

**BUILDING THE
FUTURE OF TOURISM**

DARK TOURISM

**THEORY, INTERPRETATION
AND ATTRACTION**

EDITED BY

**ANUKRATI SHARMA
SHRUTI ARORA
PARAG SHUKLA**

Dark Tourism

BUILDING THE FUTURE OF TOURISM

Series editor: Anukrati Sharma

The world is entering the Third Millennium in which great changes are expected in all areas of human interest, life, and activity. These changes have been brought on by past and present man-made events, which have had both positive and negative consequences. The coming millennium will be marked by significant social, political, demographic, and technological changes and will definitely differ from the last century. The future will bring more leisure time, a higher standard of living, and a better quality of life for us all. This series examines recent and the most probable changes and gives a wide range of visionary insights, as well as operational takeaways.

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Dark Tourism: Theory, Interpretation and Attraction

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*To my daughter “Vidushi Choudhary,” who is my heart living outside of my body.
To my son “Samarth Mehta,” whose laughter is my favorite sound.
Last but not the least to our wonderful contributors and readers.*

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Contents

About the Editors	<i>xi</i>
About the Contributors	<i>xiii</i>
Preface	<i>xxv</i>
Chapter 1 Unveiling the Significance of Irish Workhouses as Captivating Tourism Destinations	1
<i>Beth Storey, Sinead O'Leary and Noëlle O'Connor</i>	
Chapter 2 Dark Tourism, Memory, and the Reproduction of National Identity: The National September 11th Museum	13
<i>Michael Clancy</i>	
Chapter 3 Dark Tourism: Educational or Exploitative Side of Tourism?	27
<i>Iti Gaur</i>	
Chapter 4 Prison Tourism: The Emotional Responses to Robben Island, South Africa	41
<i>Rami K. Isaac</i>	
Chapter 5 Dark Attraction Sites: Understanding Motivations, Intentions, and Behaviors of Tourists	61
<i>Neelima Modi and Priya Sodani</i>	
Chapter 6 Battlefield Guidance From a New Angle	75
<i>Seda Sökmen, Ash Bendenay Çapa and Semra Günay</i>	

Chapter 7 Exploring Marketing Strategies and Media Influences in Dark Tourism	89
<i>Jeetesh Kumar, Janitha Kularajasingam and Zhang Jieyao</i>	
Chapter 8 The Impact of Dark Tourism on Local Communities	99
<i>Ankit Dhiraj, Sanjeev Kumar and Divya Rani</i>	
Chapter 9 Dark Tourism, an Absolute Transition, a Great Reset to Propel Reconciliation: The Case of Jaffna War Zones	107
<i>Suduweli Kondage Lathisha Jayangi Ramanayaka</i>	
Chapter 10 Issues and Challenges of Dark Tourism	123
<i>Birendra Kishore Roy</i>	
Chapter 11 Dark Tourism in Vietnam: A Case Study of Hoa Lo Prison Relic	135
<i>Hanh Thi Pham</i>	
Chapter 12 Chambal Valley: the Myth, the Curse, the Legend, the Challenges, and the Opportunities for Dark Tourism – Case Study	149
<i>Shaheed Khan, Swarna M. Freeda Maria and Ajoy K. Bhattacharya</i>	
Chapter 13 Marketing Strategies of Dark Tourism: Social Media	175
<i>Burhan Kılıç and Hande Akyurt Kurnaz</i>	
Chapter 14 Enlightening the “Dark” in Dark Tourism: Re-Conceptualising Dark Tourism in the Era of Late Capitalism	185
<i>Max Hart, Craig Kelly and Adam Lynes</i>	
Chapter 15 “Bawaal” Movie Is an Experience of Dark Tourism for the Indian Audience	205
<i>Surbhi Sharma</i>	
Chapter 16 Unexplored Avenues of Dark Tourism in Bangladesh	213
<i>Md. Wasiul Islam, Md. Mahfuz Ur Rahman and Shakil Ahmed</i>	
Chapter 17 Reviving Forgotten Heritage as a Tourist Destination: A Case Study on Malcha Mahal Haunted Heritage Walks in Delhi	241
<i>Terrance Ancheary, Puneet Mehta and Anish Mondal</i>	

Chapter 18 Conceptual Multiplicity and Contradiction that Impede Dark Tourism Promotion	265
<i>Samik Ray</i>	
Chapter 19 Unearthing the Digital Dark: Enhancing Dark Tourism Through Online Platforms	279
<i>Shruti Sharma and Nidhi Sharma</i>	
Chapter 20 Unveiling Shadows: Prospects for Dark Tourism Development in India	297
<i>Ravi Kant Modi and Ruchi Garg</i>	
Chapter 21 Uncovering Psychological Shadows: Delving Into the Soul of Dark Tourism in India Through Narrative Inquiry	311
<i>Neharshi Srivastava</i>	

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Preface

Over the past 10 years, dark tourism has become more and more popular as individuals look for deeper travel experiences and decide to genuinely deal with our more difficult heritage instead of just going on escapist holidays. A commemorative light on the epidemic that has engulfed society can be achieved through dark tourism. An umbrella concept for travel to sites that are associated for visits to locations like prisons, slave forts, and battlefields that are connected to agony and death. The Dark Tourism edited volume is relevant to students, scholars, and academicians associated with the fields of memorialization and morality death studies, history, cultural studies, psychology, business management, museology, and heritage tourism studies, as well as religious studies. The world over, dark tourism has grown in popularity in the 21st century. Travelers' evolving tastes and preferences, together with the emergence of the notion of special interest tourism, have compelled tourism regulators globally to include this market in their mission and vision statements. The people have experienced a number of terrible catastrophes, ranging from widespread natural disasters to genocide and war. The locations of these catastrophes are now popular travel destinations for dark tourism worldwide. The reason for the surge in gloomy tourism is that there are more tragedies worldwide. The use of social media has also played a significant role in raising awareness of this kind of travel. This book will focus on war tourism, disaster tourism, banditry tourism, macabre and supernatural tourism, and the abuses and ethical problems surrounding dark tourism as well.

Creating this edited book was primarily aimed at spreading knowledge about the "Dark Tourism: Theory, Interpretation and Attraction."

This book is the conclusion of the meticulous efforts of many minds from India, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Malaysia, Ireland, USA, Netherland, China, Vietnam, England, and Bangladesh. We wish to thank all the contributors for their hard work.

Dr Anukrati Sharma
Dr Shruti Arora
Dr Parag Shukla

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Chapter 1

Unveiling the Significance of Irish Workhouses as Captivating Tourism Destinations

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Abstract

Dark tourism has grown as an area of study since the 1990s with a great deal of research carried out into visitor motivations in recent years. Visitor centres within the dark tourism sector have a balancing act between the education and entertainment elements of tourism and sensitivity to the difficult stories they tell as part of their remit. This study examines the importance of tourism to the survival of Ireland's remaining workhouse buildings and the role the workhouse museums play in the local community. Research found that the visitor demographics and responses correlated with other studies, with a similar spread of male and female respondents to the survey, similar reasons for visiting and many of the same emotional responses.

The workhouses are very large buildings spread over several acres of land and therefore can be difficult and expensive to maintain. Community is very important to the management at Donaghmore and Portumna, and both management teams are open to the use of the buildings for events and education. They are also aware of their place in the local communities, supporting other businesses such as accommodation and restaurants.

This chapter shows that not only are Ireland's workhouses an important part of the history of the country, but they also have a role in modern society as places to preserve and teach that history. Tourism plays an important role in the preservation of the remaining workhouses and in educating the public about a difficult time in Ireland's history.

Keywords: Irish workhouse museums; dark tourism; Ireland; visitor motivations; community engagement

Introduction

This study investigates the importance of tourism to the survival of the Irish workhouses. Through primary and secondary research, it investigates the place of tourism in the preservation of the buildings and its place in telling visitors about the history of the workhouses and making the buildings available for modern use. The aim of the research is to investigate and understand the place of workhouses as visitor destinations and the role of tourism in preserving the built heritage of the workhouses. To undertake this aim, the following steps were used:

- Provide an overview of the importance of remembering the history of the Irish workhouse system.
- Investigate the topic in relation to current trends in heritage tourism and dark tourism.
- Identify the key issues facing Irish workhouses and in using workhouse buildings for tourism.
- Undertake primary research to investigate the issues of using workhouse buildings for tourism purposes.
- Undertake primary research to investigate visitor motivations and responses to visiting the workhouse.
- Carry out data analysis of primary research findings.
- Draw conclusions from the collected data.

To carry out the above points, the topic was investigated using five main themes:

- (1) Theme 1 investigated the main issues with using the workhouse buildings for tourism.
- (2) Theme 2 considered the alternative uses the buildings had been put to during their lifespan and the effects of those uses on the structure.
- (3) Theme 3 examined whether the need to be financially viable clashes with the other considerations of using the workhouse buildings as a tourist destination.
- (4) Theme 4 investigated the role of the workhouse museums in the community.
- (5) Theme 5 discussed the visitors from the viewpoint of the museum management.

The study investigates the role of tourism in the preservation of the workhouse buildings and how they have been adapted to accommodate visitors, but an important part of the study will examine visitor motivations and responses to the workhouse. It is the author's belief that without the interest of tourists, this aspect of Irish history will be lost outside of academic history circles, and that it is vital that this dark period of Irish history is remembered. Workhouse museums, where visitors can see for themselves the living conditions and hear the stories of the inhabitants from knowledgeable tour guides, have an important place in teaching Irish history, heritage, and the experiences that helped form Ireland today. There is a growing awareness of

workhouses and their impact on Irish society but little in the area of tourism. This chapter aims to fill a gap in the research, providing insights into how tourism can support the preservation of workhouses and their history, and the place workhouse museums hold in the wider community.

The workhouse system was designed to industrialise the relief of poverty in Britain and Ireland. To obtain any help, destitute and starving men, women, and children were forced to leave their homes and enter a system that would strip them of their dignity and force them to work long hours for the bare minimum of food and covering. Families were split up, men, women, girls, and boys were housed in separate buildings and were only allowed to meet with permission from the staff (Higginbotham, 2012; O'Connor, 1995). The system lasted in Ireland from 1838 to 1921. Many of the buildings associated with this aspect of Irish history have been demolished or repurposed, and others have fallen into dereliction.

In 2011, the Irish Workhouse Centre in Portumna, Co Galway, opened to the public. It is dedicated to telling the story of workhouses in Ireland in a respectful and sensitive manner. Donaghmore Famine Workhouse Museum in Co Laois tells the story of the workhouse in the context of the Famine and is also an agricultural museum, and Carrickmacross Workhouse in Monaghan tells the story of Carrickmacross Workhouse during the famine. Workhouse museums, where visitors can see for themselves the living conditions and hear the stories of the inhabitants from knowledgeable tour guides, have an important place in teaching Irish history, heritage, and the experiences that helped form Ireland today.

Donaghmore Workhouse opened in 1853, one of the last workhouses to be built in Ireland, and it closed as a workhouse in 1886. In 1927, the buildings became the site of the Donaghmore Co-operative which established a creamery to assist local farmers produce and sell butter. By the following year, Donaghmore was producing 400,000 gallons of milk at 2s 5d per gallon. In 1968, Donaghmore Co-op amalgamated with other creameries to form Avonmore, and more recently, Avonmore amalgamated with Waterford Creamery to form Glanbia PLC. Glanbia is still active on the site (Donaghmore Famine Museum, 2023).

In 1988, a voluntary committee formed to renovate and interpret the two front buildings, which are the most complete on the site. The former girls' building houses a large collection of agricultural and farmhouse implements, and the former boys building has a very well-preserved boys' dormitory as well as the Master's House, where the workhouse Master lived and had his office. The museum opened in 1992 and is still run by a voluntary committee with staff from Community Employment, Tús, and Rural Social Schemes. The Donaghmore Workhouse building is now owned by Laois County Council.

Portumna Workhouse opened in 1852 and closed in 1922. The infirmary continued to function for a few years longer before finally closing. After the workhouse closed, the buildings were put to a variety of uses, including a knitting factory, vegetable cooperative, potato packing company, metal body factory and offices for Inland Waterways, the Office of Public Works, as well as a storage yard for Galway County Council roads department. The County Show was held in the

grounds in the 1950s, but the buildings gradually fell into disuse from the 1970s onward. By 1992, the buildings were derelict and covered in ivy. Work began in 1999 to conserve the buildings, and they officially opened in 2011. Today, the ground floor of the girls' building, two floors of the women's building, and the dining hall are accessible to the public. There is a museum showing items from workhouses around the country and several permanent exhibitions, including work by sculptor Kieran Tuohy, and an exhibition about Polish humanitarian and explorer Pawel Strzelecki. Temporary exhibitions have included "1845 Memento Mori" by Paula Stokes, and an exhibition about Midwifery in the Workhouse. The Irish Workhouse Centre hosts regular conferences and seminars; the upstairs rooms of the girls' building are used for classes and courses. In 2022, the Irish Workhouse Centre hosted a play by *The Old Tuam Society* that was attended by the President and Mrs Higgins.

Literature Review

Interest in places of suffering and death dates back centuries (Lewis et al., 2021) but, although not new as a phenomenon, the study of dark tourism as a concept is more recent (Kunwar & Karki, 2019). The term, dark tourism, was coined in the 1990s, with the publication of a research paper on the topic by John Lennon and Malcolm Foley (Foley & Lennon, 1996). It was not the only attempt to understand the draw of death and suffering as a tourist activity. The same year, Seaton introduced the term thanatourism in relationship to visitors to battlefield sites (Seaton, 1996) and other researchers coined their own, including "morbid tourism" (Blom, 2000). Stone defined dark tourism as "visiting real or recreated places related with death, suffering, disgrace, or the macabre" (Stone, 2006). Lennon and Foley defined dark tourism as "phenomena which encompass the presentation of real and commodified death and disaster sites" (Foley and Lennon, 1996, p. 198). It is an umbrella term for classifying and understanding the places associated with death and dark emotions, as well as being used as an analytical instrument in conceptual research, rather than a clearly defined mode of tourism (Zerva, 2021). By focussing on death, Seaton's interpretation is much narrower than Lennon and Foley's definition (Light, 2017) making it more restrictive and concise while dark tourism can be symbolic and incorporate macabre feelings (Zerva, 2021). The simplest definition is that of a journalist in the Irish Times who states that they are "sites where man's inhumanity to man was perpetrated" (Boland, 2020). This definition shows the breadth of dark tourism in a way that many others don't, incorporating all aspects of the subject rather than a narrow focus on death and death sites. Boland writes of dark tourism as branding or marketing, suggesting that it is our interest that makes the site dark.

In tourism, it is the stories which are interesting to the visitor (Lussetyawati, 2015). Sharpley (2005) gives four types of dark tourism consumption – experience, where the consumption of the tourism product elicits feelings, thoughts, and emotions; play, the sharing of an experience where the site is a product to be used;

integration, where the experience is integrated into the sense of self; and classification. More recent research has shown that visitors to dark tourism sites are more often seeking knowledge and understanding of the events (Mangwane et al., 2019) which is no different to other types of culturally motivated tourist using their leisure time to gather new information and experiences, raising their cultural level, and satisfying cultural needs (Edwards, 2013). Sharpley questions whether there is a “dark” tourism sector at all, arguing that tourism motivated by fascination with death is rare and that the supply and demand of dark tourism sites is driven by other factors, suggesting that the many forms of dark tourism are alternative experiences (Sharpley, 2005). Tourism has a responsibility to engage visitors in powerful and transformative learning experiences (Packer & Ballantyne, 2016), and dark tourism certainly offers this.

A large part of tourism in Ireland is based around heritage that would be considered “dark,” such as Kilmainham Gaol, Spike Island, Strokestown House Famine Museum, and the Titanic Museum in Cobh, to name some of the best known. Despite this, there is currently little research into dark tourism in Ireland, although the area is growing. Some recent studies include narrative construction at Kilmainham Gaol (Ogliari, 2022), a historical study of Glasnevin Cemetery (Callan, 2019) and an investigation into the revitalization of the Harland and Wolff shipyard in Belfast (Hodson, 2019).

Author Gillian O’Brien, in an Irish Times article, suggests that the term “dark tourism” implies a certain exploitation of people (Boland, 2020), and it is this view of dark tourism being exploitative that could make scholars in Ireland reluctant to study it. Within dark tourism, it is necessary to be wary of exploitation, and ethics must be the priority; such sites need to be unbiased and to ensure images and artifacts are appropriately explained.

One study of dark tourism in Ireland investigates it as a tourism product for the Wild Atlantic Way (McLoughlin & Reis, 2019). They discuss how authenticity is important to the modern tourist, and that this is something that purpose-built museums lack. The authenticity of a site, such as a prison, is regarded as an essential element of the visit, engendering empathy and sympathy (McLoughlin & Reis, 2019). Research into dark tourism in Northern Ireland found that there were generational differences in how the use of areas affected by the troubles were viewed, with younger generations believing that use should be made of the history and the older generations believing that they were too recent (Simone-Charteris et al., 2018).

It is impossible to discuss heritage as a tourist product without considering the tourists. A very simple division is between “general” tourists who consume culture as part of a holiday and “specific” tourists who travel purposefully to engage in cultural tourism (Galí-Espelt, 2012; Richards, 1996). By understanding tourist motivations, providers will be able to offer a product that meets the needs of all stakeholders. This can revitalize the host community, giving heritage buildings a new economic value (Kordej-De Villa and Šulc, 2021). Cultural visitor satisfaction is delivered through authenticity (Park et al., 2019), through sense of place (Ashworth, 2009), and through a combination of visitor-related and context-related factors (Falk, 2011 cited by Richards, 2018). In a 2019 study of

the Irish Workhouse Centre, it was found that visitor's main motivation was to learn about the past, rather than to visit a place of suffering (Cunniffe, 2019), and that their reasons were very similar to visitors at other types of heritage sites.

Methodology

The study sought to understand the role of tourism in preserving the heritage, and particularly built heritage, of workhouses and the benefits of using the workhouses for tourism. The questions differed depending on whether the respondents were visitors to the workhouse or staff and were based on the research objectives outlined previously. Question 1 was investigated using an exit survey offered to visitors to the workhouse; questions 2–4 formed the basis of in-depth interviews with the workhouse management.

- *Research Objective 1:* What are the motivations of visitors to the workhouse, and what is their response to the visit?
- *Research Objective 2:* What are the main issues with using heritage buildings such as the workhouse for tourism?
- *Research Objective 3:* Does the need to be financially viable clash with other considerations (if any) of using the workhouse buildings as a tourist destination?
- *Research Objective 4:* What role, if any, do the workhouse museums play in the local community?

The research method used both a questionnaire and in-depth interviews. The intention was to gather both qualitative and quantitative data to allow a full understanding of the topic. Through the quantitative research, the intention was to understand emotional responses to visiting the workhouse and whether that differed with regards to demographics and visit intention. The qualitative research would enable in-depth understanding of how tourism affects the workhouse, as built heritage and as a dark heritage site. For this study, the reasons for choosing the mixed method approach were (i) triangulation, to find convergence and corroboration from the different methods, (ii) complementarity, seeking to enhance and elaborate upon findings, and (iii) to expand the enquiry and to access the breadth of knowledge held by professionals within the industry as well as the data from visitor surveys.

A questionnaire was offered to visitors to the Irish Workhouse Centre, to understand their motivations and responses to their visit. This was left at the reception desk, and visitors were asked to complete it at the end of their visit. They were made aware that the questionnaire was completely optional, and that it would only take a few minutes to complete. The research was carried out between October and early December 2022 during an extended season at the workhouse, meaning that there were fewer visitors than normal, and therefore, fewer respondents to the survey than would have been available had the research been carried out at high season. Most of the questions asked were closed, with boxes to

tick, but there was also an opportunity for the respondent to add a comment about their visit.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out with management at Donaghmore Famine Museum and the Irish Workhouse Centre to gather qualitative data. The goals of these interviews are to understand the experiences and perspectives of stakeholders responsible for the preservation and promotion of these heritage sites and how tourism has affected the buildings, whether tourism is the best use for the sites and what they think the future could be for the buildings.

Results

The purpose of this research was to investigate the importance of tourism to the Irish workhouse museums. The intention of the primary research was to answer a combination of research objectives and themes and to place the research in context with the secondary research carried out previously. There were four main themes to the research: visitor motivation; the main issues with using the buildings, and how they are used; financial viability; and the role of the museums in the community. It was found that the visitor information from the limited surveys corresponded with findings from other studies, and the interviewees were in agreement that the workhouse museums play an important role in educating visitors about the history of the workhouse, preserving the buildings for future use and supporting the local communities.

Research Objective 1: Visitor Motivation

The first objective was to explore the motivations of visitors and how they responded to their visit. This was done through visitor surveys and was also investigated from the provider's perspective. It was found that most visitors already had some knowledge of, or some level of interest in, workhouses and their visits were intentional rather than spontaneous, although the research did find that two of the three visitors who only entered because they saw the sign were also interested in history, and one ticked the interested in the famine box too. There has been a great deal of research recently into visitor motivations at dark tourism sites, with [Cunniffe \(2019\)](#), in a master's study at the Irish Workhouse Centre, finding that the interest in visiting the workhouse is very similar to that at other heritage sites. The interview respondents were in agreement that the visitors are vital to the long-term survival of the workhouse buildings, with a consensus that, without the tourist, there would be no need to keep the buildings in repair. Many workhouses were converted into schools, hospitals, and county homes, but others, such as Kells, have been demolished entirely. In telling the story of the workhouse, in authentic surroundings, it is possible to keep the history alive and to teach visitors about this dark period in authentic surroundings that make the telling rawer and more visceral.

Research Objective 2: The Main Issues Using the Buildings

This investigated the main issues using the workhouse buildings as a tourism destination. The interview respondents identified several main areas of interest. The predominant issue was with the repair and maintenance of the buildings themselves. The workhouses were built to house hundreds of people and therefore are very large, with dormitories and work rooms spread across numerous buildings. Over the years, there have been alterations to suit industrial uses as well as the decay resulting from abandonment, and this has left many of the buildings dangerous to access and with the need for expensive repairs. The museums rely on grant aid for the work, but both museums agree that authenticity is vital, and that repairs and rebuilding is undertaken using modern best practice. This means that, in areas that are important to telling the story of the workhouse, the spaces are left raw and authentic, but it also creates the opportunity to use more modern materials where appropriate, such as the glass doors in the Irish Workhouse Centre Museum. It also allows for necessary modifications for modern use to be made without compromising the integrity of the buildings, such as toilet facilities and kitchens. These interventions are essential to the long-term viability of the spaces.

Research Objective 3: Financial Viability

While the main purpose of the museums is to educate visitors about the history of the workhouses, both museums rely on public funds, such as Pobal, or schemes such as the Community Employment Scheme to do so. This can mean the long-term survival of the museums is precarious, and therefore, management at both venues is conscious of the need to expand the usage of the museums. Both management teams are open to community use of the museums as venues for music, plays, and art exhibitions, while the Irish Workhouse Centre has built a reputation for seminars, conferences, and training courses. Both teams also discussed the possibility of improving the buildings to create a more modern event space. Interestingly, both identified the same area, the former dining hall, as the best place for this.

Research Objective 4: Role in Community

Both management teams are aware of their role in the local community, providing facilities for the use of the community, for example, as an arts venue for Portumna Shorelines Arts Festival. They are also aware of the role they play drawing visitors to the area where they also spend in local businesses. One of the managers stated in the interview that he prefers to take phone calls rather than online bookings as then he can give suggestions for other destinations in the area as well as make recommendations for accommodation and dining. Management at both venues indicated that they are interested in expanding their role in the community.