

## Conference Paper

# The Benefits of Dark Tourism Experience among Visitors in Malaysia

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### Abstract

Tourists are continuously searching for new trends, exciting ways of travelling and a variety of adrenaline rush experiences. Dark tourism is one of many examples of tourism products that able to fulfil these objectives. Although Malaysia has many dark tourism sites, they are not globally recognized yet and able to attract the international tourists. Many focused on the negative impacts of the sites rather than the potential benefits of the industry. Thus, this study is prepared to investigate the benefits of dark tourism among visitors. The study adapted a model from Kang, Scott, Lee, and Ballantyne (2012). Three factors including social benefits, learning benefits and psychological benefits were discussed. The findings have shown that dark tourism contributes sufficient benefits which may aid to the rapid development of this tourism sector in the future.

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## 1. Introduction

Dark Tourism (DT) can be defined in so many ways, all connected with one another. Some say it is related to ghosts, while some others say it is related to death [4]. Nevertheless, all the definitions given by authors are not far of a relation. A brief definition of DT stipulates that it involves tourists travelling to places that are related to death, disasters, sufferings or anything that is themed macabre. This sector of tourism is no longer new to most countries or its citizens especially to those who has interest on the horrifying scenes of the past such as the infamous event of 9/11 in the United State of America.

Tourists like to satisfy their curiosity and fascination with the DT concept in a socially adequate setting that also gives them the opportunity to build their own reflection of mortality. In the context of dark tourism, Malaysia has various DT destinations and sites such as cemeteries, museums and war relics. Many of these sites are becoming more popular over the years due to its dark past. Some examples are such as the Penang

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War Museum in Pulau Pinang, Kellie's Castle in Perak and Villa Nabila in Johor Bahru. In addition, other potential DT products in Malaysia are Pulau Bidong, Batu Lintang, Ranau Death March and Jerajak Island [7].

Although Malaysia has lots of dark tourism sites, they are not globally recognized yet and able to attract the international tourists. [11] added that this is due to the lack of government recognition and supporting services by agencies towards this new tourism prospect. Thus, it is extremely important for the both the government and tourism agencies to promote more awareness campaigns. In fact, the creation of custom packages to DT sites might also help to boost the demand of DT hence increasing the tourism economy.

## 2. Social Benefits (SB)

Referring to [2], social defines relation to activities in which people meet and spend time with other people and living together in organized ways. Social benefit is a sense of social responsibility to darker motives such as indulgence in violence and suffering. Social context plays a vital role to since it affects consumer experience. Firstly, DT helps to generate income for the local community which is affected by the tragedy to rebuild itself. Tourism generates income for the betterment of education and infrastructure as well as to fund conservation efforts and to promote more responsible tourism, nationally and locally. Tourists visiting these disaster locations bring in tourist dollars which may aid the local community. Some people may think that DT brings nothing good to the local community as profits generated are used for something else rather than helping these poor people to improve their standard of livings, promoting their local product such as organic product, handicraft and else. They will also can promote local cultures and history while interaction with tourists and increasing communication skills among them. Secondly, DT sites may assist in creating job opportunities for the local community while small businesses which are directly participating in local community will aid to boost country's economy. [5]mentions that local community may increase its standard of living by working in DT sites. For example arts and crafts will produce many lot of artist and craftsmen at DT sites. Thirdly, DT may enhance communication skills of visitors and local community. When they visit DT sites, they will be sharing stories, experiences of their ancestors and curiosity of DT sites. This will also lead them to create new camaraderie and understand the importance of socialization with others. With communication, it can reduce language barriers and promote global understanding among tourists and local community that can provide good customer services.

### 3. Learning Benefits (LB)

Referring to [12], learning is the act of gaining knowledge and skill and innovation/newness. Learning refers to any sensation or knowledge acquisition resulting from a person's participation in daily activities. Definition of experience is related to learning elements. For instance, learning elements are predominant namely, an individual sensation (emotional elements) involving knowledge acquisition (learning elements), resulting from participating in activities (personal participation), and differing from one another (subjectivity). Learning is considered a foundation and source of experience. The importance of informal learning, which occurs incidentally and unintentionally through exposure to one's environment and day-to-day experiences. First, DT can be used for educational purpose where awareness and encouragement can be shown to younger generations. By raising our awareness of horrific events in the past, DT guides us to understanding of the world live in [3]. It will give advantages for local community to explore more history of death, crime and ghost tours. Local community will then to contribute memorable knowledge/experience and share it with the visitors. [8] claims that children trip will help to increase their understanding in history. Some of children enjoy the experience and find it fascinating. Besides, visitors will know about historical tragedy/ stories that happened on that site in depth. For example, warriors who sacrificed their lives for to uphold justice for the country will have visitors showing their families and them respect. Second, DT may impress tourist with their old equipment like bomb, scary hallway, weapons used in war and weapon storage room. Visitors will feel more connected to their knowledge on how to fight with enemy using effective strategies will enhance. [9] mentions that wars in the past are too painful to reminisce, however they serve great histories to today's generations. Apart from that, visitors learn about their past punishment if found guilty in certain cases and will feel grateful that those rules are no longer applicable today. Visitor also get to learn about interesting geopolitical and strategic development of resources and forces to ensure safety. Third, DT encourages people to learn from history by visiting DT sites. These DT tours are designed in such a way that the story can be experienced with the aim of learning from it so that it does not repeat itself. [9] mentions that DT brings to life the history of the tragedies one occurred and discussed of the darker side of history and humanity will create largest history in world. Visitors also may spread the knowledge out of history that they see and learn. Fourth, DT may aid the visitors to understand the culture. DT is something that mostly cannot be seen but its presence has to be felt once people choose to understand what dark tourism it is. DT can be

found at historical site like war tragedies site, museum that stored old stories or things, places that have bad tragedies and many untold stories. The truth of some stories or tragedy can only be heard from their descendant or blood family. It will help to promote dark tourism involving cultural society. Local community may utilize this tragic past to promote their cultures and educate the international community about the progress that has been made and the true identity of their nation by adding individuality to their exhibits including to their tradition.

#### 4. Psychological Benefits (PB)

Psychological sense is related to the tourism experiences as people will experience deep emotion and feelings in dark tourism sites. Psychological benefits of the leisure travel experience come from the interplay of escaping and seeking dimensions [5]. Psychological benefits are derived from experiences in heritage or museum settings or DT sites. In DT, the value of an experience is understood as a visitor's psychological benefits and emotional reactions (McIntosh, 1999). Feelings, reactions, motivations, satisfactions and desired psychological outcomes are related to tourism experience. In satisfactory experience, visitors will gain all benefits in physical, learning and psychological. As a result, visitors who participate in DT may achieve the desired needs to acquire suitable and satisfactory experiences. First, it will strengthen their relationship and they will be more aware of the importance of family. The most important thing in this life is quality type of relationship with family and friends. Visitors are more likely goes to death sites with their family members or friends to explore equipment such as original weapon, article, ancestors and the old clothes. They will feel blessed and thankful to the fact they are living now and not then. Besides, locals are encouraged to provide a meaningful and memorable experience to the visitors so that their strange desires will be satisfied and positive and memorable experience during visiting DT sites will spread [10]. Second, they will feel excited and focused on the DT sites and their equipment. It will deliver new experience as the excited feeling can only be felt when they visit DT. [6] stated that visitors feel comfort from sharing the pain and sadness of the dark tourism sites incident with others. Third, visitor will get positive moral values from DT sites such as understanding, empathy, sincerity, courage to trust and giving good constructive feedback. They are also able to feel relatively confident in themselves and have positive self-esteem to cope their stress in work/ studies. They also can improve their wellbeing with others especially family and friends. Fourth, DT can create a new experience for tourists seeking for unusual adventure that are different from their everyday lives. Other

types of tourism such as volunteerism are likely more commonly heard. It will make them to be more open-minded and want to explore the world. It is also human nature that people would like to experience suffering of others due to curiosity of the mind. DT is a multi-dimensional experience that can have a deep impact on life. Fifth, DT will affect their personality traits namely courage, patience, openness and else. Visitors will feel inclined to change the way they treat other people and respect others regardless of family, friends or local community. It will change their perceptions and they will be more willing to understand each of good values in their life. The 'death' incident will award a sentiment of happiness to them because they are that they still have possibilities. Sixth, DT will increase their satisfaction level because these locations allow individuals to satisfy their curiosity about death and this will further motivate them achieve personal goals. Locations with desirable attribute will pull tourist to visit them. Tourist will typically select destination that are more likely to satisfy their needs and expectation. Example of satisfaction that they will get from visiting DT sites are personal curiosity about how the victims died or they are seeking a fun and enjoyable tourist experience by visiting DT sites. Seventh, tourist will realize the importance of peace in a country when visiting DT sites. There are varieties of peace in our life namely peace between human being and nature, peace for development and peace of feeling itself. Peace helps to create feelings of love, trust, tolerance and bring happiness among people. [1] mentions that visitors' mind reflect the design of environmental interactions and show the authentic disaster site to visitors, enabling visitors to learn and respect the natural environment.

## 5. Data Analysis & Results

The study adapted a research conducted by Kang et. al, (2012) to confirm the benefits of dark tourism products to the growth of tourism industry in Malaysia. 95 respondents were asked using a five-likert scale questionnaire. Data were collected in Melaka historical city.

Table 1 shows the demographic results of all successful respondents. Out of 95 respondents, n=49 (51.6%) turns out to be male. In terms of age, people aged between 26 - 35 were the most to answer the survey with a dominant n=49 (51.6%) while only a couple of respondents were above 55 years old. Most of the respondents attended college with n=46 (48.4%) but only n=25 (26.3%) proceeded to undergraduate and n=9 (9.5%) are postgraduates. Majority of them are married with a huge n=59 (62.1%), outnumbering single respondents with just n=33 (34.7%). For household income, RM 3,000 – RM 3,999 is the highest frequency with n=34 (35.8%) while the least is income

TABLE 1: Demographic Profile.

ITEM	FREQUENCY (N)	PERCENTAGE (%)
1. Gender		
Male	49	51.6
Female	46	48.4
2. Age		
< 18	5	5.3
18 – 25	23	24.2
26 – 35	49	51.6
36 – 55	16	16.8
> 55	2	2.1
3. Education		
Secondary School	15	15.8
College	46	48.4
Undergraduate	25	26.3
Postgraduate	9	9.5
4. Marital Status		
Single	33	34.7
Married	59	62.1
Divorce	3	3.2
5. Household Income (Rm)		
< 1,000	14	14.7
1,000 - 1,999	11	11.6
2,000 - 2,999	26	27.4
3,000 - 3,999	34	35.8
> 4,000	10	10.5
6. Travel Companion		
Alone	14	14.7
One Adult	41	43.2
Group	40	42.1

above RM 4,000 which is only n=10 (10.5%). Finally, a travel companion of one adult leads the hierarchy with n=41 (43.2%) just slightly more than travel companion of group by 1.1% which sees going alone in the lowest frequency with only n=14 (14.7%).

Based on Table 2, n=95 (100%) of the respondents have visited at least one DT site before. This is compulsory for them to be able to complete the survey. Secondly, n=48 (50.5%) of them visited sites associated war which is the highest among all the other sites. However, only n=9 (9.5%) had been on a ghost tour before. There are five reasons

TABLE 2: Tourist Motivations.

ITEM	FREQUENCY (N)	PERCENTAGE (%)
1. Have you ever visited any dark tourism site?		
Yes	95	100
No	0	0
2. Which site?		
Prison	27	28.4
Site associated with war	48	50.5
Communism site	11	11.6
Ghost tour	9	9.5
3. Reason of visiting dark tourism site?		
To learn something new about dark tourism	21	22.1
Interested in Malaysian contemporary history	22	23.2
Interested in ideological conflict in general	26	27.4
To participate in an educational program provided by community groups, school and organizations	10	10.5
Brought by friends and relatives	16	16.8

of visiting dark tourism site given in the survey with *To participate in an educational program provided by community groups, school or organizations* having the least vote with only n=10 (10.5%) which is quite extreme in comparison to the other items. On the other end, most of the respondents agreed with *Interested in ideological conflict in general* which is n=26 (27.4%).

Table 3 shows the findings of Section C in the survey which is benefits of DT. The benefits of DT are divided into three segments namely social benefits, learning benefits and psychological benefits. Five likert-scale method was used to indicate respondents' satisfaction level for every distinct item. The results of the frequencies were then calculated to find the mean of every item. If the mean is 5.00 means respondents are absolutely satisfied with the item. Meanwhile, the lower the mean number indicates dissatisfaction.

Based on Table 3, *I learned that a large number of people was involved during dark tourism's incident* has the highest mean under the category of social benefits with 4.24 while *I realize how horrible the dark tourism incident is* has the lowest mean with 4.01. This proves that although the mean of *I realize how horrible the dark tourism incident is* is not as high as the other items, many people are still well aware of how horrible the dark tourism incident is after visiting the DT site because the mean is still higher than 4.00. As for learning benefits, the data clearly portrays that the respondents are

TABLE 3: Dark Tourism Benefits.

ITEM	FREQUENCY (N)	MEAN ( $\bar{x}$ )
<b>SOCIAL BENEFITS</b>		
1. I realize how horrible the dark tourism incident is	69	4.01
2. I learned that a large number of people was involved during dark tourism's incident	52	4.24
3. I deeply understand how the dark tourism incident had erupted	52	4.19
4. I changed my viewpoint regarding the dark tourism sites after visiting them	52	4.21
<b>LEARNING BENEFITS</b>		
5. I learned about Malaysian contemporary history from my visit	53	4.08
6. I understand the issues of ideological conflict and human rights	54	4.06
7. I carried out the obligation to visit the site as a local community	51	4.18
8. I can carry out the obligation to commemorate victims as a tourist	58	4.05
<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS</b>		
9. I feel comfort from sharing the pain and sadness of the dark tourism site incident with others	50	4.12
10. I am relieved from my memory of the dark tourism incident	56	4.14
11. I feel grateful that no victims are from my family	49	4.26
12. I understand the importance of family	50	4.35
13. I had an insight into the miserable life my ancestors used to have	44	4.31
14. I felt grateful that we are living now and not then	49	4.43
15. I realized the importance of peace in dark tourism sites	56	4.46
16. I had a meaningful day out	52	4.44
17. I had a good time with family, friends and relatives	59	4.52

proud to carry out the obligation as a local community and visit the site. This item has an extreme mean of 4.18 while the mean of other items in this segment are below 4.10. Nonetheless, a consistent mean of 4.00 and above shows a positive result reflected from respondents' visit to DT sites. The third section is psychological benefits which consists of nine items. In this section, *I had a good time with family, friends and relatives* has the highest mean of 4.52. It is obvious that majority of respondents were happy to spend time with their loved ones regardless of what the DT destination is. On the other hand, *I feel comfort from sharing the pain and sadness of the dark tourism site*



*incident with others* holds the lowest mean with a 4.12. As a summary, all the items are showing positive results as their mean are more than 4.00. This is an evidence that all of the respondents are generally satisfied with their visit to their respective DT sites. Besides, they are also agreeing to the fact that DT brings more benefits to them instead of disadvantages.

## 6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the authors have mutually agreed and portrayed sufficient evidence that there are more advantages rather disadvantages that DT may bring to both tourists and tourism suppliers. In spite of the fact that DT leads to negative social problems such as the occurrence of sexual activities due to abandoned sites, DT also help to create job opportunities for local community and to generate income for government should the sites are properly managed. Moreover, DT activities are able to provide valuable information and first-hand experience. Based on the questionnaire surveys conducted, majority of the respondents very well agree to the fact that DT brings social, psychological and learning benefits to many. It is safe to say that DT contributes sufficient benefits which may aid to the rapid development of this new tourism sector in the future. As a matter of fact, the economy and knowledge level for a tourism sector will be enhanced altogether, also be improved in terms of economy and knowledge gained. A suggestion would be that there is more in depth studies regarding DT in the future and also for other specific aspects such as motivation and satisfaction of DT. Last but not least, the awareness on the benefits of DT should also be raised through platforms such as social media and articles for more effective communication.

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