

An overview of tourism management issues tourism essay



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Dark tourism has been defined as encompassing the visitation to any site associated with death, disaster and tragedy in the twentieth century for remembrance, education or entertainment. Furthermore Howie (2003) argues that visits to the sites of recent tragedies, as for example the site of the World Trade Center in New York destroyed by terrorist attacks in 2001, raise issues of both genuine compassion and morbid fascination. Urry (1991, taken from Theobald, 1994) also suggests that nostalgia, it would seem, knows no limits, to the virtual extent that the worse the experience the more appealing the attraction. The idea of dark side of tourism has also been identified by Dann and Seaton (2001) as incorporating what they call thanatourism, milking the macabre as a kind that pervades tourism in general.

As suggested by McCormick (2004) dark tourism is not a new phenomenon as it can be referred back to the twelfth century when the violent death of the British Canterbury in the town's cathedral attracted many people to the site. Today's sites such as Chernobyl, The World Trade Center, Auschwitz or even sites where famous people were killed such as John F Kennedy are all experiencing an increase in visitor's number (Lennon and Foley, 2004). As an article by the Guardian (2004) suggest, the explosion that in 1986, ripped the roof off Chernobyl's fourth reactor, causing the building's walls to bend and hurling tons of radioactive waste into the air, is today a popular tourist site. For foreigners, Chernobyl is easily added to a long list of tourist attractions whose fame turns on tragedy or disaster, but for those that live in the affected area, it is a different story. As the Ukrainian tourist board's

executive director suggested: *Chernobyl is not a historical place, it is a sleeping lion, and when a lion is sleeping you do not open the cage* .

Other historical sites also include that of Auschwitz, a symbol of terror, genocide and the Holocaust. The number of registered visitors to this site are increasing and as the statistics show, the number of visitors of some countries, such as the USA, has doubled from 34404 to 62997 between 2003 and 2004 (Auschwitz, 2004), re-affirming the statement put forward by Lennon and Foley (2004) that dark tourism is on the increase.

More recently a destination that has been affected by the terrorist attacks and that has seen an increase in inbound tourism, has been the World Trade Center, or better known as Ground Zero. In 2002, the ruins of the World Trade Center in New York attracted 3.6 million visitors, while the observation deck from the intact towers used to attract an average of 1.8 million tourists per year (McCormick, 2004).

It must be noted that there are many more sites that have not been previously mentioned that are worth considering for future research to further understand the spread of dark tourism.

Having considered some of the sites that best represent the view of dark tourism, the essay will now briefly look at the reasons behind this form of tourism and an in-depth analysis of the implications on tourism management issues will follow.

Foley, Lennon and Maxwell (1997) suggest that many of the deaths and disasters that gave rise to heritage interpretation had received considerable

coverage via global media, international news and film media. Young (1993, taken from Lennon and Foley, 2004) argues that there are elements of the ancient in dark tourism, in the visitation of these sites that are intended to maintain memory. People will be motivated by different things, perhaps they decide to visit these sites out of curiosity, pay their respect to those who have lost their lives or simply because they feel as if they are part of this (Di Sante, 2003).

For the purpose of this task, the essay will now consider the tourism management issues as a result of the widespread of dark tourism. As with any tourist site, the conservation and safeguard of these monuments, museums or any other site, is perhaps the most relevant of all. Although the increase of dark tourism may mean that more people are now aware of what has happened for example during the Nazism and perhaps in a way it limits these atrocities to be repeated, a number of important issues have also been identified. As suggested by Lennon (2004) *if there are lots of people involved in these attractions, you need regulations. It promotes extreme sensitivities and a lot depends on the motivation of visitors, is it morbid curiosity or is there personal reasons?* One of the tourism management issues identified is that of the long-term damage caused by visitors. Inevitably the high number of visitors received by sites such as Auschwitz, ground Zero, Chernobyl, will have an impact in the long term. Therefore it is important to impose a visitor number management to control how many visitors are coming through the site. The protection of these are vital if damage is to be avoid and protection is also needed to restrain vandals from leaving their mark on everything they visit (Yale, 2004).

As Yale (2004) also suggests weathering is also a major concern for those sites that are exposed to the elements, wind, rain, frost and sun, can be damaged unless shelter is provided or special arrangements made.

Auschwitz camp is a perfect example for this. It is in the process of continual erosion; the growth of vegetation and foliage- coverage has to be managed and controlled. As Lennon and Foley (2004) further suggest, there should be management rather than restoration. This dark attraction has swelled visitor number and catalysed economic activity.

A very important issue also identified is that of culture management. Tourist must be given a code of conduct and be educated to behave in a certain way when visiting particular sites as to conform and integrate with the local community to avoid conflict. Tourist themselves have, or should have, an obligation to observe codes of behaviour and be aware of cultural norms in the destination they are visiting (Howie, 2003).

Some behaviour such as alcohol abuse, shouting, fighting should not be permitted as these might insult the local community and lack of respect needed in these tragedy sites. *While at Auschwitz-Birkenau, groups of schoolchildren were taking photographs of each other, parents were photographing their children at the gates of Birkenau and indeed, school parties were sitting on the ruins of the crematorium eating sandwiches* (Lennon and Foley, 2004).

Furthermore funds required to conserve sites will also be of consideration. The two options that will be available to raise funds would probably lie with government support and a visitor's entrance fee.

It can be construed that the phenomenon of dark tourism is not a recent trend but its origins can be traced back to the twelfth century. Dark tourism has been defined as those visits to any site associated with death, disaster and tragedy in the twentieth century for remembrance, education or entertainment. It was noted that there are various reasons of why people decide to visit these particular sites; morbid curiosity, remembrance, the need to pay respects are just a few of these. The essay also looked at the more common cases of sites where dark tourism is more noticeable. Auschwitz, Chernobyl and the World Trade Center were taken into consideration while it was also noted that other sites such as the death site of John F Kennedy's murder provoke people's interests. It was also noted that the number of visitors, of a particular country, at certain sites such as Auschwitz had doubled between 2003 and 2004 re-affirming the statement that suggested that dark tourism is increasing.

Furthermore, the essay also determined that there are a number of tourism management issues involved with dark tourism; conservation and safeguard of these sites; weathering of those sites exposed to the elements, wind, rain, frost and sun, and that can be damaged unless shelter is provided or special arrangements made. It was also noted that Auschwitz is currently in the process of erosion, the overgrowth of vegetation for example is going out of hand and it really needs a management program more than a restoration program to keep it in perfect order. Vandalism was also noted as a tourism management issue to take into consideration. Finally it was noted that culture management is also very important and tourists must be educated to behave in a certain way when visiting particular sites to avoid conflict. Site

managers should seek government funds or even impose a small entrance fee to be able to continue the conservation process.

Back to: Example Essays

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