship, devotional arts, hospitality, and transnational networks. Its strongest resource is not a collection of monuments but a living geography sustained by religious institutions and communities. Touba and Tivaouane demonstrate the scale and organizational depth of this heritage, while Medina Baye, Ndiassane, the Layene centres, Popenguine, and Saint-Louis provide the plurality required for a national narrative.

Interpretation should address several audiences without dissolving the distinction between pilgrim, disciple, diaspora returnee, and cultural visitor. Authorized local routes, multilingual explanation, visitor protocols, and a calendar separating peak rituals from year-round visits can make the heritage legible while protecting worship and teaching. The network should remain optional and differentiated: each community must decide what it shares and under which conditions.

The necessary safeguards are institutional as much as promotional. Religious authority over representation, plural governance, reliable transport, water and sanitation, crowd safety, accessible services, transparent economic measurement, and locally retained value determine whether branding is credible. A practical first phase would complete a custodian-led heritage inventory; test authorized year-round routes linking Tivaouane with Ndiarndé, Fass-Diacksao, and Gaé or Gaya and a separate Touba circuit that includes major Murid sites such as Khelcom, Porokhan and Daru Mousty; establish a multilingual visitor charter, accredited guiding, and a verified information service; and catalogue both community and commercial accommodation. Expansion to a national or transnational network should follow evidence of community approval, visitor understanding, operational reliability, and shared local benefit.

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