

Chapter 17

Factors Affecting Dark Tourism Experience Behaviour: A Case Study on Jallianwala Bagh in Punjab (India)

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the factors influencing dark tourism experience, focusing on Jallianwala Bagh in Punjab, India. Using secondary data from academic literature, reports, and historical archives, the study explores how visitors engage with the site, which commemorates the 1919 massacre of unarmed civilians during British colonial rule. It identifies key factors shaping visitor behaviour, including historical curiosity, personal connections, emotional responses, and site management. The research highlights the role of interpretive tools, such as preserved bullet marks and memorial installations, in fostering a reflective and emotional experience. Additionally, it addresses the influence of cultural attitudes and societal narratives in shaping perceptions of the site. Findings emphasize the potential of dark tourism to promote historical awareness and empathy while underscoring challenges such as commercialization and overcrowding. This study contributes to understanding how dark tourism sites like Jallianwala Bagh balance education, commemoration, and ethical tourism practices.

INTRODUCTION

Dark tourism, also known as thana tourism, refers to the practice of visiting places associated with death, tragedy, and the macabre. This niche form of tourism has garnered significant academic and public attention over the past few decades, as it explores the intersection of history, memory, and human curiosity. Destinations classified as dark tourism sites range from battlefields and concentration

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camps to disaster zones and memorials for victims of atrocities. These sites, while rooted in death and suffering, often serve as spaces for education, reflection, and commemoration, providing visitors with an opportunity to connect with the past and grapple with its implications for the present and future. The concept of dark tourism is complex, often shaped by the interplay of cultural, psychological, and historical factors. Visitors are drawn to these sites for a variety of reasons, such as historical curiosity, personal connections, or a desire to understand human resilience and morality in the face of extreme circumstances. For some, the experience is a way of paying homage to the deceased, while for others, it is an opportunity to confront the darker aspects of human history and behaviour. As such, dark tourism offers both emotional and intellectual engagement, often evoking a mix of grief, empathy, and fascination.

Understanding the behaviour of dark tourists requires a nuanced exploration of the factors influencing their motivations, experiences, and perceptions. These factors are multifaceted, encompassing personal, environmental, cultural, and societal dimensions. Personal factors, such as an individual's background, emotional disposition, and prior knowledge, often play a significant role in shaping their interest in dark tourism. For example, someone with a personal connection to a historical tragedy may seek to visit a related site for closure or remembrance. Similarly, individuals with a strong interest in history or human psychology may be drawn to sites that offer insights into the human condition and societal responses to tragedy. Environmental factors, including the physical presentation and management of a dark tourism site, also significantly influence visitor behaviour. Elements such as site accessibility, interpretive materials, and preservation efforts can enhance or detract from the visitor experience. Well-maintained sites with informative displays and memorials often provide a more impactful and meaningful experience, fostering a deeper connection with the historical events being commemorated. Conversely, poorly managed or overly commercialized sites may risk alienating visitors or diminishing the gravity of the events they represent.

Cultural and societal factors further shape dark tourism behaviour, reflecting the broader context in which these sites exist. Cultural attitudes toward death, mourning, and commemoration influence how individuals perceive and interact with dark tourism destinations. For instance, in societies where death is considered a taboo topic, dark tourism may be viewed with scepticism or discomfort. In contrast, cultures that emphasize the importance of remembrance and historical accountability may encourage active engagement with such sites. Societal narratives, including the way historical events are framed in education and media, also impact visitors' motivations and expectations. The emotional and psychological aspects of dark tourism are another critical area of exploration. Many visitors to dark tourism sites report profound emotional experiences, ranging from grief and anger to empathy and reflection. These emotions are often shaped by the interpretive framework provided by the site, as well as the visitor's own values and beliefs. For example, sites that emphasize the human stories behind historical events often evoke a stronger emotional response than those that focus solely on statistics or generalities. The psychological impact of dark tourism also raises ethical considerations, as site managers must balance the need to educate and engage visitors with the responsibility to respect the dignity of the deceased and the sensitivities of their descendants. Dark tourism behaviour is also influenced by broader trends in tourism and globalization. The increasing ease of travel and the rise of social media have made dark tourism sites more accessible and visible to a global audience. Social media platforms, in particular, play a dual role in shaping dark tourism behaviour: they can raise awareness and encourage thoughtful engagement with historical sites, but they can also contribute to voyeurism and sensationalism. The ethical implications of sharing images or narratives from dark tourism sites on social media are a growing area of debate, as such practices can sometimes trivialize the experiences of those affected by the tragedies

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