

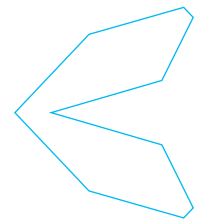
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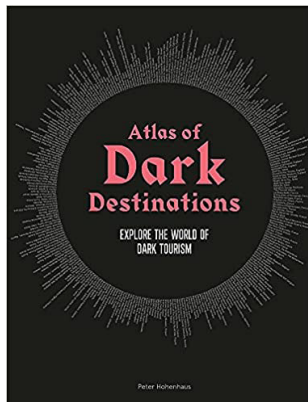


BOOK REVIEW

Atlas of Dark Destinations—Explore the World of Dark Tourism by Peter Hohenhaus

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Dark tourism is an appellation defining travel to a diverse array of tourist sites that portray death, disasters, or calamities. For more than 25 years, dark tourism as an international subject of scholarly interest has drawn together multidisciplinary discourse, where the dominion of the dead collides with contemporary touristic consumption. In turn, dark tourism has opened scholarly scrutiny of our “Significant Other” dead and how societies deal with difficult heritage. Consequently, dark tourism is about polysemic touristic encounters with our memorialized dead, where a fine line exists between commemoration and commercialism. Dark tourism is inherently political and dissonant, as (re)presentations of our dead are imbued with sociopolitical bias, and remembrance is politically engineered and hegemonically orchestrated. Whereas heritage may produce narratives for dark tourism, it is the tourist experience that consumes such messages and co-constructs meaning-making. Indeed, dark tourism displays our fights, follies, failures, and misfortunes, and subsequent tourist experiences of our “heritage that hurts” mediates a sense of mortality at places of fatality.

Dark tourism has also piqued sustained interest from global print and broadcast media over the past decade or so. Undoubtedly, the provocative term for the media implies a focus on death and dying, though in reality, academic interrogation has demonstrated that dark tourism is more to do with life and the living. Dark tourism has also recently been brought to the public market with the first-ever tourist guidebook (Stone, 2021), published a week before *Atlas of Dark Tourism*, the subject of this book review. The publicization of the research field of dark tourism is now under way, and the *Atlas of Dark Tourism* has the potential to broaden the appeal of tragic memory to the lay market.

Yet, despite these new tourist guidebooks that allow visitors to sightsee in the mansions of our significant dead, the *Atlas of Dark Tourism* is neither a practical tourist guide nor a scholarly publication. With insensitive and inappropriate ratings of stars and crossbones for each site—a so-called “darkometer” arbitrarily created by the author—the book is confusing in terms of its readership objectives. Indeed, the naive “rating” of sites using stars and crossbones as symbolic markers of “experience” turns this volume from a useful tome to a tabloid manual. Consequently, the erroneous inclusion of the “darkometer” adds unnecessary sensationalism to visitor sites of tragedy and contested history. Therefore, this book serves as an interesting compendium of subjectively selected “dark” sites from the travels of Hohenhaus, a self-declared expert and dark tourist.

With a value for money price tag (\$31), this hardcover A4 book comprises 352 pages and more than 300 potential visitor sites, with an abundance of full-color photos from across 90 countries. Visitor sites are geographically grouped for expediency, though some countries have more dark tourism sites than others. For example, Great Britain has eight allocated sites, Portugal only one, while Germany has twenty-six. Each of the “dark tourism” entries provides a descriptive but readable synopsis, some more succinct than others, and include former prisons, concentration camps, nuclear test centers, assassination spots, medical museums, and ghost towns. The book also includes a surprising feature



on volcanoes as dark tourism sites, especially considering that Hohenhaus states in the Introduction that he wishes to focus the book on modern (19th century onward) histories. Nonetheless, much of the book focuses on military sites or exhibitions, or places associated with the detritus of war and conflict. Combined with a military gothic font to highlight each visitor site, and with a black color design, this weighty book appears masculine rather than a universal “passport” of discovery it purports to be. Practical tourist information—that is, addresses, opening times, travel directions, websites, and a miscellany of other information that permits potential visitation to each of the sites—is omitted from the narrative. Therefore, this *Atlas of Dark Tourism* cannot serve as the tourist guide that it wishes to be.

Moreover, the uncritical descriptions of each site lack

historical analysis and depth and, consequently, serve only as rudimentary introductions. Thus, this *Atlas of Dark Tourism* is not a history book either. That said, however, the tome may prove useful for students with limited historical knowledge who want a basic introduction to some potential dark tourism sites. Students may wish to further research the sites with case study approaches. Otherwise, this is not a particularly well-grounded book for historians or scholars of dark tourism. Instead, in terms of the public market, this book will appeal to the lay person who might wish to rudimentarily “dip into” the world of dark tourism.

REFERENCE

Stone, P. R. (2021). *111 dark places in England that you shouldn't miss*. Emons Publishers.