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"It's not that we like death or anything": Exploring the motivations and experiences of visitors to a 'lighter' dark tourism attraction

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Abstract

This paper explores motives for visiting a 'lightest' dark (heritage) tourism attraction. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with 24 visitors to the London Dungeon. Few visitors reported an interest in death, suffering or the macabre as important in their decision to visit, a finding which accords with research at a range of other types of 'darker' places. Instead, most people visited from general or incidental reasons that were unrelated to the attraction's theme. However, while few visitors stated that an interest in learning was important in their reason for visiting, many reported that an element of informal education and discovery was an important part of the visit experience. As such, 'lighter' dark tourism is about more than entertainment and the London Dungeon offers opportunities for visitors to engage with the themes and stories in a deeper way. Overall, these findings suggest that lightest dark tourism has more in common with heritage tourism than at first appears.

Keywords:

Lightest dark tourism; motivations; informal learning; edutainment; London Dungeon

Introduction

Over the past two decades, tourism at heritage places associated with death or suffering has attracted considerable academic attention. This form of tourism goes under various names, including dark tourism, thanatourism, death tourism and, increasingly, dark heritage. Research into such forms of tourism was initially dominated by a case study approach which, while successful in highlighting the diversity of forms of dark heritage tourism had little to say about the people who visited such places (Seaton and Lennon 2004; Seaton 2009). However, in recent years the research focus has shifted towards understanding visitors to places of death and suffering. The motivations of such visitors have received particular scrutiny and a growing body of research has questioned the assumption that tourists visit such places from a defined interest in death. Instead a range of other motives appear to be more important including curiosity; a desire for learning and understanding about tragic events; the desire to remember victims of such events; a concern to affirm collective (particularly national) identities; a wish to 'connect' with tragic events, and a sense of obligation. As a result the question of whether it is appropriate to describe visitors to places of death or suffering as 'dark tourists' is assuming increasing prominence. Consequently, various researchers have argued that, in many ways, dark tourists appear to be little different from heritage tourists (Biran, Poria and Oren 2011; Roberts and Stone 2014).

From an early stage, it was apparent that the term 'dark tourism' embraced a wide range of sites offering different sorts of experiences for their visitors. As such, there were attempts to engage with the heterogeneity of dark tourism places. Both Miles (2002) and Stange and Kempa (2003) argued that some sites could be conceptualised as 'darker' than others, and this notion was expanded by Stone (2006) who proposed a spectrum of dark tourism supply. At one end of the spectrum are the 'darkest' sites, usually located where death has occurred. At such sites the primary focus is education and remembrance and providing services for visitors is a lower priority. At the other end of the spectrum are the 'lightest' sites. These usually have an association with death and suffering but are not centred on an authentic resource or location. They are deliberately intended to be visitor attractions and consequently are more commercial in orientation and usually have a focus on entertainment.

The notion of a spectrum of dark tourism supply has been widely critiqued. For example, Dale and Robinson (2011) contend that the attribution of sites to points on the dark-light spectrum is ultimately subjective. Others have argued that darkness is socially constructed by different visitors in different ways so that no heritage place or attraction is intrinsically 'dark' (Jamal and Lelo 2011; Ashworth and Isaac 2015). This relates to a broader

critique about the appropriateness of the term 'dark' to describe tourism at places of death or suffering (Seaton 2009; Bowman and Pezzullo 2009). Others argue that a continuum based on an education-entertainment binary is inappropriate in some contexts and countries (Yoshida, Bui and Lee 2016). Nevertheless, Stone's model is of use in recognising that tourist places/sites associated with death take a wide variety of forms, and will therefore involve very different forms of experiences for visitors.

To date, dark tourism research has predominantly focused on particular types of site (which represent, the 'darker' end of Stone's spectrum): concentration camps, battlefields, prisons, sites associated with slavery, and the sites of natural disasters. Similarly, most studies of the motivations of visitors have focused on the 'darker' types of site or attraction that are associated with atrocity or tragic events. Conversely, the nature of 'lighter' dark tourism has received very little attention, meaning that visitors to such places are poorly understood (Stone 2009a). As such, it may not be appropriate to include such places under the umbrella of dark tourism. This paper therefore seeks to address this issue (building on Stone's exploratory study of visitors to such attractions (2009a)) by focusing on the motivations and experiences of visitors to a 'lightest' dark tourism attraction: the London Dungeon. The paper argues that most visitors showed little interest in death or suffering, and instead most visited for general or incidental reasons that were unrelated to the attraction's principle theme. However, visitors were much more engaged with the site than might be assumed and for many the visit included learning and understanding as much as 'mere' entertainment.

Motivations for visiting places of death and suffering

Early accounts of both dark tourism and thanatourism were based on an implicit assumption that tourists who visited places of death or suffering were motivated by an interest in death. However, attempts to explain why tourists visit such places usually relied on speculation or assumption (rather than empirical research with visitors). The foundational text about dark tourism (Lennon & Foley 2000) said little about why people visited places associated with death but suggested that such motives were due to serendipity, curiosity, or simply as part of itineraries that had been pre-arranged by tour companies. At the same time they excluded visitors with 'specialist' motives (such as those with a personal connection to the deaths that took place at a particular site or those with an interest in military technology) from the category of dark tourism. The notion that some tourists had a specific interest in death was more explicit in the concept of thanatourism, defined as "travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death,

particularly, but not exclusively, violent death” (Seaton, 1996, p.240). However, Seaton acknowledged that such motives would vary in intensity depending upon whether they were combined with other motivations, and on the extent of the visitor’s personal connection with the dead. Seaton identified five categories of thanatourism: travel (rare in the present day) to witness actual deaths; visiting the sites of mass/individual death; visiting grave sites and memorial to the dead; viewing symbolic representations of death; and travelling to watch re-enactments or simulations of death.

At a later stage, Ashworth and Hartmann (2005) proposed three principle reasons for why tourists visit places associated with atrocity or suffering. The first was curiosity and an interest in the unusual in the same way that a tourist might visit any sort of unique or extraordinary attraction. The second was empathy and a desire to identify with the victims of atrocity. The third was the thrill associated with horror, reflecting a broader link between violence and entertainment. Other proposed motives for visiting places associated with death included *schadenfreude* (Seaton & Lennon, 2004); a childlike curiosity to discover more about death (Dann, 2005); nostalgia (Tarlow, 2005); and the contemplation of mortality (Seaton & Lennon, 2004). The wide range of suggested motives was itself an indication of how little was understood about why tourists visit places associated with death and suffering (Light 2017).

A later wave of research into the motivations of visitors sought to move beyond speculation through directly engaging with visitors themselves. Some studies have provided support for the contention that interest in death is an important part of such motivations. For example, Preece and Price (2005) noted that 25% of visitors to Port Arthur, Australia (a 19th century prison and site of a mass murder in the 1990s) showed a fascination with the abnormal or bizarre, but overall this was the least important reason for visiting. Podoshen (2013) investigated the motives of visitors to sites associated with the black metal subculture in Norway. He reported that visitors were seeking contact and connection and some were “seeking to immerse themselves close to death” (p.269). In a study of the motivations of visitors to cemeteries in Britain, Raine (2013) reported that some people were motivated by morbid curiosity and an interest in horror and death. Biran, Liu, Li and Eichhorn (2014) noted that around 12% of visitors to the site of an earthquake in China were motivated by fascination with the earthquake and the dark attributes of the site. Another study (Podoshen, Venkatesh, Wallin, Andrzejewski & Jin, 2015) explored the motivations of visitors at three sites associated with violence, death and bleakness in America, Switzerland and Norway. They contend that visitors were motivated by a desire to explore and connect with death, and confront insecurities about death and society.

Conversely, a growing number of research studies have questioned the assumption that interest in, or curiosity about, death is important within motives for visiting places of

death and suffering. For example, Biran, Poria and Oren (2011, p.836) noted that, among visitors to Auschwitz-Birkenau, “interest in death is the least important reason for the visit”. Similarly, in a study of visitors to a Second World War transit camp in the Netherlands, Isaac and Çakmak (2014) reported that an interest in death was not mentioned as a reason for visiting by any of the research participants. Research at sites associated with war and conflict has reached similar conclusions. Le and Pearce (2011, p.461) noted that most visitors to the battlefield sites in Vietnam associated with the demilitarized zone “do not come across as particularly “dark” tourists”, while Farmaki (2013) reported little interest in death among visitors to sites associated with the struggle for independence in Cyprus. Similarly, there was little evidence of motives linked to a morbid or voyeuristic interest in death among Australian visitors to the Gallipoli battlefields in Turkey (Cheal & Griffin 2013), findings echoed at dark tourism places in the USA (Tinson, Saren & Roth 2015). In a different context, Sharpley (2012, p.104) noted that visitors to sites associated with the Rwandan genocide were not “motivated by morbid fascination” but visited for a range of other reasons. Research undertaken at places associated with natural disasters have also concluded that many tourists visit for reasons that had no connection to the disaster itself (Rittichainuwat, 2008; Biran et al., 2014; Yan, Zhang, Zhang, Lu & Guo, 2016).

Instead, there is a growing body of research evidence which challenges the widely-held view that dark tourism “entails fascination with death as a primary reason of attraction” (Korstanje & George, 2015, p.13). Instead, other reasons for visiting are more important. Numerous studies have highlighted a desire for education, learning and understanding of past events as an important part of visitors’ motives (Best, 2007; Le & Pearce, 2011; Bigley Lee, Chon and Yoon, 2010; Biran et al., 2011; Kang, Scott, Lee & Ballantyne, 2012; Sharpley, 2012; Farmaki, 2013; Isaac & Çakmak, 2014). In other cases, visitors want to see for themselves a site of tragedy or atrocity in order to believe and better understand it (Bigley et al., 2010; Biran et al., 2011; Dunkley, Morgan & Westwood, 2011). Other motives include remembrance (Dunkley et al., 2011; Isaac & Çakmak, 2014); a desire to show empathy with victims (Biran et al., 2011; Isaac & Çakmak, 2014); and, in some cases, a powerful sense of duty or obligation (Sharpley, 2012). Other studies have suggested that visits to places of death and suffering are underpinned by a search for an (emotional) connection with one’s personal heritage or life story (Biran et al., 2011; Hyde & Harman, 2013) and in this sense such visits are a means to ground senses of personal identity. At another scale, such visits can be a way of affirming national identities through visiting places associated with iconic events in a nation’s history (Hyde and Harman, 2011; Cheal & Griffin, 2013; Tinson et al., 2015).

Overall, it is clear that tourists visit dark places and attractions from a wide variety of motives and in many cases “interest in death may be minimal or non-existent, or the

association with death may be of little relevance” (Sharpley, 2012, p.97; see also Sharpley, 2005). Consequently it is important to differentiate between “a dark tourist and... a tourist to a dark site (Biran et al., 2014, p.14; see also Poria, Butler and Airey (2003) who propose a distinction between heritage tourists and tourists visiting heritage places). Moreover the motives of visitors to places associated with death are often very similar to those of heritage tourists (Biran et al., 2011; Biran & Poria, 2012; Miles, 2014) making it increasingly problematic to draw a clear distinction between dark tourism and heritage tourism. Furthermore, ‘true’ dark tourists – people for whom an interest in, or desire for an encounter with, death is important in their reasons for visiting places of death – may be relatively rare (Light 2017).

However, to date, almost all studies of the motives for visiting places associated with death and suffering has focused on the ‘darker’ types of site, particularly those associated with war, the Holocaust, incarceration, genocide or slavery (Light 2017). Conversely, ‘lighter’ sites and attractions have been largely neglected (Stone, 2009a). The reasons are unclear, although it may be the case that the most powerful instances of death and atrocity seem more deserving of academic scrutiny (and raise broader issues of commodification and authenticity) against which entertainment-based attractions centred on torture and suffering seem insubstantial and trivial in comparison. Furthermore, issues of fun, pleasure and play are frequently overlooked within tourism research in favour of ‘bigger’ issues and debates. Although a few studies have examined ‘ghost tourism’ as a form of dark tourism (Garcia, 2012; White, 2013; Heidelberg, 2015, see also Holloway, 2010) none has focussed on motives for participating in such tourism. One study that explicitly sought to elucidate the nature of the ‘lightest’ form of dark tourism was Stone’s (2009a) study of the York Dungeon, a site which presents pain, torture and suffering as a form of entertainment. This study focussed on the expectations and experiences of visitors and the ways in which they negotiate mortality in a leisure setting but had little to say about the reasons why people visited the attraction. Overall, then, it is clear that ‘lighter’ dark tourism in general – and the motives for visiting entertainment-based dark heritage attractions in particular – is an under-researched topic. It is this issue that we seek to address in this paper.

Research Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore the motivations and experiences of visitors to a ‘lightest’ form of dark tourism attraction, and the importance of an interest in death or the macabre within such motives. The site selected for study was the London Dungeon, located in central London, UK. This attraction – termed a “dark fun factory” by Stone (2006, p.152) - offers visitors an experience based on fun, horror and thrill through an encounter with

suffering and death. This attraction opened in 1976 and is operated by Merlin Entertainments (a UK-based company which operates internationally). The attraction's website (www.thedungeons.com/london/en/) describes the site as offering "an amazing cast of theatrical actors, special effects, stages, scenes and rides in a truly unique and exciting walkthrough experience that you see, hear, touch, smell and feel. It's hilarious fun and it's sometimes a bit scary". The Dungeons feature a series of displays themed around death, torture and suffering in previous periods of history, including medieval practices of torture and execution; the executions associated with King Henry VIII; London in the time of the Plague; and the crimes of Jack the Ripper (a serial killer in East London in the 1880s). In summer 2017 a visit cost £21 (\$27.4/€23.5) for an adult (although many discounts and special offers are available) with the visit lasting 90 minutes. Figures for visitor numbers are not available but the attraction is widely recognised as one of the most popular in London (Powell and Iankova 2016).

Permission was given by the attraction's manager for data collection with visitors over a weekend in Spring 2016. A qualitative research methodology involving semi-structured interviews was adopted. The interviews were undertaken by the first author. A form of non-probability sampling was employed where visitors were approached as they were leaving the attraction. Upon completion of an interview the next visitor to pass the interviewer was approached and invited to take part in the interviews. In total, 30 people were approached but 6 were unwilling to participate (mostly because they did not consider that they spoke English sufficiently well). As a result, 24 usable interviews were completed (giving a response rate of 80%). Interviewing continued until the interviewer deemed that the interviews were not producing any new data (that is, data saturation had been achieved). The interviews (which were recorded with the permission of respondents) ranged in length from 10 to 20 minutes. Each participant was asked three initial questions, the first being "why have you come here today" which was intended to explore motivations for visiting the attraction (the other two questions were not relevant to the subject of this paper and are not reported here). Responses to the initial question were followed by further, unscripted questions that were intended to explore initial responses in more detail.

The characteristics of the interviewees are presented in Table 1. This sample is treated as broadly representative of visitors to the London Dungeon, although visitors whose first language was not English are under-represented. For this reason, the research findings apply predominantly to British visitors to the London Dungeon. Since data collection took place outside the school holidays in the UK it may also mean that family groups are under-represented (around one-fifth of visitor groups included children).

The interviews were subsequently transcribed and analysed using thematic analysis (Bryman 2016). This involved initial repeated reading of the transcripts, followed by manual

coding of the data from which categories/themes were identified. Only those themes relating to motives for visiting the London Dungeon, along with wider aspects of the experience of visiting the attraction are reported in the following discussion.

Research Findings

To gain an initial insight into the motives for visiting the London Dungeon, the principal reasons for visiting mentioned by the interviewees are presented in Table 2. Two overarching categories of motivation were apparent. The first was an interest in horror and the macabre, although this motive was mentioned by only five visitors. The second category could be broadly described as 'general' or 'incidental' motives that are unrelated to horror or death (19 interviewees). The following discussion considers each of these categories of motives in turn. In addition, the coding and analysis of the interviews suggested a third reason – an interest in learning about the past – which, although only mentioned as a reason for visiting by one person, proved to be an important part of the visit experience for many visitors. In the following discussion the numbers following interview quotations refer to the interviewees listed in Table 1.

An interest in horror and the macabre

Five people mentioned an interest in the 'dark' attributes of the London Dungeon (particularly its association with horror and torture) as important in their decision to visit the attraction. At first sight these visitors would appear to be dark tourists (and also thanatourists since they are travelling to view symbolic representations of death). However, even among these five people there was considerable variation in motives for visiting. Three people declared that they had a prior interest in horror films, and that visiting the Dungeon was an expression (and extension) of this interest. For example, one visitor stated: "I really like horror movies; that is why I came here" [2]. Similarly, another person reported:

"I like watching horror movies...it was because of the thrill I get out of watching movies and I just wanted to take it to the next level. I knew they [The London Dungeon] have live actors and I just wanted to feel a bit more involved and scared" [1]

The relationship between horror, violence and entertainment is well established within contemporary popular culture (Ashworth 2008) and its origins can be traced to the Gothic

novels of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (Dann 2005; McEvoy 2016). With its presentations based on “torture and the suffering body” (Holloway 2010, p.632), the London Dungeon offers experiences and emotions that are similar to some forms of horror cinema and, for fans of such films, a trip to the Dungeon appears to be an extension of their wider leisure interests. Such visits can, therefore, be considered as a specific form of film-induced tourism (Beeton, 2016) but unlike most forms of such tourism it does not involve visiting locations that are featured in a film or where filming took place. Instead, a prior interest in a broader cinematic genre has stimulated some fans to visit an attraction with a related theme.

Two other visitors stated that they visited for an experience of suffering and the macabre. One visitor stated: “I love the dark side of history...Nothing like a good torture...it is a must-see attraction for the bloodthirsty visitor” [4], while another stated that their reason for visiting was “for history as well as love for learning about death” [7]. For these visitors the simulations of suffering and torture presented at London Dungeon offer “the thrill of proximity to horror, albeit through a temporary willing suspension of disbelief” (Ashworth & Hartmann, 2005:9). The site offers experiences of fear, fright and trepidation, but presented in a context of entertainment, and in the socially acceptable setting of a tourist attraction (Stone, 2006). However it is also noteworthy that both visitors framed their interest in suffering and the macabre within a broader interest in history: they were interested in horror and suffering in its historic context. This again highlights the difficulties in drawing a clear distinction between dark tourism and heritage tourism (see Biran et al., 2011; Roberts & Stone, 2014).

However, while the five visitors in this category were all drawn to the site’s association with suffering and horror, only one of them specifically mentioned an interest in death (something frequently assumed to be at the heart of both dark tourism and thanatourism). Conversely several visitors specifically denied having any particular interest in (or curiosity about) death of itself. One visitor said: “It’s not that we like death or anything, it’s just that we like the thrill... It’s more about history than death” [20]. Another stated: “I didn’t really have an interest so much in death but it was rather stimulated through the gore I saw on movies” [2]. For these visitors, an enjoyment of suffering and horror did not equate to a fascination with death (even if death was continually implied by the simulation of suffering). These findings broadly support previous studies (Preece & Price, 2005; Biran et al., 2011, 2014; Isaac & Çakmak, 2014) which, although undertaken in very different contexts, have similarly reported that an interest in death, suffering or horror was not important within reasons for visiting places with such associations.

General or incidental motives for visiting

Most interviewees visited for reasons that were incidental or unrelated to the theme of the London Dungeon. Three respondents stated that they had visited previously and were returning to see if anything had changed. For example one said: "I went to London Dungeons as part of a Year 7 history school trip...I wanted to come again when I was more grown up and be able to understand it in a different light" [8]. Three other respondents stated that the London Dungeon was just another attraction to visit whilst in London. One said: "We had some spare time in London and wanted to do something interesting. I am on a weekend break to London and needed to fill some time in the afternoon" [11]. Clearly for many visitors, a trip to the London Dungeon takes place within the broader context of a visit to London, where it is just one of a number of possible attractions to visit. Similar findings have been reported in other contexts: in their study of motives for visiting a Holocaust site in the Netherlands, Isaac and Çakmak (2014) argue that visiting is often a form of "derived demand" (p.174) where the site represents one of a set of possibilities for visits that are not pre-planned.

Other interviewees mentioned that the Dungeons represented a fun thing to do whilst in the capital city. One said: "well we were in London and my wife hasn't been before...it was quite convenient for us to get to, so just something fun to do" [17]. Another said that he had visited "for a fun day out...and of course you'd come to the Dungeons for that" [22]. In this context, several visitors spoke of the thrill and excitement of being scared. One said: "I like being scared so yeah, I heard it was a good laugh" [16] while another said: "the idea of someone trying to scare you, and the adrenaline rush associated with that, still appeals" [9]. Such sensations are not unique to attractions such as the London Dungeon: a similar association between entertainment, scares and thrills has been reported by Holloway (2010) in the context of ghost tours and Light (2009) in the context of Halloween visits to Transylvania. However, scares and fear are not exclusive to 'lighter' dark tourism since similar experiences are part of rollercoaster rides at theme parks. This raises the broader question of why (some) visitors enjoy being scared during their leisure time, an issue which has been neglected within tourism research. Some researchers have focused on broader issues of fear – which as Fennell (2017) argues is itself an under-researched aspect of tourism - although this is largely concerned with perceptions of destinations as being unsafe, fear of crime and personal safety in destinations, and travel in dangerous places. There is also a growing body of research which explores the importance of risk, fear and thrills in the context of adventure tourism (e.g. Cater 2006; Carnicelli-Filho, Schwartz and Tahara 2010). However, experiences such as those offered by attractions like the London Dungeon - which offer scares and thrills without risk - await fuller attention from tourism researchers. To

explore this issue further may require engaging with a broader literature on horror as entertainment within disciplines such as film studies.

Other motives were based on curiosity: visitors had heard about the attraction and were curious to find out more. For example, one visitor said that she had visited “because we heard about it and we just wanted to see what it was like” [14]. Curiosity can be an important motive for visiting places associated with violence or suffering, and Ashworth (2008) argues that visitors are drawn to sites and experiences which are unusual or which stand outside everyday life. Their motives are similar to those for visiting anything out of the ordinary, and do not necessarily reflect a particular (or morbid) interest in suffering or the macabre. For other visitors, a trip to the London Dungeon was simply a way of sharing time with friends or relatives. One person stated that they visited because “it’s my birthday...and because it’s just a day out in London. My girlfriend has been before and she liked it so we thought we would come along again” [16]. Another stated that she was on a date and her partner had not been before. Other interviewees reported that their decision to visit the attraction was due to the availability of cheap or discounted tickets. For example: “I...went to Madame Tussauds and they had a special deal, discounted entrance at the attractions and the Dungeons was one of them” [23].

Again, these findings suggest that death, suffering or the macabre were incidental to motives for visiting the London Dungeon, rather than a central component of such motives. As such, most visitors to the attraction are not dark tourists. The attraction’s theme of torture and suffering will deter some visitors but may appeal to others when planning an itinerary in London. Visitors appear to be motivated by an expectation of an enjoyable experience and, in some cases, a broader curiosity about the topics presented. Conceptualised in terms of traditional approaches to tourism motivation, ‘pull’ factors (the opportunity to visit an attraction in London with an unusual theme) appear to be more important for most visitors than ‘push’ factors (intrinsic desires to visit somewhere connected with death or the macabre). Two other issues are worthy of note. First, the motives of many visitors are broadly similar to those proposed for dark tourists by Lennon and Foley (2000): serendipity, the organised itineraries of tour companies or mere curiosity. Lennon and Foley did not include entertainment-based attractions like the London Dungeon in their conceptualisation of dark tourism, but the evidence from this study suggests that such motives are more characteristic of the ‘lightest’ forms of dark tourism (even if there is little evidence for them at most ‘darker’ types of site or attraction). Second, the predominance of ‘general’ motives echoes previous research into motives for visiting heritage sites which has also reported the importance of recreational or relaxation motives in a range of contexts (Prentice, Davies and Beeho, 1997; Poria, Butler and Airey, 2004, 2006; Vargas-Sánchez, Porras-Buena & de los Ángeles Plaza-Mejía, 2013; Wu and Wall, 2017; Kempfiak, Hollywood, Boland and

McMahon-Beattie, 2017). In many ways, most visitors to the London Dungeon resemble the incidental cultural tourists identified by McKercher and Du Cros (2003) more than dark tourists.

Informal learning within the visit experience

Learning about the past was not an important part of motivations for visiting the London Dungeon. Only one person specifically mentioned learning when discussing their reason for visiting: “I feel it is necessary to know the history of my country and I like serious destinations which make you think about how hard was the life for people before and how much better it is now” [6]. However, while an interest in learning was not a major motive for visiting, it was clear that informal learning and discovery was an important part of the visit experiences for many respondents (including those who visited for a range of ‘general’ reasons). One stated: “I am very interested in the dungeons and the history behind it” [11] while another said: “I would say it’s nice to find out how it was” [20]. In particular, several interviewees emphasised that the London Dungeon was educational for children. One said: “for children this is a great way to get them involved in history and to start an interest in them” [8]. Another suggested that “the history of our capital city is very interesting...London Dungeons is more about our history too, which can be deemed educational for our children and our community” [11].

A further indication of the importance of learning as part of the visit experience was apparent in visitors’ perception of their own learning. A majority (14 out of 24) of the interviewees reported that they had learned something during their visit. One visitor declared: “I personally came out learning a lot which I guess was the purpose of me coming here in the first place” [9]. In some cases visitors reported learning specific facts: “I now know that the plague was in 1841...It’s good because you learn different things about the history of London which sometimes you wouldn’t necessarily know” [15]. In other cases, visitors had gained a more general understanding of life in the past: “the Dungeons taught me about the lifestyles and the way of life itself in the time Jack the Ripper was alive...I guess I now know more about the horrible past and I feel that I have expanded my historical knowledge” [3]. Another person said: “it gives you an insight into the reality of how they lived” [9].

Moreover, several visitors highlighted how the attraction’s approach to presenting history had enhanced their understanding. One specifically contrasted the attraction with the more static approach to presentation that is common in museums: “I think that learning about the dark side of our past is interesting and it is exciting because you have the live actors making it a little bit more real... it gets rid of the museum atmosphere” [3]. Others

spoke with enthusiasm of how they felt that they were participating in the stories presented to them (rather than passive spectators) and that this had enhanced their understanding and learning. For example one person said: “I was walking around, going back in time, with each scene done in perfect detail and smell...I became part of the attraction...I came alive and for a split second I was a part of history” [4]. Similarly: “people also seemed pretty inquisitive about the history behind it, which was stimulated by being immersed in the experience” [9]. The sorts of experiences provided by the London Dungeon create opportunities for visitors to reflect and engage with the stories presented in a deeper way which goes beyond fun and entertainment (see Witcombe (2013) on the potential of ‘immersive’ experiences).

In addition to offering opportunities for learning about the past, some visitors also considered that a visit to the Dungeon was morally educational. In particular their visit was an occasion to reflect on how norms of behaviour had changed since the periods of history represented in the attraction (see Stone 2009a). For example one visitor said: “it teaches us and warns us about the past evils... we all learn from our mistakes” [3]. Another visitor made a similar comment:

“I feel safe, definitely, from how things have changed. It is different and now it’s changed. But I think we should know, even though it is gruesome...you just have to see it somewhere along the line that things have changed for the better” [24]

Another visitor recognised simply that he was “thankful for the world we live in now” [15]. Clearly, some visitors developed an increased awareness of how societies have changed since the era when torture was a common part of the judicial process. These findings also support Stone’s claim (2012, p.1580) that dark tourism attractions can offer “guidance and moral instruction to the living”, by underlining how society has progressed. As such, dark tourism attractions – and the London Dungeon in particular - can be conceptualised as “new communicative spaces” (Stone 2009b, p.63) in which visitors can reflect upon and affirm moral meanings and norms.

These findings sit uneasily with claims that sites such as the London Dungeon offer a commodified and rather frivolous form of entertainment (Dale & Robinson, 2010; Powell & Iankova, 2016; see also Seaton & Lennon, 2004) which is assumed to have little educational value. There is a long-standing belief (in Britain) that education and entertainment are somehow incompatible (Greenhalgh, 1989) and the education/entertainment binary is a well-established theme in both dark tourism and heritage tourism research (Foley & Lennon, 1997; Lennon & Foley, 2000; Stone, 2006; Powell & Iankova, 2016; see also the critique of Bowman & Pezzullo 2009). However, while the London Dungeon aims primarily to entertain, it is clear that it is also a source of historical information for visitors (cf Hertzman, Anderson

and Rowley, 2008). A visit to the London Dungeon provided visitors with opportunities for informal learning and understanding within the broader context of fun and entertainment, and many visitors took advantage of these opportunities. The notion of 'edutainment' – a concept pioneered by the Disney theme parks – has been widely criticised by both media and academic commentators, but visitors to the London Dungeon appeared to have little difficulty reconciling fun with learning. As one visitor stated: "I found it very educational and fun, and felt like I had a good day out" [18]. Another said: "it was an enjoyable and thought-provoking experience while still being light-hearted" [11].

These findings also further clarify the nature of 'lighter' dark tourism. Previous research studies at 'darker' sites have indicated that learning and understanding are important elements of motives for visiting places associated with death or suffering (Preece & Price, 2005; Best, 2007; Bigley et al., 2010; Biran et al., 2011; Le & Pearce, 2011; Kang et al., 2012; Isaac & Çakmak, 2014; Yankholmes & McKercher 2015). Perhaps unsurprisingly, such motives are less important when visiting 'lighter' attractions. However, learning again appears to be an important part of the visit experience, even if it is not central to motives for visiting. Once again, these findings highlight the difficulty in drawing a clear distinction between ('lighter') dark tourism and heritage tourism, since informal learning is also an important element of both motives and experiences among many heritage tourists (Prentice, Guerin & McGugan, 1998; Poria et al. 2004; Poria, Reichel & Biran, 2006).

Conclusions

These findings advance our understanding of the 'lightest' form of dark tourism. First, there is little evidence that an interest in death, suffering or the macabre is an important motive for visiting the London Dungeon. Only a minority of visitors reported that an interest in the specific theme of the attraction was important in their decision to visit (and most were fans of horror cinema). Instead, most people visited the attraction for a range of 'general' or incidental reasons which were unrelated to the site's theme. For most visitors, the London Dungeon was just one among a number of possible attractions to visit whilst in London. Underpinning their motives was the expectation of an enjoyable experience and sometimes the desire to experience something unusual or different. Some visitors were also in search of thrills and a playful experience which was slightly scary. Visitors appear to be able to enjoy the London Dungeon without there being anything morbid about their reasons for going there. Consequently, what is labelled as macabre by academic or media commentators may not be regarded as macabre by tourists themselves. These findings accord with recent research into the motivations of visitors to other types of 'dark' tourism sites. In particular,

most visitors to such places are not purposefully seeking an experience of (or encounter with) death (Sharpley, 2005, 2012; Stone 2012) and neither are they specifically interested in human suffering. Instead, as at the London Dungeon, a wide range of other motives are more important. As such, visitors to attractions that have been labelled as 'dark' "are not automatically 'dark' tourists" (Isaac & Çakmak, 2014, p.174). Instead, motives for visiting the London Dungeon closely resemble those for visiting a range of other heritage places and attractions.

Second, in terms of the visit experience, it is clear that many visits to the London Dungeon are about more than simply entertainment and fun. Instead, many visitors showed a deeper engagement with the stories and themes presented at the site. While few visitors specifically visited with the intent of learning, many reported that their visit included an element of informal learning and discovery. A majority of interviewees considered that they had learned something new and in some cases the visit also stimulated broader reflection on moral issues. This demonstrates that attractions like the London Dungeon are consumed in a range of ways by different visitors (see Sharpley, 2005). For some, the visit may be predominantly about fun, but the attraction also offers opportunities for learning and discovery in a context of 'edutainment'. In other words, there is much more going on during a visit to the London Dungeon than at first appears. Furthermore, the significance of informal learning within the visit experience suggests that 'lightest' dark tourism has more in common with heritage tourism than is often recognised.

This study raises a number of issues for future research into the 'lightest' forms of dark (heritage) tourism. First, there is a need to move beyond stereotypes of visitors to such places as shallow hedonists in search of distraction or morbid thrills. Instead, we need to pay greater attention to 'what happens' during visits to such attractions, particularly visitors' acts of meaning-making and the ways that they engage with the histories they encounter. This includes consideration of visitors' broader reflection about issues of mortality and morality (in both past and present contexts) which can be stimulated by a visit to a 'lighter' dark tourism attraction. Second, the possibilities and potential of edutainment in heritage settings require greater critical scrutiny (including among children, traditionally a long-neglected group in tourism research (Poria and Timothy 2014)). There has been a long tendency to dismiss issues of fun and pleasure in tourism as inconsequential or not worthy of serious attention (see Franklin 2003). However, we need to recognise that visitors are active agents who are capable of taking advantage of the opportunities presented by fun and entertainment to engage more deeply and critically with the historical stories and themes they encounter (see Hertzman et al., 2008). In particular, there is a need for more attention to the ways in which entertainment can enhance or complement informal learning (rather than distract from it).

Such a research focus can throw light on an important (but still poorly-understood) dimension of the heritage tourism experience.

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Table 1: Characteristics of the Sample

Interviewee number	Estimated Age	Gender	Country of residence
1	30-39	Female	UK
2	40-49	Male	UK
3	30-39	Male	UK
4	30-39	Male	UK
5	20-29	Female	UK
6	40-49	Female	UK
7	30-39	Male	UK
8	20-29	Female	UK
9	50-59	Male	UK
10	20-29	Female	UK
11	30-39	Male	UK
12	30-39	Male	UK
13	20-29	Female	UK
14	20-29	Female	Finland
15	20-29	Male	UK
16	30-39	Male	UK
17	40-49	Male	UK
18	20-29	Male	UK
19	30-39	Female	UK
20	20-29	Female	Germany
21	50-59	Female	UK
22	20-29	Male	UK
23	40-49	Female	UK
24	20-29	Male	UK

Table 2: Summary of principal motives for visiting

Interest in horror/the macabre/the dark side of history/learning about death	5
Revisiting somewhere they had visited previously/visited as a child	3
Something to do when in London/spare time when in London	3
Taking a friend/relative to see it	2
Heard about it and wanted to see it	2
Fun day out	2
Have discounted entrance tickets as part of special offers	2
Other reasons (each mentioned by only 1 interviewee)	5
Total	24