

## INSIDE

*Hillatem sunt  
facero quaecto  
iminctiuntem  
andiciae nita  
eosCatiam*





# FALL INTO THE DARK SIDE

Dark tourism has become a buzzword in the modern era, that takes explorers to places associated with tragedy, death and suffering. Here's where you can find thrill in the dark side...

WORDS **CHRIS PARRY**





WHEN WE EXPERIENCE TRAVEL AND we seek adventures, we sometimes find more than what we're looking for, and I must admit that when exploring this travel topic, I realised that many of the sites I've visited, and sights I've seen, qualify for this type of tourism. Join me now as we enter the world of dark tourism.

It doesn't have to be morbid but it does have to involve death in wars, disasters, murders, torture, terrorism or assassination. The darker side of history has meat on the bone and the gristle as well. We try to put ourselves in the shoes of the fallen and maybe sometimes in the shoes of those responsible. It's about confirming our fears, confronting the reality of the history books we grew up with and perhaps providing closure on those images we've seen on our televisions in our own house, like that Paris tunnel in 1997 where Princess Diana was killed, or the New York City skyline in 2001.

The rise in tourist numbers at destinations such as Chernobyl, Fukushima, Bhopal, the concentration camps of World War II, prisoner of war camps in Changi, Sandakan and Ranau and to the killing fields of Cambodia and the bridge at Parit Sulong in Malaysia are all examples of a phenomenon that is attracting those seeking a broader understanding of the events that took place at those sites.

Interestingly, dark tourism has a long history and can be traced back to the famous Charge of the Light Brigade when the British fought the Russians in the Crimea in 1854. Bizarrely, if you could afford it, you could make your way from Britain to the Crimea and sit on the edge of the battlefield where you would be given a briefing by the British generals on what would be about to take place and then you would sit back and watch the action unfold from the comfort of your wicker chair and parasol, gin and tonic in one hand while reaching for a slice of cake with the other.









## THE RISE IN TOURIST NUMBERS AT CHERNOBYL, FUKUSHIMA, BHOPAL, THE CONCENTRATION CAMPS ARE ALL EXAMPLES OF A PHENOMENON

In Australia, many events and sites may be seen as dark tourism. Off the Western Australian coast on the Abrolhos Islands in 1629 the Dutch East India Company ship Batavia ran aground and the ensuing mutiny saw 125 men, women and children brutally slaughtered. The islands can be visited for an understanding of these events and there are also museum exhibitions in the cities of Geraldton and Fremantle, displaying grisly skulls marked with the slashes of the mutineer's swords.

In Snowtown, South Australia, the little bank where the bodies in the barrels were discovered in the late 1990's is a popular stop for people wanting to take a quick photo.

In India unarmed civilians, shot by the British Army in 1919 at Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar, were in a walled garden with no opportunity to escape and the soldiers only stopped firing when they ran out of bullets, leaving at least one thousand dead. This is a popular site to visit and view the memorial and also the chips and holes in the walls from the bullets.

Most issues in our lives have a line that we decide we will or won't cross. Dark tourism has many lines that cross in different directions, challenging our sense of morbidity, appropriateness, and thresholds of respect.

In my home of Perth, there was a serial killer in the late 1950's and early 1960's called the 'Night Caller', killing eight people and injuring and maiming more than twenty others. Eric Edgar Cook was unique among most serial killers, in that he used a variety of methods to terrorise and kill his victims, from running them down as he drove the streets of Perth at night, shooting people on their front doorstep, stabbing them with scissors and strangling them as they slept. While it's a morbidly fascinating crime and trauma history for many people, it is impossible to contemplate that there could ever be a walking tour of his



murder sites, yet in London the opportunity to participate in a Jack the Ripper tour is one that I've undertaken myself and regard as a wonderful experience.

Jack the Ripper was never identified. He stalked the Whitechapel district of London in 1888, cut the throats and grimly disembowelled and removed organs from at least three of his known five victims. Then the murders stopped. This tour is wonderful. Walking the streets late at night with great guides who can tell great stories is an experience that filled me with horror and delight.

These two serial killer stories from different points in time help define dark tourism. There appears to be a requirement that time is needed to allow for the macabre to become a tourist attraction. It's not a strict rule however because modern day disaster sites, particularly industrial disaster sites have become almost an obsession for many tourists and those seeking social media fame.

Being able to post footage and photos at sites that are sealed off to the public, like Chernobyl, is at the extreme end of dark tourism.

Throughout Poland and Germany, the concentration camps of World War II continue to attract rising numbers of tourists, as do the battlefield sites such as the beaches of Normandy and the fields of the Somme. Battlefield tourism is also dark tourism but there is an element of contemplation and understanding history that is important to these tourists that may be lacking in those who visit sites that are unsafe.

Dark tourism can provide that link between what I earlier described as seeing on your television or perhaps reading in the history books. In America, the site where President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas, is marked on the road with a white cross. Dark tourism can be described as almost a pilgrimage for many people. Visiting the site of an iconic disaster, war or assassination can provide a sense of understanding and closure. President Kennedy's death was captured on film and it remains one of the most iconic deaths in world history where those who remember it, also remember where they were and what they were doing when they heard the news.

One of Australia's most revered cultural stories is the 1915 battle of Gallipoli, in Turkey at the beginning of World War I. This battle was lost by the Australian, New Zealand, British and Indian troops but in Australia we remember those who fought and died there every year and remind ourselves of the stories. To visit this site and see that an area called the Nek, where famous and controversial actions took place, is little more in size than a couple of tennis courts, is an extraordinary way to put in context what happened to those young men all those years ago.

Whether dark tourism is entirely ethical is another issue and whether dark tourism should have a greater responsibility and understanding of the sensitivity of the site is also worthy of discussion. Taking a selfie at the gates leading into Auschwitz concentration camp is at first glance going to look appalling but I think perhaps we need to understand that the selfie being taken becomes part of the modern telling of the story of Auschwitz and can be acceptable as long as it is presenting empathy and information that isn't not mocking or disrespectful.



**BEING ABLE TO POST FOOTAGE AT SITES THAT ARE SEALED OFF TO THE PUBLIC, LIKE CHERNOBYL, IS AT THE EXTREME END OF DARK TOURISM**







I wish the sites that can be defined as dark tourism that I've visited had never become sites known for those events, but because those events did occur, I find it important to my understanding to get beyond the books and documentaries and create my own understanding. This then helps me tell the story of those events in my writing or just talking to my family and friends.

Like all travel experiences, whether it be a luxury cruise or the site of an industrial disaster, always show respect for those around you and tell your story well. What you put into an experience is what you get out of an experience and some experiences require you to then educate and inform others.

### ESCAPE PLAN

Covid-19: While vaccination programs continue to roll out across the world and Australia has a program in place to vaccinate its population by the end of 2021, international travel is still not likely to resume until 2022. Check regularly with police, health and customs authorities before travelling.

Dark tourism sites: Researched sites and available tours carefully to respect local communities and culture. Most dark tourism sites operate under strict tour conditions that do not allow for self-guided experiences. 

