

PERCEPTIONS OF MALAYSIANS OF THE MARKET POTENTIAL OF DARK TOURISM

OBRAIN ANAK MANG¹, MOHD ZUQHAIRY KHAN HALID², NICKOLEN ROBOT³, CHRISTY BIDDER^{4*} & BAMBANG HENGKY RAINANTO⁵

^{1, 2, 3, 4}Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, Universiti Teknologi MARA Sabah, Kota Kinabalu Campus

⁵Department of Tourism, Faculty of Informatics and Tourism, Institut Bisnis dan Informatika Kesatuan
chris822@uitm.edu.my

Received Date: 6 February 2024

Accepted Date: 10 May 2024

Published Date: 7 June 2024

ABSTRACT

This past decade marks a significant growth of dark tourism with an increasing number of dark tourists. In Malaysia, despite the seemingly enormous potential of developing dark tourism in the country, dark tourism sites in Malaysia are not globally recognized yet and cannot attract international tourists. Against this backdrop, this study aimed to analyze the market potential of dark tourism in Malaysia. Specifically, the study's objectives were i) to examine the locals' general understanding of dark tourism in Malaysia and ii) to analyze the locals' acceptance and perception of the market potential of dark tourism in Malaysia. The research was a quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional study. The research instrument was an online survey posted on such platforms as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. Three hundred fifty-six survey responses were used for descriptive analysis (frequencies, means, and standard deviations). The study's key findings reveal that while local Malaysians may have previously heard about dark tourism, they lack a conceptual grasp of the phenomenon; that is, they primarily associate dark tourism with supernaturalism and entertainment and not the other more purposeful aspects of dark tourism (i.e., education, patriotism, commemoration, and spirituality). Moreover, local Malaysians may have an enthusiastic acceptance of dark tourism and a positive outlook on the potential of developing and promoting this niche tourism in Malaysia as long as dark tourism serves economic, entertainment, and educational purposes. The study was particularly significant from a managerial perspective because its findings could be beneficial for tourism developers and operators to understand the marketability of dark tourism in Malaysia and, subsequently, assist them in developing appropriate and innovative tourism products that tap into this market potential. The study ended with an acknowledgment of the study's limitations and a suggestion for future research.

Keywords: dark tourism; acceptance; market potential; local perceptive; Malaysia

Introduction

There is a long tradition of people visiting places with dark histories of wars, disasters, deaths, and atrocities (Magano, Fraiz-Brea & Leite, 2023). For example, the Roman gladiator games, pilgrimages, or attendance at medieval public executions were early forms of such death-related travel (Stone, 2006; Sharpley, 2009). Seaton (1996) stated that traveling to death-related sites has been a fundamental part of tourism consumption long before the 20th century. This morbid fascination has given rise to a particular type of tourism called dark tourism (Magano et al., 2023), a term that was first coined by Foley and Lennon (1996). Foley and Lennon (1996, pp. 198) defined dark tourism as 'the presentation and consumption by visitors of real and commodified death and disaster sites.' Over the years, a multitude of terms associated with dark tourism have emerged, including black spots tourism (Rojek, 1993), thanatourism (Seaton, 1996), horror tourism (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996), and morbid tourism (Blom, 2000).

Recent years have witnessed the growth of dark tourism in terms of its inclusion in travel itineraries across different countries and the expansion of attractions considered part of this niche tourism. At the global level, the market of dark tourism was estimated to reach US\$30 billion in 2022, with such vital trends as the growing popularity of dark destinations, new tour launches, and the increased interest of travelers in places with dark histories (Future Market Insights, 2022).

In Malaysia, the government has recognized and promoted dark tourism as one of the potential sources of tourism revenue (Abbasi & Mohamed, 2013). The Tenth Malaysian Plan provided more than RM5 million to maintain and upgrade sites related to dark tourism in the country (Bhuiyan, Siwar, & Ismail, 2013). In 2021, the state government of Sabah highlighted the development and promotion of dark tourism in the state as one of the initiatives to revive the state's tourism sector (Miwil, 2021). Thus, in line with the government investment, there is a growing list of dark tourism spots being identified and developed around Malaysia (Mohd Zahari et al., 2016), including museums, cemeteries, churches, war relics, prisons, memorials, and so forth (Tan & Lim, 2018).

Nevertheless, despite the seemingly enormous potential of developing dark tourism in Malaysia, Jamin et al. (2020) cautioned that the dark tourism sites in Malaysia are not globally recognized yet and cannot attract international tourists. Reasons for this include an overemphasis on the negative impacts of dark tourism rather than its potential benefits (Jamin et al., 2020), the consideration of dark tourism as a taboo as it may contradict local beliefs and values (Tan & Lim, 2018), and the lack of awareness and knowledge about dark tourism, which subsequently resulted in tour operators' reluctance to promote and sell this niche tourism (Mohd Zahari et al., 2016). Thus, based on this background, this study set out to understand and analyze the market potential of dark tourism in Malaysia. Specifically, it sought to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) To examine the local Malaysians' general understanding of dark tourism in Malaysia.
- 2) To analyze the local Malaysians' acceptance and perception of the market potential of dark tourism in Malaysia.

The corresponding research questions are as follows:

- 1) In general, how do local Malaysians understand dark tourism in Malaysia?

- 2) How do local Malaysians accept and perceive the market potential of dark tourism in Malaysia?

Literature Review

Definitions and terms of dark tourism

Defining dark tourism is extremely complex due to its ever-expanding categories and sub-categories (Stone and Sharpley, 2008). The term 'dark tourism' was first coined by Foley and Lennon (1996), who defined it as 'the presentation and consumption by visitors of real and commodified death and disaster sites' (Foley and Lennon, 1996:198). Over the years, different terms associated with dark tourism have emerged. Although these terms are closely related, they have a subtle difference. Thanatourism is one of these terms, described by Seaton (1996) as travel to a location wholly or partially motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death. Another term associated with dark tourism is black spots tourism, which focuses on commercial (touristic) developments of grave sites and sites in which celebrities or large numbers of people have met with sudden and violent deaths.' (Rojek, 1993, pp. 136). Blom (2000, pp. 32) introduced the notion of morbid tourism, which he explained as a type of tourism that focuses on sudden death and quickly attracts large numbers of people.

The multiple shades of dark tourism

Dark tourism attractions are multifaceted, complex in design and purpose, and diverse (Stone, 2006). Different researchers have created different sets of dark tourism products based on dark tourism's supply and demand perspectives. One of the most commonly referenced categories of dark tourism is Seaton's (1996) five categories of dark tourism, including 1) travel to witness public enactments of death, such as witnessing political executions and public hangings in Britain during the 19th century; 2) travel to see the sites of mass or individual deaths, after they have occurred, such as atrocity sites, disaster sites and sites of individual, celebrity deaths; 3) travel to internment sites of and memorials to the dead, such as visiting the graveyards, catacombs, crypts, war memorials and cenotaphs; 4) travel to view the material evidence or symbolic representations of particular deaths in locations unconnected with their occurrence, such as visiting the Museum of the Revolution in Cuba; and 5) travel for re-enactments or simulation of death, such as the re-enactments of the battles in Britain and America by Civil War enthusiasts.

Rojek (1997) presented three types of dark tourism under the 'black spots tourism' label, including 1) postmodern spectacles that entail repeated reconstructions of death sites of famous individuals or celebrities through modern audiovisual media (e.g., annual candlelight vigils in memory of Elvis Presley at Graceland, US); 2) nostalgic sites such as national and metropolitan cemeteries; and 3) sensation sites or disaster sites.

Further complicating the process of categorizing dark tourism products is the fact that the production of dark tourism is driven by a multitude of factors, such as consumer tastes, which are often influenced by the media, marketing tactics employed by the suppliers, and the continuous changes in the broader political and cultural landscapes (Seaton, 1999). In light of this, multiple shades of darkness exist within the dark tourism phenomenon. These shades of darkness can change as events such as wars, terrorist acts, or the fall of a regime transpire and as new files of representation such as movies, novels, and memoirs lend moral meanings to sites of death and the macabre (Rojek, 1997).

Given the tremendously complex method of classification and the perpetual shift within the dark tourism phenomenon, Stone (2006) introduced a dark tourism spectrum that highlights the 'darkest – lightest' framework of dark tourism supply, as shown in Figure 1.

Higher Political Influence and ideology -					Lower Political Influence and ideology -
'Sites of Death and Suffering' -					'Sites Associated with Death and Suffering' -
Darkest	Darker	Dark	Light	Lighter	Lightest
Education Orientation -					Entertainment Orientation -
History Centric (Conservation/ Commercialization) -					Heritage Centric (Commercial/ Romanticism) -
Perceived Authenticity Product Interpretation -					Perceived Inauthentic Product Interpretation -
Location Authenticity -					Non-location Authenticity -
Shorter Time Scale to the Event -					Longer Time Scale from the Event -
Non-Purposeful Supply -					Purposeful Supply -
Lower Tourism Infrastructure					Higher Tourism Infrastructure

Figure 1: A Dark tourism spectrum: perceived product features of dark tourism within a 'darkest – lightest' framework of supply (Stone, 2006)

Motivations of dark tourism

The motivations to engage in dark tourism are as diverse and complicated as the shades of dark tourism. A wide array of motives has been proposed in the literature. The earliest (i.e., the darkest) form of dark tourism would be motivated by morbid curiosity or fascination with death (Foley & Lennon, 1996). This notion was supported by Stone and Sharpley (2008), who suggested that the sequestering of death in the public space has driven people to visit dark tourism sites to confront and contextualize death. In other words, dark tourism allows individuals to uncomfortably indulge their curiosity and fascination with death-related concerns in a socially acceptable and often sanctioned environment, thus allowing them to construct their contemplations of mortality (Stone and Sharpley, 2008). However, this notion of death fascination was challenged by Tarlow (2005), who believed people visit sites of death and suffering because 'it is the thing to do' rather than for more meaningful purposes.

Over the years, more researchers have uncovered or proposed other motives for engaging in dark tourism, including social meaning (Sharpley, 2009), shared mourning and remembrance (Sharpley, 2009; Winter 2011a), national identity or national belonging (Winter 2011b; Hyde & Harman, 2011; Cheal & Griffin, 2013), integration with death to elicit excitement and understanding (Stone & Sharpley, 2008; Sharpley, 2009), family bonding (Fabros et al., 2023), sightseeing and recreation (Fabros et al., 2023).

Although the motives to visit dark tourism sites are diverse, Lennon and Foley (2000) argued that dark tourism is a modern, primarily Western phenomenon based on non-purposeful visits due to 'serendipity, the itinerary of tour companies or the merely curious who happen to be in the vicinity.' (Lennon & Foley, 2000, pp. 23). When everything is considered, the motives to engage in dark tourism might be reduced to political, educational, entertainment, social, or economic purposes (Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005; Stone, 2006; Fabros et al., 2023).

Dark tourism in Malaysia

Dark tourism is a relatively new niche tourism in Malaysia (Mohd Zahari et al., 2016). The industry stakeholders did not give this type of tourism much attention until recently. For example, in the state of Sabah, dark tourism only received much attention when the state's Tourism, Culture, and Environment Ministry announced the importance of tapping into the potential of dark tourism as a new tourism product and preserving history in the state (Miwil, 2021).

Malaysia has a wide variety of places that can be considered dark tourism sites, such as museums, cemeteries, churches, war relics, prisons, war memorials, and so on (Mohd Zahari et al., 2016; Tan & Lim, 2018; Jamin et al., 2020). For instance, Tan and Lim (2018) highlighted the enormous potential of developing dark tourism in Penang, citing places such as Penang War Museum and Jerajak Island. In another example, in the state of Sabah, the Sandakan-Ranau death marches, Berhala Island, Brothel No.8, Sulug Island, Mantanani Island, and Agnes Keith House are some of the places regarded as dark sites (Masanti, 2016; Inus, 2022; Miwil, 2022; Sabah Tourism Board, 2022). Despite the wide variety of dark tourism sites in Malaysia, they could be categorized into four broad categories, as proposed by Ibrahim and Chai (2010): 1) graveyard tombs (i.e., tombs belonging to legendary warriors), 2) dynastic burial places (i.e., royal mausoleums that have centuries-old graves built for royal family members), 3) prisons, and 4) war memorials and war cemeteries.

Despite the enormous potential of developing and promoting dark tourism as a tourism niche in Malaysia, Jamin et al. (2020) cautioned that the dark tourism sites in Malaysia have yet to gain global recognition and prominence and, thus, cannot draw the attention and interest of international tourists. Reasons for this include an overemphasis on the negative impacts of dark tourism rather than its potential benefits (Jamin et al., 2020), the consideration of dark tourism as a taboo as it may contradict local beliefs and values (Tan & Lim, 2018), and the lack of awareness and knowledge about dark tourism, which subsequently resulted in reluctance among tour operators to promote and sell this niche tourism (Mohd Zahari et al., 2016).

Methodology

The research was a quantitative study that involved gathering and analyzing numerical data. Specifically, the study was descriptive as it systematically collected data to describe the what and how questions of the market potential of dark tourism in Malaysia from the local perspectives (i.e., what is the locals' understanding of dark tourism? How do they perceive the acceptance and potential of developing dark tourism in Malaysia?). Regarding the number of contacts, the study was cross-sectional as it collected data from the targeted sample at a single time.

The unit of analysis was Malaysian adults aged 18 and above currently residing within the country. As of mid-2023, the population size of Malaysian adults was 23 million (Statista Research Department, 2023). Based on this population frame (with a 95% confidence level

and 5% margin of error), the ideal sample size was 385 (Survey Monkey Calculator, 2023). According to Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size table, for a population size of 1000000, a sample size of 384 would suffice. Nonetheless, due to time limitations, the actual number of respondents used for data analysis was 356, representing a response rate of 92% compared to the ideal sample size. The sampling method used was convenience sampling, where anyone with access to the research instrument could respond.

The research instrument was an online survey that used Google Forms to design and distribute questionnaires that respondents could complete online. The online survey was posted on WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. It consisted of three sections, namely: 1) Section A comprised nominal and ordinal items related to the respondents' demographic characteristics; 2) Section B constituted ordinal items concerning the respondents' general understanding of dark tourism; and 3) Section C contained ordinal items about the respondents' acceptance and perception of the market potential of dark tourism in Malaysia. The items included in the online survey were primarily adapted from such previous studies as Ibrahim and Chai (2010), Mohd Zahari et al. (2016), and Tan and Lim (2018). To ensure that only the intended respondents were included in the study, a screening question on the respondents' current residency (i.e. within or outside of Malaysia) constituted one of the demographic questions.

Data collection took place in two stages: four weeks in May 2023 and another four weeks in November 2023. Data analysis was done using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software version 28. Descriptive analysis (i.e., frequencies, means, and standard deviations) was used to analyze the data collected.

Findings and Discussion

Respondents' demographic background

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents (N=356). There were more female respondents (59.4%) than male respondents (40.6%). About half were within the Gen Z age category (47.5%), followed by Millennials (34.2%) and Gen X (18.3%). Almost all of the respondents had completed some level of formal education: primary education (13.2%), secondary education (20.7%), post-secondary education (30.1%) and tertiary education (32.6%). In terms of state of origin, more than half of the respondents were from Sabah (56.5%), followed by Sarawak (33.2%) and Peninsular Malaysia (10.3%). Indigenous groups in Sabah made up the most significant percentage of the respondents' ethnicity (44.8%), followed by the Indigenous groups in Sarawak (28.4%), Malay (17.5%), and Chinese (9.3%). There were almost equal numbers of Muslim and Christian respondents, 42.3% and 45.6% respectively. The remaining respondents were Buddhists (5.7%) or affiliated with other religious traditions (6.4%).

Table 1: Respondent's Demographic Background (N = 356)

Gender	Female	59.4%	State/ Origin	Sabah	56.5%
	Male	40.6%		Sarawak	33.2%
				Peninsular Malaysia	10.3%
Age Group	Gen X (1965-1980)	18.3%	Ethnicity	Malay	17.5%
	Millennials (1981-1996)	34.2%		Chinese	9.3%
	Gen Z (1997-2005)	47.5%		Indigenous groups in Sabah	44.8%
				Indigenous groups in Sarawak	28.4%
Highest Level of Education	No formal education was completed	3.4%	Religion	Islam	42.3%
	Primary education	13.2%			

	Secondary education	20.7%		Christianity	45.6%
	Post-secondary education	30.1%		Buddhism	5.7%
	Tertiary education	32.6%		Others	6.4%

Locals' general understanding of dark tourism in Malaysia

As indicated in Table 2, more than half of the respondents had previously heard of dark tourism (59.4%). More than a quarter of them had heard about dark tourism via social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram (30.3%), followed by newspaper articles (18.6%), travel documentaries (14.5%), movies (14.3%), travel magazines (10.7%), academic materials (10.7%), and formal talks (4.2%).

This finding demonstrates that technologies are essential in how the respondents form their general understanding of dark tourism. This finding further supports Tan and Lim's (2018) discovery that contemporary audiovisual media has driven and popularized dark tourism, and Bolan and Simone's (2018) finding on the importance of social media platforms not just in marketing and promoting dark tourism destinations but also in engaging with the dark tourist online in a meaningful and significant way, thereby establishing a relationship with such tourists and enhancing their level of experience. For example, Netflix, the most popular streaming service worldwide, included a dark-tourism TV series called 'Dark Tourist' in 2018. There is a YouTube channel called 'Dark Tourism Malaysia', which has more than 15,000 subscribers in Malaysia. Moreover, in 2019, an online travel magazine dedicated to dark tourism entitled 'The Travellers' Guide to Dark Tourism' was published to educate readers about some of the most significant dark sites to visit and the ethics of engaging in dark tourism. During and post-Covid 19, there was an increase in the number of news articles related to the dark tourism phenomenon in Malaysia, such as those written by Chin (2020), Mu (2021), Miwil (2021), Hashim (2021), Inus (2022), Victor (2022), and TTR Weekly (2022).

When asked about the types of sites, attractions, or activities that could be related to dark tourism, more than a quarter of the respondents mentioned ghost-related or paranormal tours/exhibitions/activities (38.5%), followed by graveyards or cemeteries (16.6%), sites of remembrance and respect for the recently dead (11.4%), former prisons and courthouses (10.1%), museums with educative or commemorative displays of death or suffering (9.3%), place of mass killings, atrocities, and disasters (7.7%), and war and battlefields (6.4%).

Perhaps it is no surprise that supernaturalism accounts for the most significant proportion of the respondents' general understanding of dark tourism attractions/activities because the dark tourism content propagated in the various forms of mass media, gravitated toward the notion of spectral appearance, ghost hunting, other-worldly existence or inexplicable mysteries. This finding is in line with the finding of Ironside (2018) who discovered that for the American general publics, the allure of dark tourism was associated with legend tripping and ghost seeking in dark places due to this niche tourism's ability to connect people to death and the dead through dark narratives, supernatural legends, and participatory experiences. For example, in the news reported by Mu (2021), Agnes Keith House in Sandakan, Sabah, would be promoted as a dark tourism site due to Agnes' experiences of horror while staying at the house, which included 'the sighting of a tall woman saying goodbye to her husband, picking up her baby and going down the street alone, standing at the end of the street and looking back.' In another example, the seven 'spooky' places that Victor (2022) listed as dark tourism landmarks in Malaysia all have some common features, such as ghostly figures, spirits, haunted, mysterious, and weird vibes. Even the Dark Tourism Malaysia channel on YouTube asserted that their purpose is 'to share the atmosphere of the night in a place of horror that is always associated with the supernatural and mystical.' (Dark Tourism Malaysia, 2023).

Regarding the respondents' self-rated knowledge of dark tourism, the mean score was 3.31, indicating novice knowledge and experience. This finding shows that although most respondents had previously heard about dark tourism, they lacked conceptual discernment about the phenomenon.

Table 2: Locals' General Understanding of Dark Tourism in Malaysia (N=356)

Item		Frequency
Have you ever heard of the term Dark Tourism?	Yes	59.4%
	No	40.6%
If your answer to Question 1 is a YES, how did you hear about Dark Tourism?	Social media	30.3%
	Newspaper articles	18.6%
	Travel documentaries	14.5%
	Movies	14.3%
	Travel magazines	10.7%
	Academic materials	6.8%
	Formal talks	4.2%
	Others	0.6%
Which of these sites, attractions, or activities can be related to Dark Tourism?	Ghost-related or paranormal tours/exhibitions/activities	38.5%
	Graveyards or cemeteries	16.6%
	Sites of remembrance and respect for the recent dead	11.4%
	Former prisons and courthouses	10.1%
	Museums with educative or commemorative displays of death or suffering	9.3%
	Place of mass killings, atrocities, and disasters	7.7%
	War and battlefields	6.4%
	Mean	Standard Deviation (SD)
Overall, how would you rate your level of knowledge about dark tourism?	3.31 ¹	1.145

¹Based on a five-point Likert scale, one = very poor and five = very good.

Locals' acceptance and perception of the market potential of dark tourism in Malaysia

Table 3 shows the mean scores and standard deviations of the respondents' acceptance and perception of the market potential of dark tourism in Malaysia. Overall, the respondents indicated an enthusiastic acceptance of dark tourism. They disagreed that dark tourism is a taboo that contradicts local beliefs and values ($\bar{x} = 1.29$) and that visiting dark tourism sites is against their religious teachings ($\bar{x} = 1.38$). The finding is further supported by the respondents' strong agreement that it would be acceptable to market death and suffering for tourism consumption despite their religious and cultural beliefs ($\bar{x} = 4.10$) and their indication of interest in visiting dark tourism sites/exhibition ($\bar{x} = 4.25$) and taking part in dark tourism activities ($\bar{x} = 4.27$).

Concerning the respondents' perceived market potential of dark tourism in Malaysia, they generally indicated a positive outlook on the possibility of developing and promoting dark tourism in the country. They perceived Malaysia has many dark sites that can potentially be turned into tourist attractions ($\bar{x} = 4.34$), that dark tourism is an untapped potential tourist product in Malaysia ($\bar{x} = 4.63$), that Malaysia can be one of the top dark tourism destinations in Asia ($\bar{x} = 4.66$). Thus, Malaysia should develop and promote dark tourism ($\bar{x} = 4.43$). This finding supports the growing dark tourism acceptance and market worldwide, particularly in

Western countries such as the US, Australia and England (Királ'ová & Šperková, R, 2024). What's more, as Bhati et al. (2020) discovered, dark tourism could be feasible even in developing economies, such as Southeast Asia, though the authors emphasized that dark tourism might be appealing only to a certain extent as tourists pre-select dark tourism destinations based on specific motivations. In Vietnam, for instance, Duffy (2022) pointed out that the very mention of Vietnam is synonymous with the traumas of the country's dark wartime heritage, though the author described the acceptance and market of dark tourism in the country as a 'mixed blessing' because the dark tourist market in Vietnam is still outweighed by the preponderance of dark or conflict-related heritage.

Additionally, the respondents were asked to rate the reasons for the importance of developing dark tourism in Malaysia. As indicated in Table 3, the respondents regarded the reasons for the importance to be (in high-to-low rank order by mean scores): economic ($\bar{x} = 4.70$), entertainment ($\bar{x} = 4.53$), and education ($\bar{x} = 4.28$). They did not perceive dark tourism to be playing an essential role in commemoration ($\bar{x} = 3.38$), politics ($\bar{x} = 2.95$), or spirituality ($\bar{x} = 2.72$). This finding is fascinating because it might imply that the respondents had an enthusiastic acceptance of dark tourism and a positive outlook on the market potential of this niche tourism only because the respondents understood dark tourism in its light-lighter-lightest shades that are oriented toward entertainment, as portrayed in Stone's (2006) dark tourism spectrum. In other words, the respondents might only be approving the notion of dark tourism and recognize its market potential if death and suffering were understood and marketed in a way that is fun, enjoyable, educating, does not interfere with religious/cultural traditions, and done in a commercial setting that produces happy, positive feelings at the end of the day (like the other types of tourism). They might shy away from dark tourism in its dark-darker-darkest shades when death and suffering are to be contemplated as they are, when death and suffering are to be used to reinforce a sense of patriotism or when death and suffering become the tools to remember and honor the deceased or sites where lives have been lost.

Table 3: Locals' Acceptance and Perception of the Market Potential of Dark Tourism in Malaysia (N=356)

Item		Mean (\bar{x})	SD
Dark tourism is a taboo that contradicts local beliefs and values.		1.29 ¹	1.509
Visiting dark tourism sites is against my religious teachings.		1.38 ¹	1.543
Despite my religious and cultural beliefs and values, I feel it is acceptable to market death and suffering for tourism consumption.		4.10 ¹	1.047
I want to visit dark tourism sites/exhibitions.		4.25 ¹	.830
I want to take part in dark tourism activities.		4.27 ¹	.885
Malaysia has many dark sites that can be turned into tourist attractions.		4.34 ¹	.851
Dark tourism is an untapped potential tourist product in Malaysia.		4.63 ¹	.670
Malaysia can be one of the top dark tourism destinations in Asia.		4.66 ¹	.678
Malaysia should develop and promote dark tourism in the country.		4.43 ¹	.826
In your opinion, what are the reasons for the importance of developing dark tourism in Malaysia?	Economic <i>Commercializing dark sites as tourist attractions/activities to generate tourism revenue.</i>	4.70 ²	.642

Entertainment <i>Providing fun, enjoyable, and unusual experiences of horror.</i>	4.53 ²	.678
Education <i>Supplementing individuals' learnings of dark histories.</i>	4.28 ²	.825
Commemoration <i>Remembering and honoring the deceased or sites where lives have been lost.</i>	3.38 ²	1.066
Political <i>Reinforcing national identity or sense of patriotism.</i>	2.95 ²	1.499
Spiritual <i>Creating experiences of contemplation/meditation on life and death.</i>	2.72 ²	1.444
¹ Based on a five-point Likert scale, one = strongly disagree and five = strongly agree.		
² Based on a five-point Likert scale, one = not at all important and five = very important.		

Conclusion

This study set out to analyze the market potential of dark tourism in Malaysia. Specifically, it examined the locals' general understanding of dark tourism in Malaysia and analyzed the locals' acceptance and perception of the market potential of dark tourism in Malaysia. One key finding shows that while local Malaysians may have previously heard about dark tourism, they lack a conceptual grasp of the phenomenon; that is, they mainly associate dark tourism with supernaturalism and entertainment and not the other more purposeful aspects of dark tourism (i.e., education, patriotism, commemoration, and spirituality). This situation may be attributable to the fact that the dark tourism content propagated in the various forms of mass media gravitates toward the notion of spectral appearance, ghost hunting, other-worldly existence, or inexplicable mysteries. Another key finding reveals that local Malaysians may have an enthusiastic acceptance of dark tourism and a positive outlook on the potential of developing and promoting this niche tourism in the country if dark tourism serves economic, entertainment, and education purposes. This study is without its limitations. It employed a convenience sampling method that could result in sampling bias since the study sample was not chosen randomly. Moreover, the actual sample size was slightly less than the calculated ideal sample size. Additionally, an online survey in Google Forms was used to collect data, which could restrict those without Internet access. For a future study, it can be insightful and exciting to examine the locals' understanding, acceptance, and perception of the market potential of dark tourism in Malaysia from generational perspectives.

Acknowledgments

We thank all the individuals who had responded to our online survey. We also extend our heartfelt appreciation to the reviewers for their valuable insights for the improvement of this research paper.

References

- Abbasi, D. S., & Mohamed, B. (2013). Local perception of tourism development: A conceptual framework for the sustainable cultural tourism. *Journal of Management and Sustainability*, 3(2), 31-39. <https://doi.org/10.5539/jms.v3n2p31>
- Ashworth, G., & Hartmann, R. (2005). *Horror and human tragedy revisited: The management of sites of atrocities for tourism*. New York: Cognizant.
- Bhuiyan, M. A. H., Siwar, C., & Ismail, S. M. (2013). Tourism development in Malaysia from the perspective of development plans. *Asian Social Science*, 9(9), 11-18. <https://doi.org/10.5539/ass.v9n9p11>
- Blom, T. (2000). Morbid tourism: A postmodern market niche with an example from Althorpe. *Norwegian Journal of Geography*, 54, 29-36.
- Bolan, P., & Simone-Charteris, M. (2018). Shining a digital light on the dark: Harnessing online media to improve the dark tourism experience. In: R. Stone, P., Hartmann, R., Seaton, T., Sharpley, R., White, L. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Dark Tourism Studies* (pp. 727-746). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-47566-4_30
- Cheal, F., & Griffin, T. (2013). Pilgrims and patriots: Australian tourist experiences at Gallipoli. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 7(3), pp. 227-241.
- Chin, C. (2020). Dark tourism: should you visit places with creepy and violent past in Malaysia? Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/travel/2020/10/31/why-malaysians-should-be-039dark-tourists039-and-visit-local-erie-places>
- Dark Tourism Malaysia. (2023). Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCzkZct0mrMU3BF9SuGy_pvg
- Duffy, M. (2022). Changing international perceptions of Vietnam and its dark heritage. Retrieved from <https://www.e-ir.info/pdf/97017>
- Fabros, M. G. M., Lopez, E. L. F., & Roma, M. N. (2023). Dark tourism in the Philippine context: indicators, motivations, and spectrums. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 7(1), 100452. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssaho.2023.100452>
- Foley, M., & Lennon, J. J. (1996). JFK and dark tourism: A fascination with assassination. *Journal of International Heritage Studies*, 2(2): 198-211
- Future Market Insights. (2022). Dark tourism market overview (2022 to 2023). Retrieved from <https://www.futuremarketinsights.com/reports/dark-tourism-sector-overview>
- Hashim, M. I. (2021). Don't dismiss potential of dark tourism, says Minister. Retrieved <https://www.dailyexpress.com.my/news/178044/don-t-dismiss-potential-of-dark-tourism-says-minister/>
- Hyde, K., & Harman, S. (2011). Motives for a secular pilgrimage to the Gallipoli battlefields. *Tourism Management*, 32(6), pp. 1343-1351.
- Ibrahim, S., & Chai, A. (2010). The dark within – exploring challenges and opportunities for dark tourism in Malaysia. In K. Din & J. Mapjabil (Eds.), *Tourism research in Malaysia: what, which way and so what?* (pp. 351-365). Sintok: Universiti Utara Malaysia.
- Inus, K. (2022). Efforts made to turn Sulug Island as Sabah's dark tourism hub. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2022/07/27/efforts-made-to-turn-sulug-island-as-sabah039s-dark-tourism-hub>
- Ironside, R. (2018). The allure of dark tourism: legend tripping and ghost seeking in dark places. In Waskul, D., & Eaton, M. (Eds.). *The supernatural in society, culture and history* (pp. 95-115). Temple University Press.
- Jamin, A., Mohd Zain, Z., Sakarji, S. R., Ahmad, N., & Mohd Beta, R. M. D. (2020). The benefits of dark tourism experience among visitors in Malaysia. *International Conference on Economics, Business and Economic Education*, 2020, 219-228. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v4i6.6600>
- Kiráľová, A., & Šperková, R. (2024). Mapping the dark: a bibliometric examination of research in Dark Tourism. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2294552>
- Krejcie, R. V., & Morgan, D. W. (1970). Determining sample size for research activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 30(3), 607-610. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001316447003000308>
- Lennon, J. J., & Foley, M. (2000). *Dark tourism: The attraction of death and disaster*. London: Continuum.
- Magano, J., Fraiz-Brea, J. A., & Leite, A. (2023). Dark tourism, the holocaust, and well-being: a systematic review. *Heliyon*, 9(1), e13064. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2023.e13064>
- Masanti, M. (2016). Understanding dark tourism acceptance in Southeast Asia: The case of WWII Sandakan-Ranau death march, Sabah, Malaysia. In P. Mandal & J. Vong (Eds.), *Development of tourism and the hospitality industry in Southeast Asia* (pp. 113-125). Singapore: Springer.
- Miwil, O. (2021). Three potential 'dark tourism' sites identified at Sabah's Crocker Range. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2021/09/731597/three-potential-dark-tourism-sites-identified-sabahs-crocker-range>
- Mohd Zahari, M. S., Hanafiah, M. H., Syed Mahboob, S. S., & Md Zain, N. A. (2016). Dark tourism: is it a growth segment for the Malaysia tourism industry? *Tourism and Hospitality Management*, 22(1), 47-56. <https://doi.org/10.20867/thm.22.1.5>
- Mu, P. (2021). Sandakan's Agnes Keith House will be promoted as 'Dark Tourism'. Retrieved from <https://www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2021/06/702767/sandakans-agnes-keith-house-will-be-promoted-dark-tourism>
- Rojek, C. (1993). *Ways of escape: Modern transformations in leisure and travel*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.

- Rojek, C. (1997). Indexing, dragging and the social construction of tourist sights. In C. Rojek & J. Urry (Eds.), *Touring cultures: Transformations of travel and theory* (pp. 52-74). London: Routledge.
- Sabah Tourism Board. (2022). Experiencing dark tourism on Sulug Island. Retrieved from <https://sabahtourism.com/press-release/experiencing-dark-tourism-on-sulug-island/>
- Seaton, A. V. (1996). From thanatopsis to thanatourism: guided by the dark. *Journal of International Heritage Studies*, 2(2), 234-244.
- Seaton, A. V. (1999). War and thanatourism: Waterloo 1815-1914. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 26(1), 130-158.
- Sharpley, R. (2009). Dark tourism and political ideology: towards a governance model. In R. Sharpley & P. R. Stone (Eds.), *The darker side of travel: the theory and practice of dark tourism* (pp. 145-166). Bristol: Channel View Publications.
- Statista Research Department. (2023). Number of adults in Malaysia 2013 – 2022. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/667521/number-of-adults-in-malaysia>
- Stone, P. R. (2006). A dark tourism spectrum: towards a typology of death and macabre related to tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions. *Tourism: An Interdisciplinary International Journal*, 52, 145-160.
- Stone, P., & Sharpley, R. (2008). Consuming dark tourism: a thanalogical perspective. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 35(2): 574-595.
- Survey Monkey Calculator. (2023). Sample size calculator. Retrieved from <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/sample-size-calculator/>
- Tan, G. A., & Lim, S. (2018). The 'Pearl of the Orient' as a dark tourism destination in Malaysia. *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, 4(1), 68-80. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJTC-04-2017-0023>
- Tarlow, P. (2005). Dark Tourism: The appealing 'dark' side of tourism and more. In M. Novelli (Ed.), *Niche tourism: Contemporary issues, trends and cases* (pp. 47-57). Oxford: Elsevier.
- TTR Weekly. (2022). Sabah casts light on dark tourism. Retrieved from <https://www.ttrweekly.com/site/2022/08/sabah-casts-light-on-dark-tourism/>
- Tunbridge, J., & Ashworth, G. (1996). *Dissonant heritage: Managing the past as a resource in conflict*. Chichester: John Wiley.
- Victor, C. (2022). Seven spooky places in Malaysia you can check out this Halloween. Retrieved from <https://www.thestar.com.my/lifestyle/travel/2022/10/31/seven-spooky-places-in-malaysia-you-can-check-out-this-halloween>
- Winter, C. (2011a). Battlefield visitor motivations: explorations in the Great War town of Ieper, Belgium. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 13(2), pp. 164-176.
- Winter, C. (2011b). Battlefield tourism and Australian national identity: Gallipoli and the Western Front. In E. Frew & L. White (Eds.), *Tourism and national identities: An international perspective* (pp. 176-189). Oxon: Routledge