



# American Journal of Tourism and Hospitality (AJTH)

ISSN: 2993-6519 (ONLINE)

**VOLUME 3 ISSUE 1 (2025)**

PUBLISHED BY  
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

## Exploring Tourist Motivations and Experiences in Cemetery Tourism: A Study of Dark Tourism in the Philippines

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### Article Information

**Received:** December 09, 2024

**Accepted:** January 11, 2025

**Published:** February 15, 2025

### Keywords

*Cemetery Tourism, Dark Tourism, Thanatourism, Tourism Marketing, Tourist Motivations*

### ABSTRACT

This study explores the motivations and experiences of tourists engaged in dark tourism in the Philippines, focusing on cemetery tourism destinations such as the Hanging Coffins of Sagada, the Sunken Cemetery of Camiguin, and the Nagcarlan Underground Cemetery. By employing a qualitative approach, the research investigates the underlying motivations of tourists, including curiosity, education, and incidental visits, as well as their personal experiences and emotional responses. The study also examines the ethical considerations and cultural sensitivities involved in promoting these sites as tourist destinations. Findings reveal that tourists are driven by a mix of educational interests and a desire for unique experiences while also highlighting the economic benefits and challenges of maintaining cultural integrity. The study highlights the need for culturally sensitive tourism practices and community involvement to ensure respectful engagement with these historically and culturally significant sites. The insights gained aim to inform sustainable tourism strategies that balance cultural heritage preservation with dark tourism's economic potential.

### INTRODUCTION

Dark tourism and its subset, thanatourism, explore the motivations and implications of visiting sites associated with death, tragedy, and suffering. While dark tourism encompasses a broad spectrum of experiences, from somber reflection to celebratory engagements with mortality, thanatourism focuses more specifically on engaging with death through historical and cultural lenses. Recognized as a field in the late 20th century, thanatourism evolved from incidental encounters with death to purposeful tourism practices shaped by ideologies such as Romanticism and nationalism (Καρασμάνης, 2022). Historical sites like battlefields and cemeteries serve as focal points for dark tourism, offering visitors opportunities to engage with the past and reflect on collective memory (Hoppen, 2022). Tourists are often drawn to these sites by motivations such as curiosity, education, and remembrance, with experiences ranging from solemn reflection to communal celebrations, such as dark tourism festivals that highlight both emotional engagement and social bonding (Fabros *et al.*, 2023; Golz, 2022).

The commercialization of dark tourism raises ethical questions regarding authenticity, as historical narratives are often curated to align with consumer expectations, reinforcing neoliberal ideologies (James *et al.*, 2024). Despite these concerns, dark tourism remains a powerful medium for engaging with history and memory, offering opportunities for both catharsis and community bonding. This duality underscores the complexity of dark tourism as both a reflective and celebratory experience.

In the Philippines, the tourism industry has diversified significantly, with niche markets like dark tourism gaining attention. Introduced by Lennon and Foley (2000),

dark tourism involves visiting sites associated with death, disaster, and the macabre. This form of tourism appeals to those interested in history, culture, and the human condition (Stone, 2006), and the Philippines, with its rich historical and cultural narratives, offers a compelling backdrop for dark tourism. The country offers a diverse array of dark tourism sites that embody historical significance and cultural heritage, making it an ideal context for examining tourist motivations and experiences. Notable examples include the Hanging Coffins of Sagada, which reflect the ancient burial practices of the Igorots and intrigue tourists with their mystique and historical value (De la Cruz, 2019). Similarly, the Sunken Cemetery of Camiguin, a haunting reminder of the 1871 volcanic eruption, serves as both a geological landmark and a testament to local resilience (Cabigas, 2016). The Nagcarlan Underground Cemetery in Laguna, established in 1845, stands out as the only underground cemetery in the country and holds historical significance as a secret meeting place for revolutionaries during the Spanish colonial period (Chan, 2014). These sites illustrate the intersections of history, cultural practices, and socio-political narratives, providing a rich context for exploring the dynamics of dark tourism.

These examples highlight the potential of dark tourism to serve as a vehicle for cultural education and historical reflection. They align with the research questions aimed at exploring the motivations, experiences, and emotional responses of tourists at these sites. However, they also highlight the critical need for managing such sites with sensitivity and respect, ensuring that the narratives presented are both accurate and respectful to the deceased and the communities connected to these places (Sharpley & Stone, 2009). The study seeks to address

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the challenge of balancing the commercial aspects of tourism with the preservation of cultural heritage and the ethical considerations inherent in promoting sites associated with death and tragedy (Stone, 2012). Through this exploration, the research aims to contribute to the development of culturally sensitive and sustainable tourism practices that enhance visitor experiences while respecting the historical and cultural significance of these sites.

Despite the growing interest in dark tourism, cemetery sites face challenges in balancing historical preservation with tourism development. The primary issue lies in maintaining the sanctity and dignity of these sites while accommodating tourists seeking unique experiences. As Stone (2012) notes, promoting these sites raises ethical concerns, including the commodification of resting places and the risk of trivializing their cultural and historical significance. Stakeholders must navigate these dilemmas carefully by implementing culturally sensitive practices and ensuring that marketing strategies respect the integrity of these sites (Sharpley & Stone, 2009).

The promotion and management of dark tourism sites, particularly cemeteries, face significant challenges. Striking a balance between historical preservation and tourism development is critical, as these sites must maintain their sanctity while accommodating tourists seeking unique experiences. As Stone (2012) notes, the commodification of such sites risks trivializing their cultural and historical significance. Ethical considerations are paramount, as stakeholders must ensure that marketing strategies respect the integrity of these spaces and the communities connected to them (Sharpley & Stone, 2009). Sustainable tourism practices, including educational initiatives and local community involvement, are essential for preserving the cultural heritage and dignity of these destinations (Lennon & Foley, 2000; Smith & Robinson, 2006).

Furthermore, there is a need for ongoing dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders, including local communities, tourism operators, and cultural heritage organizations, to develop sustainable tourism practices. This collaboration can help establish boundaries and guidelines that protect the sites' integrity while allowing for meaningful and respectful tourist engagement. By fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of these sites, dark tourism can contribute positively to cultural preservation and education, rather than merely serving as a commercial venture.

In addition to these issues, there are notable challenges and research gaps within the field of dark tourism, particularly in the context of the Philippines. Despite the country's rich historical and cultural heritage, which offers numerous sites significant to dark tourism, such as cemeteries, burial grounds, and memorials, limited scholarly attention has been given to understanding the motivations, experiences, and emotional responses of tourists visiting these locations. Existing literature predominantly focuses on quantitative approaches, leaving a gap in qualitative insights that explore the personal

and emotional dimensions of tourist engagement with these sites. Furthermore, there is insufficient exploration of how local cultural and historical narratives shape the perception and management of dark tourism destinations in the Philippines. This study addresses these gaps by examining the motivations, experiences, and emotional responses of tourists at cemetery sites, providing a localized and in-depth perspective on dark tourism in the Philippine context. It aims to contribute to the development of culturally sensitive and sustainable tourism practices that respect the historical and cultural significance of these sites while enhancing visitor experiences.

The primary objective of this study is to explore the interconnected motivations, experiences, and emotional responses of tourists visiting cemetery tourism destinations in the Philippines. This includes investigating the psychological drivers, such as curiosity, education, and adventure, that compel individuals to visit these sites, as well as examining the nature of their interactions and engagement during their visits. Additionally, the study analyzes the emotional impact of these experiences, capturing the range of feelings tourists encounter, from fascination to reflection and catharsis. By consolidating these aspects into a cohesive framework, the research aims to provide a holistic understanding of tourist behavior at cemetery tourism sites.

Furthermore, the research explores the ethical and cultural considerations inherent in promoting and managing cemetery tourism destinations, particularly the challenge of balancing economic benefits with the preservation of cultural integrity and respect for the deceased. The study also evaluates the economic and social impacts of cemetery tourism on local communities, including job creation, revenue generation, and the involvement of local stakeholders in tourism planning and management. Finally, it provides practical recommendations for developing culturally sensitive and sustainable tourism practices that enhance visitor experiences while safeguarding the historical and cultural significance of these destinations.

By addressing these objectives, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of dark tourism in the Philippines, offering insights that are both locally grounded and globally relevant. It highlights the potential of cemetery tourism to serve as a platform for cultural education, historical reflection, and economic development, while also emphasizing the importance of ethical and culturally sensitive practices. Ultimately, this research seeks to inform the sustainable development of dark tourism in the Philippines, ensuring that it benefits both visitors and local communities while preserving the integrity and significance of culturally and historically important sites.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study employs the Push and Pull Theory of Tourism Motivation, developed by Dann (1977) and further elaborated by Crompton (1979), as the foundational

framework to explore the motivations behind tourist behavior in the context of cemetery tourism in the Philippines. This theory is particularly suitable for understanding the complex motivations associated with niche tourism markets such as dark tourism. It categorizes tourist motivations into two primary groups: push factors, which are internal psychological drivers that compel individuals to travel, and pull factors, which are external attributes of the destination that attract tourists. In the realm of cemetery tourism within the Philippines, push factors include intrinsic motivators such as curiosity and fascination with death. Tourists are often drawn by a desire to explore the macabre or the mysterious, as illustrated by the interest in sites like the Hanging Coffins of Sagada and the Sunken Cemetery of Camiguin. Educational and cultural enrichment also serve as significant push factors, with many visitors motivated by the desire to learn about historical events, cultural practices, or unique traditions associated with death, such as the burial practices of the Igorot people. Additionally, emotional or reflective needs drive tourists to seek dark tourism sites for introspection, catharsis, or to reflect on mortality and human resilience, aligning with the emotional responses elicited by sites like the Nagcarlan Underground Cemetery.

Conversely, pull factors are the specific attributes or features of cemetery tourism destinations that attract tourists. These include the cultural and historical significance of sites like the Nagcarlan Underground Cemetery, with its ties to revolutionary history, and the Hanging Coffins of Sagada, which represent ancient burial traditions. The aesthetic and environmental appeal of destinations, such as the haunting beauty of the Sunken Cemetery of Camiguin set against the backdrop of the sea, exemplifies how natural and man-made elements combine to create a compelling destination. Furthermore, accessibility and promotion, such as the integration of cemetery sites into broader travel itineraries and effective marketing strategies like social media campaigns, serve as pull factors that enhance the appeal of these destinations. The Push and Pull Theory is highly relevant to this study as it enables a comprehensive analysis of both the internal motivations of tourists and the external attributes of cemetery tourism destinations. By applying this framework, the study aims to identify the psychological and emotional factors that compel tourists to engage in dark tourism and to analyze how the unique characteristics of cemetery sites in the Philippines influence tourist decision-making and satisfaction. This framework also facilitates bridging the gap between individual motivations and destination management, providing insights for sustainable and culturally sensitive tourism practices.

Through the integration of the Push and Pull Theory, this study seeks to achieve its objectives of exploring tourist motivations and experiences by offering a structured lens to analyze the interplay between personal drivers (e.g., curiosity, education, emotional needs) and destination-

specific factors (e.g., cultural narratives, historical significance, aesthetic appeal). Additionally, this framework supports the development of practical recommendations for marketing, community involvement, and the ethical management of cemetery tourism destinations. By adopting the Push and Pull Theory, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex motivations behind dark tourism and offers actionable insights for balancing cultural preservation with tourism development in the Philippines.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research design for this study is structured around a qualitative approach using phenomenological research. It aims to gain a deep and nuanced understanding of the motivations, experiences, and emotional responses of tourists visiting cemetery sites within the context of dark tourism in the Philippines. This design is particularly suited to the study's objectives, as it allows for an exploration of complex, subjective phenomena that cannot be easily quantified.

Given the exploratory nature of the study, the design is flexible and adaptive, allowing for the emergence of new themes and insights as the research progresses. This is crucial for capturing the diverse and potentially unexpected motivations and experiences of tourists, which may not be fully understood through pre-defined categories.

### Data Gathering Procedures

This study employed semi-structured interviews as the primary data collection method. This approach allowed the researcher to explore specific themes, such as curiosity, education, adventure, and relaxation while providing participants the freedom to express their thoughts and emotions in their own words. Semi-structured interviews generated rich, detailed data essential for understanding the motivations and emotional responses of tourists.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure a diverse range of perspectives. The sample consisted of 63 individuals: 30 tourists, 3 tourism administrators, and 30 community representatives. The tourist group included non-local travelers who visited one of three cemetery tourism destinations—Hanging Coffins of Sagada, Sunken Cemetery of Camiguin, and Nagcarlan Underground Cemetery—on the dates of data gathering, with 10 tourists from each site. The tourism administrators were representatives of the tourism authorities managing each destination, offering insights into site management and promotion. The community representatives were residents from the areas surrounding the destinations, with 10 participants from each site, providing perspectives on how cemetery tourism impacts local communities. This sampling strategy ensured a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of cemetery tourism from multiple stakeholder perspectives. Data saturation was reached when no new themes or insights emerged from the interviews. During data

collection, the researcher continuously analyzed responses from all participant groups to identify recurring themes related to tourist motivations, experiences, and the socio-cultural impact of cemetery tourism. By the end of the 63 interviews, responses had become repetitive, indicating that the data collected was sufficient to address the research objectives. Data saturation enhanced the findings' credibility and reliability by ensuring all significant perspectives were captured.

The data was collected during the peak tourist season in October and November, a period that coincides with significant cultural events in the Philippines, such as Undas (All Saints' Day and All Souls' Day). These months are culturally associated with remembrance and honoring the departed, likely influencing the findings. Tourists visiting during this time may have been motivated by the spiritual and cultural significance of the destinations, in addition to curiosity or the pursuit of unique experiences. This context may have heightened the emotional and reflective aspects of their visits. In contrast, tourists visiting during off-season periods might exhibit different motivations, such as leisure or educational interests. The timing of data collection is therefore an important consideration in interpreting the study's findings, as it may have shaped the motivations and experiences observed.

**Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis is used to analyze the data collected from interviews. This method involves coding the data to identify recurring themes and patterns, allowing the researcher to systematically explore how tourists' motivations, experiences, and emotional responses contribute to their perception of cemetery sites. Thematic analysis is well-suited to the study's objectives, as it facilitates the identification of both commonalities and unique aspects of tourists' experiences, providing a comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics involved.

**Ethical Considerations**

The researcher obtained approval were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights as participants. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before conducting interviews, ensuring they were fully aware of their voluntary involvement and the option to withdraw at any time without consequence. Additionally, measures were implemented to protect participants' privacy and confidentiality, including anonymizing data and securely storing all research materials. This ethical framework is crucial for building trust with participants and maintaining the integrity and credibility of the research process.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis of the interview transcripts and qualitative data coding revealed several key themes that shed light on the motivations, experiences, and perceptions of tourists visiting cemetery sites in the context of dark tourism in

the Philippines. These themes align with existing literature on dark tourism and provide insights into the complex dynamics at play.

**Table 1:** Key Themes in Tourist Engagement with Cemetery Tourism Destinations

<b>Tourist Motivations and Experiences in Cemetery Tourism Destinations</b>	
Motivations for Visiting Cemetery Sites	Incidental Visits Curiosity and Discovery Educational Interest
Perceptions and Experiences	Dark Tourism Fascination Cemetery Sites as Tourist Destinations
Awareness and Acceptance	Dark Tourism Awareness Social and Cultural Acceptance
Economic and Social Implications	Economic Benefits Government and Community Support

**Theme 1: Motivations for Visiting Cemetery Sites**

**Incidental Visits**

Many tourists visited cemetery sites as part of a broader itinerary or travel package, rather than as their primary destination. For instance, visitors to the Hanging Coffins of Sagada and the Nagcarlan Underground Cemetery often included these sites as side trips during vacations focused on other attractions. This incidental nature of visits suggests that while these sites are not always the main draw, they are integrated into the overall travel experience due to their proximity and cultural significance. Similarly, Canet and Panaligan (2024) observed that domestic tourism significantly outweighs international tourism in certain regions, where local landmarks and cultural attractions, such as cemeteries, play a vital role in shaping the travel experience. This finding complements Stone and Sharpley's (2008) assertion that dark tourism sites often serve as supplementary destinations, enhancing broader travel itineraries by offering unique cultural and historical value.

**Curiosity and Discovery**

Curiosity emerged as a significant motivation for visiting cemetery sites. Tourists expressed a desire to learn about the historical and cultural significance of these sites, such as understanding the traditions behind the Hanging Coffins or the historical events associated with the Nagcarlan Underground Cemetery. This curiosity often led to a deeper appreciation of the sites' historical context and cultural heritage. As noted by Lennon and Foley (2000), curiosity about death-related sites can drive tourist interest, providing both educational and reflective experiences.

**Educational Interest**

A substantial number of visitors were motivated by an interest in history and culture. They sought to gain

knowledge and understanding of the past, which these sites vividly represent. This educational motivation aligns with tourists' desire to learn about the unique cultural practices and historical narratives associated with each site. This aligns with Seaton's (1996) concept of "thanatourism," where tourists are drawn to sites associated with death for educational purposes.

## **Theme 2: Perceptions and Experiences**

### **Dark Tourism Fascination**

While some tourists were drawn to the thrill and excitement of visiting sites associated with death and the supernatural, others were more interested in the historical and cultural aspects. The fascination with dark tourism varied among tourists, with some expressing interest in the eerie and mysterious elements, while others focused on the educational value of these sites. This duality reflects the findings of Biran and Poria (2012), who suggest that dark tourism can offer both entertainment and educational experiences.

### **Cemetery Sites as Tourist Destinations**

There was a diverse range of opinions on whether cemeteries should be considered tourist destinations. Some tourists believed these sites should be preserved for their cultural and historical significance, while others saw them as opportunities for dark tourism experiences. The importance of respecting local beliefs and traditions was emphasized, highlighting the need for sensitive promotion and management of these sites. This echoes the concerns raised by Ashworth and Hartmann (2005) regarding the ethical implications of commodifying sites associated with death.

## **Theme 3: Awareness and Acceptance**

### **Dark Tourism Awareness**

Awareness of dark tourism varied among tourists. Some were familiar with the concept and actively sought out such experiences, while others had limited knowledge and stumbled upon these sites during their travels. This variation in awareness suggests the need for better education and marketing to inform potential visitors about the significance and ethical considerations of dark tourism. As noted by Light (2017), increasing awareness and understanding of dark tourism can enhance visitor experiences and promote responsible tourism practices.

### **Social and Cultural Acceptance**

The acceptance of dark tourism within the community and among tourists was influenced by social norms and cultural perceptions. While some community members and tourists viewed dark tourism as a positive way to share cultural heritage and generate economic benefits, others were concerned about the potential for disrespect and misinterpretation of sacred sites. Ensuring community involvement and consent in promoting these sites is crucial for maintaining cultural integrity. This aligns with the findings of Poria, Reichel, and Biran (2006), who

emphasize the importance of community engagement in managing heritage sites.

## **Theme 4: Economic and Social Implications**

### **Economic Benefits**

The promotion of cemetery sites as tourist destinations has provided economic benefits to local communities. Increased tourist arrivals have led to job creation, particularly in tour guiding and hospitality services. Additionally, the revenue generated from tourism has supported local businesses and community projects, contributing to the overall economic development of the area. This is consistent with Tarlow's (2005) observation that dark tourism can serve as an economic driver for local communities.

### **Government and Community Support**

Government and community support play a critical role in promoting and managing cemetery tourism sites effectively. Strategic tourism marketing, including the use of social media, educational programs, and integrated marketing communications, has proven instrumental in attracting visitors while preserving cultural heritage. Community acceptance and active participation in tourism activities ensure equitable distribution of benefits and the safeguarding of local traditions, aligning with Strange and Kempa's (2003) emphasis on the importance of strategic marketing and community involvement in sustainable dark tourism development. Supporting this, Escamis and Hinlayagan (2024) explored the relationship between community participation and socio-economic sustainability in tourism within Marilog District, Davao City. Their study revealed a significant direct relationship between community participation and socio-economic sustainability, as well as between participation and community-based tourism implementation. However, the study found no significant mediation effect of community-based tourism implementation on the relationship between participation and socio-economic sustainability. This underscores the importance of direct community involvement in achieving sustainability goals, suggesting that while structured tourism frameworks are valuable, active and meaningful community engagement remains the cornerstone of successful tourism initiatives. Together, these findings highlight the need for collaborative efforts between governments, tourism planners, and communities to ensure the long-term success of cemetery tourism.

## **Discussion**

The findings highlight the multifaceted nature of dark tourism in the Philippines, where cemetery sites serve as both cultural heritage landmarks and attractions for dark tourism enthusiasts. The motivations and experiences of tourists vary widely, influenced by factors such as curiosity, educational interest, and social norms. Understanding these dynamics is essential for developing sustainable tourism strategies that respect cultural heritage while

maximizing economic benefits.

Promoting cemetery sites as part of a broader cultural and historical narrative can enhance their appeal and ensure respectful engagement with local communities. By addressing the concerns of both tourists and community members, stakeholders can create a balanced approach to dark tourism that preserves cultural integrity and supports local development. This approach aligns with the recommendations of Sharpley and Stone (2009), who advocate for a holistic understanding of dark tourism that considers both its challenges and opportunities.

## CONCLUSION

The exploration of dark tourism in the Philippines, with a focus on sites like the Hanging Coffins of Sagada, the Nagcarlan Underground Cemetery, and the Sunken Cemetery of Camiguin, highlights the diverse motivations and experiences of tourists. These sites attract visitors driven by curiosity, educational interests, and the incidental inclusion in broader travel itineraries. While some tourists are drawn to the thrill associated with dark tourism, others are more interested in the historical and cultural narratives these sites offer. The study reveals that awareness and acceptance of dark tourism are shaped by social norms and cultural perceptions. While there are significant economic benefits, such as job creation and support for local businesses, there are also challenges related to respecting cultural heritage and ensuring community involvement. The findings emphasize the need for thoughtful promotion and management of these sites to preserve cultural integrity while maximizing tourism's positive impacts.

## Recommendations

Enhancing educational outreach requires programs that provide tourists with a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural significance of cemetery sites. This can include guided tours by knowledgeable locals, detailed brochures, and interactive exhibits. Collaborations with schools and universities can integrate these sites into curricula, fostering appreciation and encouraging educational visits. Responsible tourism should promote respectful behavior through visitor guidelines, cultural sensitivity education, and awareness campaigns. Interpretive materials, such as tours and brochures, can provide historical context, while partnerships with cultural organizations ensure narratives honor local traditions.

## Community involvement is vital for sustainable

tourism. Engaging locals in planning and management ensures their voices are heard, while opportunities like training tour guides, supporting artisans, and revenue-sharing mechanisms foster ownership and reduce resistance. Digital platforms, influencers, and cultural tourism packages can promote these sites to broader audiences.

Infrastructure improvements, such as rest areas and signage, must prioritize cultural preservation and

sustainability. Ethical management policies, including visitor caps and codes of conduct, balance economic benefits with site preservation. Training tourism professionals and conducting research on tourist behavior and socio-cultural impacts can guide strategies to ensure cemetery tourism respects heritage while benefiting communities.

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