

Unfolding the Dark Tourism in the City of Manila: Motivations, Experiences, and Impacts

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ABSTRACT

N/A

INTRODUCTION

This study examined dark tourism in the City of Manila, focusing on tourists' motivations, experiences, and perceived impacts when visiting sites associated with death, tragedy, and historical suffering. Dark tourism has emerged as a significant niche within the tourism industry, providing opportunities for visitors to engage with historical events, collective memory, and cultural heritage through meaningful and reflective experiences. In Manila, notable dark tourism destinations include Intramuros, Luneta Park, Paco Park and Cemetery, and the Chinese Cemetery, all of which serve as important reminders of the country's colonial past, national struggles, cultural traditions, and historical tragedies.

The study was conducted among 1,000 tourist-respondents who visited selected dark tourism destinations in Manila from January to May 2024. Using both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the research explored the demographic characteristics of visitors, the factors that motivated them to visit these sites, their experiences during their visits, and their perceptions regarding the educational, cultural, social, and sustainability impacts of dark tourism.

Findings revealed that visitors were primarily motivated by educational purposes, historical interest, cultural heritage appreciation, and curiosity about significant events and places. Statistical analysis showed that motivational factors were generally consistent across age, gender, educational attainment, and occupational groups, suggesting that dark tourism appeals to a broad range of visitors regardless of demographic background. The results indicate that tourists commonly view these destinations as opportunities to learn about Philippine history, deepen their understanding of cultural heritage, and reflect on important historical events that shaped the nation.

The study further found that visitors experienced strong emotional and intellectual engagement while visiting dark tourism sites. Educational attainment significantly influenced the emotional responses of tourists, with more educated visitors demonstrating deeper levels of reflection, empathy, and appreciation of historical narratives. However, age, gender, and occupation showed little influence on emotional experiences, indicating that dark tourism sites can evoke meaningful responses across diverse visitor groups.

Moreover, the findings highlight the significant contribution of dark tourism to historical awareness and cultural understanding. Respondents reported that visiting these sites enhanced their knowledge of Philippine history and culture, strengthened their appreciation for heritage preservation, and encouraged reflection on the sacrifices, struggles, and resilience of past generations. Many respondents emphasized that dark tourism should be developed responsibly, with respect and sensitivity toward victims and historical events. Thematic analysis revealed that respect and sensitivity (28.28%), educational and reflective value (24.06%), and heritage preservation (17.33%) were the most important themes identified by participants. Other themes included promotion and awareness, ethical tourism practices, community involvement, and the use of technology to improve interpretation and visitor engagement.

Overall, the study demonstrates that dark tourism in Manila serves not only as a tourism activity but also as a valuable educational and cultural platform that promotes historical consciousness, collective memory, and sustainable heritage tourism. The findings support the view that visitors perceive dark tourism as a respectful and meaningful engagement with history rather than merely an attraction based on tragedy. By understanding tourist motivations, experiences, and perceptions, tourism stakeholders can develop more effective strategies for heritage preservation, visitor education, ethical site management, and sustainable tourism development in the City of Manila.

METHODS

This study utilized a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design supported by qualitative methods to examine dark tourism in the City of Manila. The research was conducted in four major dark tourism destinations: Intramuros, Luneta Park, Paco Park and Cemetery, and the Chinese Cemetery. A total of 1,000 tourist-respondents aged 18 years old and above who visited these sites from January to May 2024 participated in the survey. Respondents were selected through purposive and incidental sampling, while an additional 100 participants took

part in unstructured interviews and onsite observations to provide deeper insights into their experiences and perceptions.

Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire consisting of three parts. The first part collected demographic information such as age, gender, nationality, educational attainment, occupation, and monthly income. The second part assessed tourists' motivations for visiting dark tourism sites, their experiences during their visits, and their perceptions of the impacts of dark tourism. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, and Chi-square tests to determine significant relationships between respondents' demographic profiles and their motivations, experiences, and perceived impacts. The findings showed that educational attainment, gender, and occupation influenced certain aspects of dark tourism participation, while visitors across different demographic groups generally shared similar motivations centered on education, cultural heritage, and historical interest.

To support the quantitative findings, qualitative data from interviews and onsite observations were analyzed using thematic analysis. The results revealed that the most common themes identified by respondents were respect and sensitivity toward historical events and victims, the educational and reflective value of dark tourism, and the importance of heritage preservation. Other themes included promotion and awareness, ethical tourism practices, community involvement, and the use of technology to enhance visitor experiences. These findings provided a more comprehensive understanding of how tourists perceive dark tourism and served as the basis for recommendations and the development of proposed cross-platform promotional materials for Manila's dark tourism destinations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study found that gender, educational attainment, and occupation significantly influenced the choice of dark tourism destinations visited by respondents, while age did not have a significant effect. This means that men and women, individuals with different educational backgrounds, and people with different occupations tended to prefer different dark tourism sites in Manila. However, regardless of whether respondents were younger or older, they generally showed similar preferences when choosing which dark tourism destinations to visit. The findings also revealed that the frequency of visits was related to age and occupation, indicating that certain age groups and occupational categories were more likely to visit dark tourism sites more frequently than others. These results suggest that personal background characteristics can affect visitation patterns, although they do not necessarily determine the reasons why tourists are interested in dark tourism.

When asked about their reasons for visiting dark tourism destinations, respondents commonly identified education, cultural heritage, historical interest, and curiosity as their primary motivations. Statistical analysis showed that these motivations were generally similar across different demographic groups, suggesting that visitors share a common desire to learn about the country's history and cultural heritage. Many respondents viewed dark tourism sites not as places of entertainment but as important locations for understanding significant historical events and remembering the experiences of past generations. This finding highlights the educational role of dark tourism in promoting historical awareness and cultural appreciation among visitors.

The study further revealed that educational attainment significantly influenced the emotional responses of visitors. Respondents with higher levels of education tended to demonstrate stronger feelings of reflection, empathy, and understanding when visiting sites associated with tragedy and historical suffering. In contrast, age, gender, and occupation did not significantly affect emotional experiences. This suggests that educational background may help visitors better appreciate the historical and cultural meanings of dark tourism sites. Moreover, the findings showed that visiting these destinations significantly enhanced respondents' understanding of Philippine history and culture, making dark tourism an effective tool for learning and heritage education. Many visitors reported gaining a deeper appreciation of the sacrifices, struggles, and important events that shaped the nation.

The qualitative findings supported the quantitative results through thematic analysis. The most frequently mentioned theme was respect and sensitivity toward historical events and victims, showing that visitors believe dark tourism should be approached with dignity and responsibility. Respondents also emphasized the educational and reflective value of these sites, highlighting their importance in teaching history and encouraging personal reflection. Another major theme was heritage preservation, as participants recognized the need to protect and maintain historical sites for future generations. Additional themes included ethical and responsible tourism practices, ensuring that tragic events are not exploited for commercial purposes, and community involvement, which encourages local residents, historians, and guides to participate in preserving and interpreting these sites. These findings demonstrate that tourists view dark tourism as a meaningful and educational experience that contributes to historical understanding, cultural identity, and sustainable tourism development in Manila.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study show that dark tourism destinations in Manila serve as important educational, cultural, and historical resources. Sites such as Intramuros, Luneta Park, Paco Park and Cemetery, and the Chinese Cemetery provide visitors with opportunities to learn about significant events, people, and experiences that shaped Philippine history. Rather than viewing these places merely as tourist attractions, respondents considered them meaningful spaces for reflection, remembrance, and learning. Many visitors reported that their experiences at these sites helped them gain a deeper understanding of the country's heritage, culture, and historical struggles, demonstrating the valuable role of dark tourism in promoting historical awareness and cultural appreciation.

The study also revealed that while demographic factors such as gender, educational attainment, and occupation influenced certain aspects of visitor behavior, including destination preferences and emotional responses, the main motivations for visiting dark tourism sites were generally similar across all groups. Most respondents visited these destinations because of their interest in history, education, cultural heritage, and curiosity about past events. This suggests that dark tourism appeals to a wide range of individuals regardless of age, gender, or occupation. Furthermore, visitors perceived these sites as opportunities to connect with the past, reflect on historical tragedies, and develop a greater appreciation for the lessons that history can provide.

Based on these findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the development of dark tourism in Manila. Tourism stakeholders should prioritize the preservation and protection of historical sites to ensure that their cultural and historical significance is maintained for future generations. Site managers and tourism organizations should also provide accurate, respectful, and ethical interpretations of historical events, ensuring that tragedies and sensitive histories are presented with dignity and sensitivity. Educational programs, guided tours, exhibits, and learning materials should be strengthened to further increase visitors' understanding of Philippine history and culture. In addition, local communities, historians, educators, and cultural organizations should be actively involved in the planning and management of dark tourism destinations to promote authenticity and inclusivity.

Finally, the study recommends the use of digital technologies and innovative tools such as QR codes, virtual tours, mobile applications, and augmented reality features to improve visitor engagement and learning experiences. These technologies can make historical information more accessible and interactive while preserving the integrity of the sites. By combining heritage preservation, ethical tourism practices, community participation, and modern technology, dark tourism destinations in Manila can continue to serve as meaningful places of education, remembrance, and cultural appreciation while supporting sustainable tourism development.....

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