

## **A Key to Reality : Exploring Dark Tourism** *The Thirteenth Banana in a Dozen*

**Richard Sharpley & Philip R. Stone (eds). *The Darker Side of Travel : The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, (2009), Bristol : Channel View Publication, ISBN – 13: 978-1-84-541-114-5 (pbk) £ 29.95**

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Is it possible to justify and give importance to dark tourism – the tourism related to the sites of death. It has socio-cultural, historical and political dimensions which are to great extent dealt comprehensively by Sharpley and Stone in **The Darker Side of Travel : The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism**. According to the editors dark tourism is "...travel to places associated with death, disaster and destruction..." (p.9) that it brings to the mind of reader can there be charm and fascination in death and suffering and the probable response he gets is 'why not?'. There are categories of dark tourism namely 'Perilous Places' which include tours of horrors and dangerous destinations, secondly 'Houses of Horror' are dungeons of death and heinous hotels, thirdly 'Fields of Fatality' are bloody battle grounds, the Hell of Holocaust, cemeteries of celebrities, fourthly 'Tours of Torment' include mayhem and murder and lastly 'Themed Thanatos' are morbid museums and monument to morality. The real attraction in such sites is due to 'restorative' nostalgia and search for novelty or to celebrate history. Dark tourism also adds the immediacy and spontaneity of sensation for the tourist and when one reaches to the sight as a distanced (in time and space) witness he forgets about his own inevitable end.

In some countries like Vietnam, in order to make a tourist experience and feel the ambience the what they have done is the Cu Chi tunnels near Ho Chi Minch city it is only possible to crawl through the tunnels enabling tourists to become temporarily a soldiers. This is intense kind of dark tourism.

The chapter 2 deals with the probing of dark tourism consumption and located it with in thanatological framework for further study. Other key issues raised for an individual are 'personal meaningfulness – a key to reality, thus to life and sustaining social order and... overall well being' (p. 38). The next chapter titled "Dark Tourism : Mediating Between the Dead and Living" adds psychological dimensions to the interpretations of the topic. Tony Walter holds up the view that the society, which fails to relate to its dead, would be cut-off from what we call history. It is a fine way to enliven one's heritage. It is however essential to conserve and preserve language, photography and history so that we can mediate between the dead and the living. Philip R. Stone, in his essay "Dark Tourism : Morality and New Moral Spaces" deals with the theoretical presumptions of dark tourism by considering emotion and morality as basic plans... "Individuals seek morally relative meaning on their own terms and from non-religious and non-traditional institutions enabling dark tourism places to become contemporary communicative spaces." (p. 71)

The essay concludes with an optimistic note that morality and emotion have relative dimension and deserve unending attention. Therefore, it requires further scrutiny.

The book under review has three parts. Part two deals with Management Implications of Dark Tourism, Chapter 6, "(Re) presenting the Macabre : Interpretation, Kitschification and Authenticity" adds a new dimensions to the subject. Sharpley and Stone leave the reader for further conceptual augmentation and empirical testing. They are of view that, '...Kitsch interpretation of dark and tragic sites merely play a part in conveying sentiments of empathy and nostalgia, while at a more fundamental level, conveying narratives of redemption and recoding of (popular culture)....' p. 128). They do justice with authenticity dilemmas of heritage

sites, including notions of selectivity, trivialization and distortion. In the Chapter 7, Craig Wight sets out to explore ethical complexities associated with production and consumption to the dark tourism sites. He delves into fine examples of Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum in Japan, where the mission is, "...that no one else should suffer as we did', (p. 132). Wight interestingly concludes that truth depends on number of ethical codes that are embedded in cultural background, religious and secular beliefs and cultural narrations. Again it is subjective for an individual to interpret and follows one's own ethical mind-set. In a post modern society there is nothing like 'universal truth'.

The last chapter of the "Life, Death and Dark Tourism : Future Research Directions and Concluding Comments" is the thirteenth banana in a dozen and the editors Sharpley and Stone leave the reader perplexed by saying that dark tourism is '...a complex, emotive, mutli-dimensional, politically vulnerable and ethically and morally challenging phenomenon...' (p.250). But the key to the book is not in getting perplexed with such comprehensive judgments but to feel enlightened with areas not often discussed in academia or the corporate world.

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