

**“Walking the Path of Gods”:
A South African’s Visit to Hindu Sacred Sites in India**

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ABSTRACT This auto-ethnographic account, based on the author’s pilgrimage through India in 2010, analyses four sacred sites in Hindu mythology viz. Hampi, Puttaparthi, Belur Math and Varanasi. These sites are analysed in terms of how they attract pilgrims and tourists and why they are considered pilgrimage sites. Aspects of the visit discussed in this article include the food and culture at these sacred sites, the mode of transport used to travel throughout India, and the role of tourism in the development of these sites and the cities in which they are located. The theoretical framework draws from Durkheim’s theories of religion and in particular his distinction between the sacred and the profane, the effervescence and collective consciousness of the site. Sacred spaces emanate an energy that is unique compared with the profane sights of everyday life and everyday existence. Visit to these sacred sites provide provided an ‘authentic’ spiritual focal point, a gateway from daily material existence into the spiritual realm, and a means to connect better with Hindu beliefs, mythologies, and legends. The pilgrimage strengthened the author’s own identity construction as a Hindu and as an individual.