

DARK TOURISM DESTINATIONS ATTRACT PEOPLE INTERESTED IN HISTORY



Ground Zero, Killing Fields in Cambodia, Fukushima, Auschwitz are names that everyone knows because of the terrible things that have shaped the world history. While the majority of us know these places only from history books or from media, there are also people who visited these sites deliberately. This tourist phenomenon has a name - Dark Tourism.

The niche can also be called “disaster tourism.” This type of travel is not a trend, but more of a tourism business, says Professor Urs Wagenseil from the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences. “I do not know any travel agencies that market such trips, but there are many local providers doing tours,” he explained.

Tourists Should Learn from History

Urs Wagenseil visited, among other places, the Auschwitz and Dachau concentration camps and also Ground Zero as well as the Killing Fields. But it had nothing to do with curiosity.

“This is not like an accident on the highway, where you may still see injured or dead people. **These tours are designed in such a way that the story can be experienced with the aim of learning from it so that it does not repeat itself.**”

What strikes him is the fact that in the case of group tours, there is an unbelievable calm. “Every participant is occupied with the tragedy, himself and what goes into him. After that, one has to process the experience first”. The tourist lecturer, therefore, prefers to speak of formative tourism rather than catastrophic or dark tourism destinations.

Most of these places are memorials, and one example is the tunnel in Paris, where Lady Diana had the fatal accident. “People do not want to see the accident itself, but above all to remember the person,” Wagenseil Explains.

Main Dark Tourism Destinations

Killing Fields Phnom Penh, Cambodia

Under the rule of the Maoist Khmer, between 1963 and 1998 nearly 21% (1.7 to 2.5 million) of the Cambodian population were brutally murdered. Scientists, teachers, doctors and other intellectuals were at the top of the black list of the Khmer Rouge. Many were probably executed in the Tuol-Sleng Prison in Phnom Penh, which served as a torture and interrogation center. The former grammar school is now a museum, and the Killing Fields comprise of over 300 sites in Cambodia where the mass murders took place. Various providers organize guided tours that give insight into this dark chapter of Cambodian history.

Chernobyl, Ukraine

On 26 April 1986, only 100 kilometers from Kiev, reactor number 4 exploded in Chernobyl and thousands of employees at the nuclear power plant lost their lives. The 43,000 inhabitants of the

town of Pripyat, only three kilometers from Chernobyl, had no idea of the disaster. On April 27, people were accustomed to their everyday life with 600,000 times more radiation exposure than usual. Only in the afternoon, they were informed that they had to leave the city within the next two hours. Since then, Pripyat is a ghost town that will remain uninhabitable for centuries. Various tour operators offer tours to the restricted area of around 35 kilometers. A device is always included, which measures the radioactivity. According to a provider of a 2-day tour, the body takes 500 times smaller dose of radiation than during an x-ray.

Auschwitz-Birkenau, Krakow, Poland

In the largest concentration camp (Auschwitz) and the extermination camp (Birkenau), about 1.5 million people were murdered. Auschwitz was the most prominent place for the “final solution of the Jewish question” and today is one of the most visited dark tourism destinations in the world. About one million of the people killed were Jews, but also Poles, Roma, Soviet prisoners of war, Czechs and Belarussians were among the victims. Today you can visit the places of horror and see, for example, the railway ramp, where the people were transported to Birkenau, as well as the remains of the gas chambers, prisoners’ barracks and barbed wire fences.

Fukushima, Japan

On March 11, 2011, a massive earthquake shook the coast of Japan, and this triggered a tsunami, 18,000 people were killed, and cities were extinguished. Meanwhile, the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear electricity power station fell, and it resulted in a nuclear meltdown, and some 170,000 people had to be evacuated. However, 20 kilometers around the nuclear power plant was declared a restricted area for tourists; and tours are offered to the city of Namie, which is eight kilometers away, as well as guided tours through fields where agriculture is now prohibited. Ship trips can also be booked, where one can reach the nuclear power plant up to 1.5 kilometers. Two nuclear events to an even bigger extent occurred in Japan also at the end of WW2 in the form of the atomic bomb explosion.

Guantanamo, Cuba

The US open-air prison was built on behalf of George Bush in Cuba in 2001 and belongs to the dark chapter of the US’s younger history. Originally, Al-Qaeda fighters were to be imprisoned there. Almost 800 inmates had been imprisoned there since the opening. As it turned out, around 90% of these were not Al-Qaeda fighters, and Barrack Obama announced the closing of the camp during his term of office. At the beginning of 2017, 41 prisoners were still present. Tourists can visit Cuba from the border town of Caimanera, north of the 118-square kilometer base. There is a small museum, where people can see the camp’s aerial photographs and a map showing the dimensions of the huge base.

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