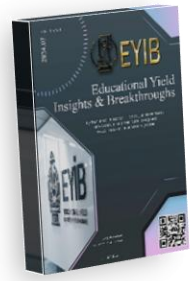
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The Psychological Impact of Dark Tourism on Visitors

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Annotatsiya

Dark tourism involves visiting places associated with death, suffering, disasters, and tragic historical events. These destinations can create emotional experiences that differ from those commonly associated with tourism. Visitors may experience sadness, fear, empathy, curiosity, reflection, or even positive emotions. However, these reactions vary between individuals. This article reviews existing research on the psychological and emotional impact of dark tourism, focusing on visitors' emotional responses, the factors influencing their experiences, and the possible duration of these effects. A literature-based approach was used to compare five academic publications employing different research methods, including quantitative surveys, qualitative research, conceptual analysis, and literature review. The findings suggest that dark tourism experiences are complex and are influenced by visitors' motivations, personal characteristics, interpretations of historical events, and the atmosphere of a destination. The literature also indicates that negative emotions do not necessarily result in an entirely negative overall experience. However, evidence concerning the long-term psychological effects of visiting dark tourism sites remains limited. The article concludes that further research is needed to understand how visitors' emotional responses develop during and after such visits.

Kalit so‘zlar: dark tourism, psychological impact, emotional responses, visitor experience, tourism and well-being.

Introduction Dark tourism refers to visiting places associated with death, disasters, historical tragedies, and human suffering. These destinations may include memorials, concentration camps, disaster sites, prisons, and locations connected with tragic historical events. People visit such places for various reasons. Some are interested in history, while others want to understand past events, remember victims, or experience the atmosphere of a place firsthand. Unlike many other forms of tourism, dark tourism can involve emotionally challenging experiences. Visitors may feel sadness, fear, empathy, discomfort, or curiosity when learning about tragic events. At the same time, some may experience admiration, reflection, or a stronger appreciation of life. These reactions demonstrate that the psychological impact of dark tourism is not necessarily the same for every visitor. Previous research has examined dark tourism

from several perspectives, including visitor motivations, emotional experiences, psychological well-being, and tourist behaviour. Magano et al. (2022), for example, investigated the relationships between visitors' characteristics, motivations, practices, and well-being. Martini and Buda (2020) explored how the atmosphere and context of places associated with death and disaster influence the tourist experience. Other researchers have examined visitors' emotional responses at specific destinations and the potential psychological implications of dark tourism. Despite growing academic interest in this subject, important questions remain. In particular, it is necessary to distinguish between emotions experienced during a visit and psychological effects that may persist afterwards. An emotional reaction during a visit does not automatically demonstrate a lasting effect on psychological well-being. Understanding these experiences is important for tourism professionals. Guides and destination managers need to present tragic historical events respectfully while considering visitors' emotional responses. A better understanding of these responses may also help tourism professionals prepare visitors for potentially challenging experiences. Therefore, the aim of this article is to examine existing research on the psychological and emotional impact of dark tourism on visitors. The article addresses the following research question: How does existing research describe the psychological and emotional impact of dark tourism on visitors, particularly in terms of their emotional responses and the possible duration of these effects?

Literature Review

Emotional Responses to Dark Tourism

Emotions are an important part of the dark tourism experience. Visiting a place connected with death or suffering may encourage visitors to reflect on historical events and the experiences of the people affected by them. However, the emotions experienced depend on the individual and the context of the visit. Bauer (2021) reviewed dark tourism from the perspective of travel medicine and psychological health. The article discusses the range of possible emotional reactions to visits to places associated with death and suffering. These reactions may be positive, negative, or unexpected. Bauer also highlights the importance of considering visitors' psychological circumstances when examining the potential effects of such experiences. The relationship between place and emotion is also explored by Martini and Buda (2020). Their conceptual article considers dark tourism as an emotional and spatial experience. The authors emphasise that visitors' experiences are influenced by the context in which they encounter a place associated with death or disaster. Consequently, the emotional significance of a destination cannot be understood by considering its physical location alone. Research conducted in Samarkand provides a specific example of emotional responses to a historical site. Patterson et al. (2024) examined visitors' psychological mood states at the Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum. Their qualitative research identified a range of emotions, with many participants reporting positive feelings by the end of their visit. These findings illustrate that visiting a place associated with death does not necessarily produce an entirely negative emotional experience.



Figure I. Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum in Samarkand Source: uzbek-travel.com

Taken together, these studies suggest that dark tourism can produce varied emotional responses. Sadness and discomfort are possible, but positive emotions and personal reflection may also form part of the experience.

Factors Influencing Visitors' Experiences

Visitors' psychological experiences may be influenced by their motivations, personal characteristics, knowledge, and interpretations of a destination. Magano et al. (2022) investigated dark tourism motivations, practices, and well-being using survey data from 993 respondents. Their research examined factors including curiosity, the desire to learn and understand, and various psychological characteristics. The study identified relationships between certain psychological indicators and dark tourism practices. However, these associations should not be interpreted as proof that visiting dark tourism sites causes particular psychological outcomes. Martini and Buda (2020) provide another perspective by examining the influence of context on emotional experiences. Their analysis suggests that the experience of a place associated with death or disaster is shaped by more than its historical significance. The way visitors encounter and interpret a destination also matters. The research by Patterson et al. (2024) further demonstrates the importance of context. Their study of the Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum in Samarkand included visitors from different backgrounds. The findings suggest that visitors may interpret the same location in different ways, including through historical, cultural, or religious perspectives. These studies suggest that psychological responses to dark tourism should not be treated as universal. Visitors may respond differently to the same destination because of their different motivations, experiences, and interpretations.

2.3. Tourist Behaviour and Moral Considerations The impact of dark tourism is not limited to emotions. Visitors' behaviour and their understanding of the places they visit are also important considerations. Sharma (2020) examined dark tourism and moral disengagement in the context of a cremation ground in Varanasi, India. The

research explored how tourists explain and justify their behaviour in a setting associated with death, including how they rationalise actions that may raise ethical concerns. This perspective is relevant because emotional engagement does not always result in respectful behaviour. A visitor may feel curious or emotionally affected while still acting in a way that disregards the dignity of others or the significance of a site. Therefore, understanding dark tourism requires attention to both visitors' internal experiences and their actions. Sharma's (2020) research does not directly establish the long-term psychological effects of dark tourism. Instead, it contributes to the broader discussion by showing how moral reasoning and visitor behaviour can shape encounters with places associated with death. These considerations also highlight the responsibility of tourism professionals to encourage respectful behaviour and communicate the historical and cultural significance of destinations.

2.4. The Duration of Psychological Effects An important question is whether the emotional impact of dark tourism continues after a visit or is experienced mainly at the destination. Bauer (2021) discusses the potential psychological consequences of visiting places associated with death and suffering. The review highlights the importance of considering visitors' psychological health and recognises that emotional responses may vary considerably. However, the available evidence does not allow researchers to predict every visitor's long-term response. Similarly, Magano et al. (2022) examined relationships between psychological characteristics, motivations, tourism practices, and well-being. Their survey provides useful information about these relationships, but it does not establish that a particular visit caused a lasting psychological change. The Samarkand study by Patterson et al. (2024) provides evidence about visitors' emotional states in the context of a particular destination. Nevertheless, findings from a qualitative study at one location cannot establish how long emotional responses generally last across different types of dark tourism sites. A distinction must therefore be made between experiencing an emotion during a visit and demonstrating a lasting psychological effect. These are related but different questions. Research that follows visitors over time would help clarify whether particular emotional responses continue after a visit and under what circumstances.

3. Methodology

This article uses a literature-based review approach to examine existing academic research on the psychological and emotional impact of dark tourism. Rather than collecting new data from tourists, the study compares findings and perspectives reported in five previously published academic articles. The selected publications address different aspects of the research question. Magano et al. (2022) used a quantitative survey to investigate dark tourism motivations, practices, and psychological well-being. Patterson et al. (2024) used qualitative research to explore visitors' psychological mood states at the Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum in Samarkand. Bauer (2021) provided a literature review concerning dark tourism and psychological travel health. Martini and Buda (2020) presented a conceptual analysis of emotion and affect in dark tourism. Sharma (2020) examined tourist behaviour and moral disengagement in a setting associated with death. The publications were compared according to three themes: emotional responses, factors influencing visitors' experiences, and the possible duration of psychological effects. Attention was also given to the research methods and limitations of each publication. Because the selected studies differ in their methods,

settings, and objectives, their findings cannot be treated as directly equivalent. The purpose of the review is to identify common themes and differences rather than to calculate a combined statistical result. This review has several limitations. First, it examines only five publications and therefore does not represent the entire body of research on dark tourism. Second, the selected studies use different methodologies and investigate different aspects of the subject. Some focus directly on emotional or psychological experiences, whereas others examine theoretical perspectives or moral behaviour. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted as a synthesis of selected literature rather than a systematic review of all relevant research.

4. Results

The comparison of the five publications revealed three main themes: the diversity of emotional responses, the influence of individual and contextual factors, and the limited evidence concerning long-term psychological effects.

4.1. Dark Tourism Produces Different Emotional Responses

The reviewed literature indicates that visitors may experience a wide range of emotions when visiting places associated with death and tragedy. These emotions can include sadness, discomfort, curiosity, reflection, and positive feelings. Bauer (2021) discusses the diversity of emotional responses that may occur in dark tourism. Martini and Buda (2020) emphasise the role of context in shaping emotional experiences. In the Samarkand study, Patterson et al. (2024) reported that many participants experienced positive feelings by the end of their visit to the Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum. These findings suggest that the emotional impact of dark tourism cannot be described as uniformly negative. The experience depends on the destination and the way visitors interpret it.

4.2. Visitors' Characteristics and Interpretations Matter

The reviewed publications also indicate that visitor experiences are influenced by several factors. Magano et al. (2022) identified relationships between psychological characteristics, motivations, and dark tourism practices. Martini and Buda (2020) highlighted the significance of context and the way a place is experienced. Patterson et al. (2024) illustrated how visitors may interpret a historical site from different perspectives.

Motivation	Number of respondents	Percentage
Curiosity	576	58.0%
Need to learn	318	32.0%
Need to see	357	36.0%
Need to understand	402	40.5%
Pleasure	80	8.1%
Need to see morbid things	52	5.2%

Figure 2. Motivations for Visiting Dark tourism sites Source: Adopted from Magano et al. (2022, Table 3)

As shown in Figure 1, curiosity was the most frequently reported motivation among respondents (58.0%), followed by the need to understand (40.5%) and the need to see (36.0%). The need to learn was reported by 32.0% of respondents, while pleasure was less frequently selected (8.1 %). The desire to see morbid things was reported by 5.2% of respondents. These findings suggest that visitors may be motivated by curiosity and a desire to understand or learn about dark tourism sites rather than solely by an interest in morbid subjects (Magano et al., 2022) Sharma (2020) added a behavioural dimension by examining how tourists justify their actions in a place associated with death. Together, these studies suggest that the psychological impact of dark tourism is connected not only to the destination itself but also to visitors' motivations, interpretations, and behaviour.

4.3. Evidence on Long-Term Psychological Effects Is Limited

The reviewed publications provide useful information about emotional experiences and psychological factors, but they do not establish a universal pattern for how long these effects last. Some studies focus on relationships between psychological characteristics and tourism practices, while others examine emotional experiences at a particular destination or discuss the topic conceptually. These different approaches provide complementary perspectives, but they do not offer a consistent measurement of psychological changes over an extended period. Consequently, the evidence is insufficient to conclude that emotional reactions to dark tourism are always temporary or that they usually produce lasting psychological consequences. Further research involving visitors before and after their visits, including follow-up assessments, would help address this question.

5. Discussion

The purpose of this article was to examine how existing research describes the psychological and emotional impact of dark tourism on visitors. The reviewed literature suggests that these experiences are complex and cannot be explained through a single emotional response. First, the findings challenge the assumption that dark tourism necessarily creates negative experiences. Although places associated with death and suffering may evoke sadness or discomfort, visitors may also experience curiosity, admiration, reflection, or other positive emotions. Patterson et al. (2024), for example, reported that many visitors to the Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum experienced positive feelings by the end of their visit. However, this finding relates to one destination and should not be generalised to every form of dark tourism. Second, the review suggests that the experience depends on both personal and contextual factors. Magano et al. (2022) examined relationships between motivations, psychological characteristics, and tourism practices, while Martini and Buda (2020) explored how context shapes emotional experiences. Sharma (2020) further demonstrates the relevance of examining visitors' behaviour and moral reasoning alongside their emotional responses. Together, these perspectives indicate that visitors should not be expected to respond identically to the same location. Their experiences may vary according to personal motivations, previous knowledge, cultural backgrounds, and interpretations of the destination. Third, the findings demonstrate the importance of distinguishing emotional responses from long-term psychological outcomes. Feeling sad during a visit does not necessarily mean that a person will experience lasting psychological difficulties. Equally, reporting positive feelings at the end of a visit does

not prove that the experience has no later emotional effects. Establishing such outcomes requires research that examines visitors over time. The findings also have practical implications for tourism management. Guides can provide historical context, explain the significance of sensitive sites, and give visitors opportunities to reflect. Destination managers can encourage respectful behaviour and avoid presenting human suffering merely as entertainment. These recommendations follow from the ethical and emotional issues discussed in the literature, although their effectiveness would need to be evaluated separately. The review has several limitations. Only five publications were examined, and they used different research methods. Some focused directly on emotional or psychological experiences, while others examined theoretical perspectives or moral behaviour. Therefore, the findings cannot be combined into a single measure of psychological impact. In addition, the selected publications do not provide sufficient evidence to establish how emotional reactions develop over an extended period after a visit. Future research could address these limitations by following visitors before a visit, immediately afterwards, and several weeks or months later. Researchers could also compare different types of sites and examine how prior experiences, motivations, cultural backgrounds, and the purpose of a visit relate to emotional responses. Such research would provide a clearer understanding of both immediate reactions and possible longer-term effects.

6. Conclusion

This article examined existing research on the psychological and emotional impact of dark tourism on visitors. The reviewed literature indicates that visits to places associated with death, suffering, and historical tragedy can produce varied emotional responses, including sadness, discomfort, curiosity, reflection, and positive feelings. The findings also suggest that visitors' experiences are influenced by their motivations, personal characteristics, interpretations, and the context of the destination. Consequently, dark tourism should not be understood as an experience that produces the same emotional response in every visitor. However, the available evidence does not establish a universal pattern for the duration of these effects. Emotional responses experienced during a visit and the long-term psychological consequences of that visit are distinct issues. Further research involving follow-up assessments is needed to determine whether particular responses continue after visitors leave a destination. Overall, a better understanding of the psychological impact of dark tourism can contribute to more thoughtful and responsible tourism practices. By presenting tragic history respectfully and considering the diversity of visitor experiences, tourism professionals can help create visits that support learning, reflection, and respect for the people connected with these places.

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