Abstract

Dark tourism, a niche subsector in tourism that focuses on sites associated with tragedy, suffering, crime, and death, has gained prominence in recent years. While people have long been drawn to death and tragedy, the growing accessibility to unique experiences has fueled the demand for such tourism. Popular sites like the Chernobyl exclusion zone have experienced a surge in visitors due to media representation. The Paris Catacombs, attracting those seeking alternative excursions, represent this trend and has been chosen as a case study for this paper. However, the classification of death-related sites as "dark tourism" remains debatable, and empirical research on motivations and emotional responses is limited. This thesis aims to bridge this gap by examining differences in motivations and emotions between Regular Visitors and Cataphiles in the Paris Catacombs.

This paper adopts a quantitative research design, considered most appropriate for the study. An experiment was conducted using an online survey tool, where participants provided responses to diverse questions relating to their motivations and emotions while visiting the Paris Catacombs.

Cataphiles, a distinct group of catacomb visitors, exhibit a closer bond to the Catacombs, making multiple trips and describing them as addictive. They seek adventure, escape, and social interactions, while feeling a sense of belonging and safety. Cataphiles have higher expectations for thrilling experiences and are more likely to have those expectations met.

Regular Visitors make single trips to the Catacombs, motivated by curiosity and a desire to learn about the historical significance. They appreciate the visual elements and experience fear and discomfort in the spooky atmosphere. Regular Visitors emphasize the historical context and appreciate the stories embedded within the Catacombs' walls.

These findings demonstrate the distinct motivations and emotions of Cataphiles and Regular Visitors in the Paris Catacombs and are more thoroughly discussed further into this paper.