

NEW DIRECTIONS IN TOURISM ANALYSIS

# Dark Tourism

Practice and interpretation

 Edited by  
Glenn Hooper and John J. Lennon

ROUTLEDGE  


# **Dark Tourism**

Practice and interpretation

**Edited by Glenn Hooper and  
John J. Lennon**

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# Dark Tourism

Dark tourism, as well as other terms such as thanatourism and grief tourism, has been much discussed in the past two decades. This volume provides a comprehensive exploration of the subject from the point of view of both practice – how dark tourism is performed, what practical and physical considerations exist on site – and interpretation – how dark tourism is understood, including issues pertaining to ethics, community involvement and motivation. It showcases a wide range of examples, drawing on the expertise of academics with management and consultancy experience, as well as those from within the social sciences and humanities. Contributors discuss the historical development of dark tourism, including its earlier incarnations across Europe, but they also consider its future as a strand within academic discourse, as well as its role within tourism development. Case studies include holocaust sites in Germany, as well as analysis of the legacy of war in places such as the Channel Islands and Malta. Ethical and myriad marketing considerations are also discussed in relation to Ireland, Brazil, Rwanda, Romania, the UK and Nepal.

This book covers issues that are of interest to students and staff across a spectrum of disciplines, from management to the arts and humanities, including conservation and heritage, site management, marketing and community participation.

**Glenn Hooper** is a Lecturer in Tourism and Heritage at Glasgow Caledonian University, and has held academic appointments at St. Mary's University College Belfast, the University of Aberdeen and the Open University. He has published widely in travel and tourism, and is the co-founder of the international 'Borders & Crossings' Conference Series. His publications include *Land and Landscape, 1770–2000*, *Irish and Postcolonial Writing* (with Colin Graham) and *Travel Writing and Ireland, 1760–1860*.

**John J. Lennon** is the Vice Dean for the Glasgow School for Business and Society, Glasgow Caledonian University and Director of the Moffat Centre for Travel and Tourism Business Development. John has undertaken over 550 tourism and travel projects, in over 40 nations, on behalf of private sector and public sector clients. John is the co-author of *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster* and a range of publications relating to the subject based on international research in the area.

## **New Directions in Tourism Analysis**

Series Editor: Dimitri Ioannides, E-TOUR, Mid Sweden University, Sweden

Although tourism is becoming increasingly popular both as a taught subject and an area for empirical investigation, the theoretical underpinnings of many approaches have tended to be eclectic and somewhat underdeveloped. However, recent developments indicate that the field of tourism studies is beginning to develop in a more theoretically informed manner, but this has not yet been matched by current publications.

The aim of this series is to fill this gap with high quality monographs or edited collections that seek to develop tourism analysis at both theoretical and substantive levels using approaches which are broadly derived from allied social science disciplines such as Sociology, Social Anthropology, Human and Social Geography, and Cultural Studies. As tourism studies covers a wide range of activities and sub fields, certain areas such as Hospitality Management and Business, which are already well provided for, would be excluded. The series will therefore fill a gap in the current overall pattern of publication.

Suggested themes to be covered by the series, either singly or in combination, include – consumption; cultural change; development; gender; globalisation; political economy; social theory; sustainability.

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# Introduction

Glenn Hooper

## Emergence and growth

'Dark tourism', both as a category and as an analytical tool, has developed considerably in the past two decades. Lennon and Foley's *Dark Tourism* (1996), Tunbridge and Ashworth's *Dissonant Heritage* (1996), Ashworth and Hartmann's *Horror and Human Tragedy Revisited* (2005), Sharpley and Stone's *The Dark Side of Travel* (2007), as well as individual articles by Seaton and others reflected a growing interest in the field that stemmed in part from increasing access to sites in countries in eastern Europe and beyond.<sup>1</sup> Many more publications, sometimes developing discipline-specific lines, have since been added to the list, including Skinner's *Writing the Dark Side of Travel* (2012) and White and Frew's *Dark Tourism and Place Identity* (2013).<sup>2</sup> Not confined to dry and academic discussion only, the tourism industry, where interpretation and theory is tested and, if thought viable, absorbed and developed further, is no slouch when it comes to new ideas and opportunities. But an alliance between terms such as 'tourism' and 'dark'? What sort of recalibration was required to pull those two, seemingly incongruent, terms together? What did they mean; was it realistically possible to combine leisure with commemoration; and, in any case, what sorts of dangers might arise from a union of terms that ran so dangerously close to cancelling one another out?

Since many consider tourism itself to be a discipline of slippery and evasive classifications, responsive to the whims of international markets and consumers, it might be argued that the prefix 'dark' could provide a stabilising influence. As geographers, anthropologists and historians can attest, tourists can themselves be a varied and often complicated group. Out for good times, as often as not indifferent to all but their own private satisfactions and desires, they have often wreaked havoc with their demands and cultural insensitivities, their appetites and gluttonous capacity for superficiality and pleasure. Congested roads, litter and pollution, over-developed sites with their poorly constructed and indifferently designed hotels, exhausted infrastructure and bloated termini, not to mention the compromised conservation principles that surround many heritage sites (we will pass silently over 'visitor interpretation centres') – tourists are responsible for a great deal of cultural and environmental destruction. Yes, they bring in money, stimulate the local economy and are indirectly responsible for ensuring the implementation

of new tourism and hospitality training programmes, but if ever there was a market of mixed blessings then this is it.

However, despite the mixed reviews and sometimes legitimate concerns expressed by tourism-dependent economies, whatever the criticism about the future of the industry and its insatiable demands, we know that tourism has brought good as well as ill. For example, in recent years, because of increasing green and environmental awareness, a genuine commitment to regeneration (rural and urban both) and sustainable programmes that work to a set of longer-term principles, concerned as much with tourism legacies as with immediate tourism impacts, we find genuine signs of hope. It is true that we are witnessing ever greater levels of market fragmentation, with tourism boards and operators proliferating wildly, but the fact remains that tourism can also be a positive. Recently developed tourism offerings in Namibia, for example, draw tourists not just to see wildlife and landscape, but also to become more aware of the demands for sustainable conservation programmes, including the need for animal welfare, new training initiatives and so forth.<sup>3</sup> Tourism volunteering programmes, such as those that are offered to visitors with interests in archaeology, are a well-developed part of the heritage tourism offer in Britain, much respected for the training offered, the experiences gained and the professional commitment of their staff.<sup>4</sup> The international Eco-Tourism Society offers rainforest cruises that bring hard currency to areas much in need of it, but in such a way as to impinge lightly or not at all upon the environment, with trips organised to the Galapagos, the Panama Canal and the Amazon, all sites high on the wish-list of adventure tourists. Combined with greater cultural understanding, much aided by an increasingly globalised and savvy constituency, the modern tourist is today a much more complex individual, part of an even longer and more diverse spectrum than was available thirty or forty years ago, but with the capacity to make a positive contribution nonetheless.

So when dark tourism was added to the mix, it might have been felt that here was a potentially useful development – that tourists who were interested in the memorialisation of the dead, who were concerned with historical atrocity and evil and driven by a desire for education and greater self-awareness, might serve the industry well. This cohort were reverentially attentive, less concerned about the trivialities of comfort and leisure than the average annual holidaymaker, and a relatively new category of international visitor. Gathered before war graves and around battle sites, at places of genocide or natural disaster fields, here was a different type of tourist, like nothing before seen, who was interested in weakness and failure and the human capacity for malevolence. Moreover, when Lennon and Foley produced their co-authored *Dark Tourism* they described in vivid detail the places where such tourists were now congregating in greater numbers, evidence of a movement towards increasing tourist sensitivity and concern: sites of trauma such as Changi Gaol in Singapore, associated with many atrocities perpetrated by the Japanese upon British and Allied soldiers; Auschwitz and Majdanek in Poland, the notorious death camps of the Third Reich; British memorials at the Somme; border conflict zones in Cyprus; American memorials at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii and others. Although Sharpley and Stone introduced greater thematic variety in their

*The Darker Side of Travel*, much of the emphasis still remained firmly associated with the historically accurate, where emotional and psychological depth was emphasised, and sites associated with trauma and barbarity highlighted. Terms such as 'kitschification' – a growing acceptance of the appeal of fear, anxiety and fun, of a clearly identified lighter side of dark tourism, in keeping with the growth of the term, the wider options available and the increasing interest being generated among tourists and providers both – were also foregrounded. However, much of the emphasis remained focussed on places of morbidity and grief, of torture, brutality and human suffering: the House of Terror in Budapest, the World Trade Center in New York, the Museum of Genocide at Tuol Sleng in Cambodia. Site managers might fret over the additional responsibilities that accompany dark tourism membership, but as for the dark tourists themselves, surely there could be nothing untoward about travellers whose interests centred mainly upon death or disaster?

In the debate about the emergence of dark tourism, and given the difficulties inherent in marketing human grief and suffering, it is important to remember that this niche offering in fact has a long history. Most commentators on dark tourism point to tourists from an earlier era, who were just as vulgar and tactless as any other travellers, and just as easily attracted to salacious thrills and excitement. Education or self-improvement were hardly evident in visits to see slaves fight to the death in the coliseum, to watch public executions and punishments in early modern England, to gawp at figures in asylums such as Bedlam or to look at sites of disaster where people drowned, were burned or fell to their deaths. It is difficult to interpret these impulses as more than the simple gratification of curiosity or, should we wish to put a more profound metaphysical gloss on it, for the purposes of considering their own mortality. Dark tourism has always existed in some form or other. What did not exist was the term itself, the marketing that has now grown up around it, the academic discourse such as we are presently engaged in and, most of all, the acceptance of the term into common usage. And while tourism boards and authorities might be cautious about a public engagement with the term, its connotations too much in conflict with the idea of spontaneous abandonment, relaxation and pleasure conjured up by the term 'tourism', there are still many for whom the term evokes mystery, excitement and the forbidden.

### **Ethics and reconsiderations**

The opening up of trauma sites in eastern Europe and Asia has driven an academic and industry desire to identify more precisely what dark tourism actually encompasses. The field is required to respond to the ethical issues that arise in management and marketing and to engage in discussion about how dark sites might be simultaneously economically viable, and not overly exploitative of the trauma that the site contains. Building on work by Urry and Rojek in the 1990s, Lennon and Foley's *Dark Tourism* originally evaluated what was seen as a relatively new phenomenon: the desire by tourists for new experiences, especially experiences that related to death, disaster and atrocity. The authors provided examples of dark



tourism sites as part of their analysis, but they also indicated that there were a range of other possibilities, including the 'former concentration camp, battle site, assassination or killing site or the location of a disaster', all of which could become 'a tourism resource to be exploited like any other'.<sup>5</sup> To help assess the recent upsurge of interest for such commodities they defined dark tourism as another example of late modernity, where everything is available for sale and consumption, including images and narratives associated with death. They also noted historic patterns of dark tourism that included visits made by tourists to 'cemeteries, mau-soleums, churchyards', where death was commemorated and where issues of human mortality would therefore naturally arise.<sup>6</sup>

Almost a decade after the publication of Lennon and Foley's text there appeared another landmark publication in the development of dark tourism studies: Sharpley and Stone's *The Darker Side of Travel*, which brought together further analysis, a wider spectrum of case studies and, perhaps just as importantly, more questions about the entire dark tourist project, including an evaluation of the various ethical, management and interpretation issues that surround such sites. One of the most important issues that faced Sharpley and Stone centred on questions of definition, which Sharpley tackled rigorously in a perceptive introductory essay. There was increasing evidence of a rise in supply and demand, he argued, and the study of dark tourism was now described as 'both justifiable and important'.<sup>7</sup> However, the academic literature available was also 'eclectic and theoretically fragile', a number 'of fundamental questions with respect to dark tourism remain[ed] unanswered', and several earlier attempts at working in the area 'lacked theoretical foundations' and were 'largely descriptive' in content.<sup>8</sup> It would appear that although Lennon and Foley drew a line underneath what constituted dark tourism in 1996 (that it should be post-1900, preferably within living memory and capable of creating anxiety and doubt), the field had blossomed in the intervening years, to the point where it could include more diverse jurisdictions and examples and cross a much wider set of historical periods. Dark tourism, in other words, was now an academic growth area. Picked up by the media as well as academic publishers, it had also spread across schools of tourism management in the first instance, but enjoyed an increasing presence within the social sciences and the humanities. And what Sharpley clearly recognised, as he surveyed the proliferating spectacle that lay before him, was that this was both its strength and its weakness.

Perhaps a greater concern to several of the contributors to the Sharpley and Stone volume was a growing understanding of the ethical issues surrounding dark tourism, from both the supply and demand sides. While the image of tourists standing patiently in queues to visit Anne Frank's house, or the Jewish Museum in Berlin, testifies to a level of concern and decency, a determination to ensure that regrettable events are never forgotten or written out of the historical record, not all of those who attend such venues do so with the best of intentions. As with the killing fields in Cambodia or Angola, or national cemeteries that commemorate war dead, for some visitors there is, in addition to the draw of the historical story that is being told, an element of voyeurism, possibly even of adventure in being close to events that are reprehensible and obscene. And whatever management