

GOING DARKER

THE BEGGAR IS FIRST TO ARRIVE, SPORTING A COOL beanie. He retrieves the shabby grey scarf that staked his pitch, drapes it around his shoulders, and sits, cross-legged, empty Styrofoam cup in hand, to complete the look. Behind him, bathed in early evening sunlight, the Whitechapel art gallery, a KFC, and the Cashino amusement arcade. He catches my eye, and we exchange knowing smiles. His trap is set and about to be sprung.

Within moments he is lost in the melee of legs as the

tourists congregate from all directions. Some look ready to tackle mountains, sporting North Face apparel and bulging day packs, but there are also middle-aged couples, learned fathers with their taller sons, a man in an Hawaiian shirt sporting a chinstrap beard, and girlfriends in celebrity shades, who capture their first selfie of the evening. Then Phillip, our guide, arrives; baseball hat, cheeky cherubic smile, Dalmatian print shirt, and a pair of trainers that have weathered the relentless onslaught of the Whitechapel cobbles.

It's a Jack the Ripper walking tour of London's East End, hosted by a credible stand-in for the *League of Gentlemen's* Legz Akimbo Theatre Company. What were you expecting: cape, top hat, and a surgical bag bristling with knives?

Phillip takes my tenner, and marks his register until we are all present and correct. A few stragglers have arrived on the speculative off chance of a place, however we are a full group of



Groups on the Jack the Ripper walking tour, Hanbury Street, Spitafields.

thirty. Our guide points them in the direction of a sombre figure under a bowler hat and overcoat, standing sentient across the road. This Kiss of Death is also running a Ripper tour, starting in five minutes time.

Now Phillip captures our attention with a high pitched screech, then conspiratorially beckons us to set the scene. He informs us we will be crossing roads, that some of the streets and alleyways on this evening's adventure are narrow, so our consideration in leaving room for the locals to pass us by would be appreciated. Then we are off, an expectant schoolish gaggle, exchanging slightly embarrassed smiles, funnelling into the tiny passage that opens up into Gunthorpe Street, and the site of tonight's first victim, Martha Tabram, who was murdered on 7th August 1888.

We gather round an innocuous set of locked wire gates to a car park, and Phillip engages us with an anecdote about the man who lives up ahead, who occasionally ambushes the tour groups with shouted words of encouragement, the second inevitably being "Off!"

Using a laser pointer, Phillip focuses our gaze halfway up a wall, past the gates, where the body was found, on a landing inside a tenement block. We'll have to use our imagination, because that particular building has long since disappeared to London's eternal development. Our guide shares his painstaking research, producing laminated photographs from his courier bag, of both victim and crime scene, as they were at the time. The photos are offered face down, with a warning that the post-mortem image may be too graphic for some. We pass them round and naturally everyone has a good look, as Phillip continues to paint a vivid picture of Victorian Whitechapel, profiling the police and the prostitutes, and dispelling the seemingly endless myths of Ripper lore. The evening is already proving to be both educational and entertaining. Suddenly, without warning, it becomes revelatory;

"Because, let's face it, you've all come to see where the prostitutes were — MURRR — DAAARRRDDD!"

I cannot believe my luck. *Schadenfreude*. There's noticeable

discomfort within the audience, a shuffling of feet and an unconvincing murmur of denial. Some look to their shoes, as if salvation lies upon the uppers, and I follow suit, in truth to mask my delight.

Phillip has ratcheted himself into full pantomime mode; "OH! YES! — YOU! — HAAAAVE!"

To the jugular, with an incisive blade of insight, a posse of 'dark tourists', their ghoulish behaviour impaled, their ulterior motive exposed. Why are we here if not to see the actual spot where a bloated, stumpy, middle-aged streetwalker was repeatedly stabbed to death over a century ago?

THE EVOCATIVE TERM, 'DARK TOURISM', IS CREDITED to Dr John Lennon and Professor Malcolm Foley of Glasgow's Caledonian University, with their 1996 academic paper, 'JFK and Dark Tourism: A Fascination with Assassination', and their subsequent book, *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*, published in 2000.

The phenomenon is also referred to as 'Thanatourism', derived from the Ancient Greek word 'Thanatos', the personification of death, articulated in Professor Tony Seaton's 1996 paper, 'Guided by the Dark: From Thanatopsis to Thanatourism', where the tourist is "motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death."

Dr Philip Stone, Executive Director of the Institute for Dark Tourism Research, described the term as, "the act of travel, whether intentional or otherwise, to sites of death, destruction or the seemingly macabre."

'Dark sites', the destination of the dark tourist, are diverse in nature and widespread in location, being found on every continent; one might consider the ill-fated Captain Scott's hut in Antarctica as a dark site. They are even found below the waves, in the form of shipwrecks.

Fortunately, as with this evening's excursion, many of them are very accessible, organised, and affordable. The Jack the Ripper tours run nightly, with tourists chaperoned through the

very streets where the most notorious serial killer of all time stalked his prey.

Although the Ripper's manor was relatively small, and London-centric from the perspective of dark tourism providers, this has not deterred other companies, who provide something in a similar vein, such as ghost tours, which can be experienced in cities throughout the British Isles, including York, Edinburgh, Manchester, Liverpool, Chester, Dublin, Oxford, and Leicester.

One enterprise, based in Nottingham, offers overnighters in the now disused Towers Asylum, and weekend getaways to castles in Transylvania. Run by dedicated paranormal investigators and mediums, they employ no actors, but utilise state-of-the-art ghost hunting equipment, which can detect subtle variations in temperature, and sounds inaudible to the human ear. Their website warns potential customers that there is a strong behavioural policy; everyone attending will be doing so for the "right reason", although this reason remains undefined. However they will "evict anybody" who presumably messes about at the back, jeopardising the enjoyment of everyone else. This policy, they state, "is always enforced."

The seaside town of Whitby, North Yorkshire, has totally embraced its dark literary connections. The town was a setting for part of Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*, and now hosts the biannual Whitby Goth Weekend, a festival that contributes over £1m to the local economy.

War and atrocity museums, former prisons, execution sites, battlefields, slavery heritage sites, and cemeteries are all likely destinations for both the committed and casual dark tourist.

Family-orientated dark adventures are also available, such as the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's, although it is suggested that the exhibits may not be suitable for young children, or pregnant women. After a renovation in the mid 1990s, the basement waxworks occasionally come to life, with actors playing the ghouls. This theatrical development may be in response to the rival flagship attraction from Merlin Entertainment, The London Dungeon, which has evolved from macabre museum to full-blown camp-it-up gore-fest, laden

with gallows humour, special effects, rides, and audience participation. Merlin has eight dungeons throughout the UK, Germany, and The Netherlands, tapping into the public appetite for the macabre. The longevity of Tussaud's Chamber of Horrors, a London fixture since 1835, illustrates that this dark fascination appears constant, regardless of how times and attitudes have changed.

There are numerous dark exhibitions and museums, many housed within the very institutions where they gained their notoriety, such as the penitentiary of Alcatraz in San Francisco Bay, which can be toured day or night. As a tourist the only way you are escaping incarceration is through the gift shop, which is also available online. It sells everything from baseballs to stripy prison uniform oven mitts, and the obligatory American souvenir, the shot glass.

While such exploitative commercialism might seem inappropriate, given the draconian practices employed whilst a functioning prison (including sensory deprivation for troublemakers, and enforced silence in the early years that reportedly drove several inmates insane), the tour itself is consistently reviewed as the best San Francisco has to offer. I didn't care for the personalised souvenir photograph, available to purchase at the conclusion of the tour, but was totally absorbed by the audio guide, where testimonies from former guards and inmates, supplemented by appropriate sound effects, brought incarceration on 'The Rock' to life.

For something slightly more macabre, there is anatomist Gunther von Hagens' travelling exhibition, 'Body Worlds,' where real corpses have been preserved through a technique known as plastination. The anatomy on display provides the general public with an insight into the human body usually reserved for the medical profession. Initially exhibited in Tokyo in 1995, it arrived in London in 2002, and ran for six months in the Old Truman Brewery on Brick Lane. Although controversial, over forty million worldwide have rolled up to view von Hagens' travelling cadavers.

Although this show, both its subsequent incarnations and imitators, have been controversial, millions of people have

Former attic residence of serial killer Dennis Nilsen, Muswell Hill.



been happy to pay for the privilege of viewing von Hagens' cadavers. While this travelling dark show may blur the lines between education and entertainment, it affords objectivity, seeing what we all look like, stripped of skin and hair.

There are some destinations that cater for a niche market, for those looking for something more specific, and darker still.

Death and murder sites are a continual source of tourist footfall. Some are globally renowned, such as Dealey Plaza, site of the assassination of JFK. Originally devoid of specific tourist infrastructure, it was subsequently developed to accommodate those who came in large numbers, uninvited and unannounced. The Texas School Book Depository, now known as the Dallas County Administration Building, contains a museum, relating to the life, death, and legacy of President Kennedy, and the road outside is marked where the bullets struck their target whilst riding in his open top limousine. One can only suppose the authorities pinpointed the hit to prevent further fatalities, with assassination aficionados standing in the middle of a busy road, lining themselves up with the sixth floor window in question.

Fortunately since 1999, there has been a live camera feed from the sniper's nest, and indeed, while writing this, I have

the live 'EarthCam' in-screen, enabling me to watch tourists, waiting for a break in the traffic, so they can run into the road to be photographed standing on the requisite X marks the spot. This happens with metronomic regularity, day in day out, as if it were on a bucket list.

While tourists can be conveniently blamed for encouraging the authorities to facilitate and sanction their presence, as with Dealey Plaza, this is not always the case. There are those who visit sites where there are no facilities, provisions, or glossy publicity in place to encourage them.

Such an example would be 23 Cranley Gardens, a well-appointed three storey semi-detached house, internally divided into four flats, in leafy Muswell Hill, an extremely desirable suburb of north London. From the pavement the property appears unremarkable; white walls, decorative mock Tudor studwork, wheelie bins, and a spacious porch. The only thing that disappoints is the roof, where interlocking tiles have replaced the original slate that graces its neighbours. And the fact that serial killer Denis Nilsen was arrested here, in his attic flat, with the dismembered body parts of some of his victims still in the wardrobe.

Nilsen had befriended and murdered at least twelve, possibly as many as fifteen men, mostly the homeless, between 1978 and his arrest in 1983. Although the majority of the killings took place at his previous address, 195 Melrose Avenue, Cricklewood, it is 23D Cranley Gardens that attracts the 'House of Horrors' tabloid tag. This may have something to do with the fact that Nilsen inhabited the attic, which implies 'sinister', rather than the ground floor flat he previously rented in Melrose Avenue. Or perhaps it is because it's impossible to capture a decent photograph of the property in Cricklewood, due to a tree on the pavement, which spoils the view.

Thoughtfully, at least two of the tabloids ran stories about the sale of 23D, in 2015, including photos of the interior, which has been extensively refurbished since Nilsen vacated to serve life imprisonment. One article highlighted the estate agent's request for prospective buyers to research the history of the property. It fetched the asking price of £300,000; an absolute steal given the location, with 25% off the market value due to its dark association.

So although there is no 'tour', the exteriors of both sites can be viewed, albeit surreptitiously, with a London Underground One Day Travelcard.

Whilst affluent residents may take umbrage at dark tourists indulging themselves with the stigma on their doorstep, some neighbourhoods are welcoming, as evidenced by the rise of the favela tour. Established in the slums of South America and the townships of South Africa, escorted tour groups are taken to see how the other half truly lives. Although considered voyeuristic, with the haves walking through the rustic doorways of the have nots, to witness poverty and deprivation before being returned to their luxurious hotels, these communities have aligned themselves with this developing brand of dark tourism.

I joined a tour in Peru, to visit Lima's Villa El Salvador, the second largest shanty town in South America, home to nearly half a million inhabitants and an unemployment rate estimated at 75%. The guide was raised there, and regularly returned with tourists in tow. The community benefits directly, with part of

the tour fee funding their projects, and everyone on the bus contributed to buy practical gifts from the local market, such as chickens and the feed to rear them, that were distributed directly under the guide's supervision.

We were advised in advance to wear colourful clothing for the tour, as there existed genuine fear that 'outsiders' might try to steal children, and locals associated tourists in dark clothing with bad intentions. The tour company employed a policeman to accompany us for the duration, for the community's peace of mind as much as our own. We were also informed that, especially during the colder months, we might see bodies being removed. While the favela tour may have its critics, it does provide a means of direct contact between two diverse groups, and leaves an indelible imprint in the consciousness of the haves, and dollars that can be stretched a very long way in the hands of the have nots.

AS WITH A HUNTER'S WISH LIST ON SAFARI, THERE is also a 'Big Five' within dark tourism.

The National September 11 Memorial and Museum in New York, commemorating the multiple terrorist attacks on the United States of America in 2001, and the six victims of the World Trade Center bombing of 1993. The site comprises two square waterfall pools where the Twin Towers stood, a memorial plaza, and a subterranean museum. In the first two years since the museum officially opened, in May 2014, over five million people have paid the \$24 admission fee.

The exclusion zone surrounding the ruined nuclear power plant at Chernobyl, in the Ukraine, where 31 were killed in the world's worst nuclear accident in April 1986. The centrepiece of the experience is touring the ghost town of Pripyat, which reportedly receives ten thousand visitors annually.

Auschwitz-Birkenau. Arguably the cornerstone of dark tourism, the former concentration and extermination camp, located in Poland, saw an estimated 1.1 million deaths under the Nazi regime, predominantly Jews, but also Russian prisoners

of war, political dissidents, homosexuals, Sinti, Roma, and Yeniche peoples. The Polish parliament declared it a state museum in July 1947. In 2016, over two million people visited the former camp.

The Killing Fields of Cambodia, where over two million people were killed in the state sponsored genocide under the rule of Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge, during 1975–1979. Tourists visit the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, a former prison, torture, and detention facility, and the Choeung Ek Genocidal Center and ‘Killing Fields’, which opened in 1999. While many of the burial pits have been left undisturbed, there are thousands of human remains on display. Visitor numbers are increasing annually, with an attendance of 210,000 in 2014.

Hiroshima, Japan, the target of the first atomic bomb, dropped by the United States of America on the morning of 6th August 1945. The initial detonation killed an estimated 70,000, revised to some 90,000–166,000 by the end of that year, due to injuries sustained from the blast, and the subsequent effects of radiation. In 1955 the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum was opened in the Memorial Park, dominated by the Genbaku Dome, the only building to survive at ‘Ground Zero’. It receives over one million visitors annually.

Suicide spots remain the most likely destination for today’s dark tourist to witness death. Despite closing the walkways at night, San Francisco’s Golden Gate Bridge registers a jumper approximately every two days. The Nanjing Yangtze River Bridge currently has the dubious distinction of being the most popular site for suicide globally.

Visiting such sites can have unintended consequences for the dark tourist, certainly in the UK, where genuine curiosity may result in a concerned, well-meaning local calling the police, in the mistaken belief that you yourself are contemplating suicide. This will inevitably result in a caution, and considerable embarrassment, when explaining to a thoroughly unimpressed police officer that you were merely, ‘just looking, to see how far down it was’, and had no intention of delaying the approaching Intercity 125.

If you are considering taking a dive, then get the requisite training first. While academia references the Titanic, and the subsequent tourism industry the legendary sinking spawned, it has not recognised those dark tourists who took up scuba diving to explore shipwrecks and visit the underwater graveyards first hand.

Clearly while there is a diversity of dark sites that have been developed specifically for the purposes of tourism, others have not, yet independent dark tourists have chosen to visit them regardless.

THE INFLUENCE OF POPULAR CULTURE WITHIN DARK tourism should not be underestimated. Long before Dr John Lennon and Professor Malcolm Foley coined the term in 1996, The Sex Pistols had released their fourth single, *Holidays In The Sun*, back in October 1977, their perceptive unique take on the phenomenon.

“A cheap holiday in other people’s misery!”

The song was inspired by their trip to the Channel Islands. The Pistols commented;

“We tried our holiday in the sun in the isle of Jersey and that didn’t work. They threw us out.”

Undeterred, the Pistols decamped to Berlin, where they hung around the Wall, in the rain. Coincidentally Lennon and Foley also covered Berlin in their book, focusing on the city’s Third Reich sites, before a chapter entitled, ‘Covering History: The Interpretation of the Channel Islands Occupation 1939–45’. Dark tourism academia apparently followed in the footsteps of the Sex Pistols.

The practice of leaving tributes at the site of a tragedy has become widespread, certainly since the contemporary watershed of public grief at the loss of Diana, Princess of Wales in 1997. While the UK had mourned its heroes on an epic scale in the past, such as Nelson and Churchill, Diana was a darling of the media age. Most mourners had never met her, but empathised nonetheless. Mass floral tributes were left

at various sites associated with Diana in London, and at the scene of her death in Paris. Media commentators struggled to comprehend the abandonment of the stereotypical British stiff upper lip in favour of informal, spontaneous shrines, before suggesting the public were channelling their own personal losses through the 'Queen of People's Hearts'.

Subsequently it has become obligatory for the media to focus on mementoes left in remembrance at an appropriate site, which in turn fuels footfall to the shrine. Here people congregate with other members of their tribe, to pay their respects and leave messages, linking themselves to the tragedy or dead star, to be read by others attending.

This practice has become refined in the wake of terrorist attacks, where reporters use the publicly constructed shrine as their backdrop, to illustrate how people are 'coming together' and 'showing solidarity', coincidentally politically expedient for the Government of the day.

Media coverage, both mainstream and social, magnetises the shrine, drawing those willing to provide a suitable soundbite, and has led to the revival of the 'vigil'. Those who attend rarely maintain it through the night, as per the definition of vigil. This is left to illuminated landmarks, thematically lit, often by other countries to show solidarity, but, as with the vigils themselves, such displays appear politically motivated and strangely arbitrary.

Following the terrorist attacks on the offices of satirical French magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015, there was a vigil held in London's Trafalgar Square, although no British nationals were killed. This rite was repeated in the wake of the attacks of November 2015, again in Paris, where one Briton was killed, and in March 2016, after the attacks in Brussels, where again one Briton was killed. There was a huge gathering in London's Soho to support Orlando after the mass shooting in a gay club in June 2016, although again, there were no British casualties. Over a dozen buildings were lit in rainbow colours as far afield as the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Eiffel Tower.

Curiously there was no reporting of the vigil held in Trafalgar Square after the attacks in Sousse, Tunisia, June

TV crew at London Bridge in the wake of the terrorist attack, June 2017.



2015, where thirty of the thirty-eight victims were British. A gathering arranged on social media apparently attracted only nine participants, and no landmarks were lit in recognition, either here or abroad. Instead a minute's silence was observed in the UK at noon a week later, on Friday 3rd July, with the nation's flags flown at half-mast.

One can only assume this apparent lack of 'spontaneous' public mourning in the wake of Sousse was because the attacks happened to an older demographic, with most of the victims in Tunisia being aged fifty-plus, and that such vigils are predominantly attended by the young, for the young. Or maybe it was because the Sousse victims were tourists, sunning themselves abroad when they were killed and the only people who could relate, or be bothered to react spontaneously, were other tourists in Tunisia, who did indeed light candles on the beaches at night.

Murals have also been used as a pictorial tribute to the fallen, notably on the house walls of Belfast during The Troubles. These huge artworks have now become tourist attractions in their own right. On the other side of the Atlantic, in Long Island City, New York, the graffiti mecca 5 Pointz, now sadly

demolished, also carried pictorial tributes to lost cultural icons, as well as preserving the tags of fellow departed street artists.

The first 'ghost' bike, to commemorate a killed cyclist, appeared in St. Louis, Missouri, in 2003. At the time of writing there were 630 ghost bikes across 210 global locations. Painted white, and chained near the scene of the accident, they not only act as a memorial, but to remind passing motorists that they share the road with cyclists.

The iconography of shrines is also in evidence after a death in the world of sport, notably football, where fans drape scarves or replica shirts in memory of a former player, or manager, affiliated with their club. There's an obligatory minute's silence before the next game, where players, officials and fans unite in remembrance, although due to the tribal nature of football this has been abandoned in favour of applause, to drown out disrespectful cat calls by rival supporters and attention seekers.

Competitive mourning and ownership of grief is symbolised in the remembrance of Hollywood silent film star, Rudolph Valentino, who died from peritonitis at the height of his fame in 1926. Some 100,000 mourners lined the streets of New York, before Valentino's body was taken for interment in Beverly Hills. On the anniversary of his death a mysterious 'Lady in Black' visited his crypt, leaving a single red rose. Over the years this spawned many imitators, although it has been subsequently suggested that the original may have been a publicity stunt. The current incumbent of this ritual is motion picture historian and cemetery guide, Karie Bible.

The land and sycamore tree in Queen's Ride, Barnes, where singer-songwriter and Glam Rock pioneer Marc Bolan was killed in a car crash in 1977, was purchased by the T. Rex Action Group. The tree where the car came to rest has been preserved, and the steps providing access are lined with memorial plaques, recognising the passing of other band members. The shrine continues to draw fans from all over the world, and has been recognised by the English Tourist Board.

The plaque in Heddon Street, London, commemorating the site where the cover photograph of David Bowie's landmark

album, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars* was taken, became a focal point for mourning after Bowie's death in January 2016. Located between two functioning doorways, the shrine adopted the physical dimensions of a grave and headstone. There is also a mural on the wall of a department store, conveniently close to the tube station in Brixton, although Bowie was actually born in nearby Stansfield Road, died in New York and had his ashes reportedly scattered in Bali. Consequently these London shrines became natural, accessible places for his fans to publicly grieve.

Bowie's decision to leave no grave may have been to deter the fanatical, evidenced by the desecration of the Parisian cemetery, Père Lachaise, where tombs are indiscriminately scratch-sign-posted to direct pilgrims to the grave of American rock legend, poet, and leader of the Doors, Jim Morrison, who died from a suspected drug overdose in 1971.

Although Père Lachaise is the final resting place of many notable figures, such as Oscar Wilde, Chopin, Édith Piaf, and Marcel Proust, Morrison's iconic counterculture status dominates the necropolis. His grave had no official marker until French officials supplied a shield, which was subsequently stolen in 1973. In 1981, to mark the tenth anniversary of Morrison's death, sculptor Mladen Mikulin donated a bust of the icon, which was defaced, then subsequently stolen. In the early 1990s, Morrison's father had a flat stone, bearing a Greek inscription, 'True to Himself', placed on the grave.

I took my own pilgrimage to pay my respects to Jim in the summer of 2003. The grave was squashed and cramped; after 200 years of internment, the 110 acre site is bursting at the seams. As testimony to Morrison's enduring aura, his grave was attended by a uniformed guard, which, although necessary given the behaviour of the Lizard King's devotees, did make the experience somewhat anticlimactic, rather than reverential.

Walking away I encountered three fellow fans; a guy, a girl, and a Jim lookalike, resplendent in trademark black leather jeans and white shirt, carrying a ghetto blaster. Despite abundant directional graffiti they asked me where his grave was.

Minutes later I heard the Doors, and out of curiosity retraced my steps. There, under the shade of a venerable tree, a surreal tableau, reminiscent of Manet's, *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe*. Jim's clone was stripped to the waist, gyrating, Morrison-esque, using an unrelated grave for a stage.

His friend was videoing the performance, with the girl, clearly embarrassed, in charge of the music. The grave acting as a makeshift stage was a curved shield, which may have contributed to the performer's lack of serpentine grace. That, or the boots he wore, because he swore and fell off.

What this anecdote illustrates is that while we go to pay our dutiful respects at dark sites, we, like the media, cannot resist the temptation to point the finger at others who do not conform to 'our' standards of acceptable behaviour in the presence of the dead. We may be dark tourists, but at least we are respectful, unlike everyone else.

Which brings us to the anti-shrine, extensively reported in the wake of the terrorist attack on the Promenade de Anglaises in Nice, on Bastille Day, 2016. Stones and rubbish marked the spot where the truck driver, Mohamed Lahouaiej-Bouhlel, was shot and killed by police. Passers by spat, and one man urinated on the pile, with no regard for the public works employee who would have to clean up the mess afterwards.

Public shrines have an indeterminate life span. Floral tributes are removed to become dedicated compost, with the mementoes offered to the relatives. In time a permanent memorial, less conspicuous, will be erected. While these memorials are visited, their function is not to accrue revenue. There is of course an exception: 'The King', Elvis Presley.

Elvis was, and still is, an industry. His home and burial plot at Graceland, Memphis, Tennessee is principally a commercial outlet with a shrine and grave attached. It receives around 600,000 visitors a year. The King resides in second place behind Michael Jackson on the list of top earning dead celebrities, according to Forbes, returning a steady \$55m annually.

Among the notable visitors to Graceland are Prince William and Prince Harry, and in 2006 President George W. Bush took

Japanese Prime Minister and die-hard Elvis fan, Junichiro Koizumi, for a tour of the mansion.

What truly sets Elvis apart is the commemorative merchandise. Consider this; Elvis died in 1977, yet there are eleven items in the '2016 Elvis Presley for President' range, from can coolie to golf balls, and the entire collection can be yours for \$89.60 + p&p, if you are buying from the online store. If only they'd put Elvis on the ballot. There again, Clinton would have come third.

AS ILLUSTRATED THERE ARE A LARGE VARIETY OF sites that fall under the banner of dark tourism, although it's most commonly associated with sites of genocide, in particular the Nazi Holocaust of WWII.

Dark tourists usually visit a site where atrocities took place, such as a former concentration camp. However as noted by John Beech in *The Darker Side of Travel*, there are several museums at locations completely divorced from the events. An example would be the US Holocaust Museum in Washington, which opened in 1993. It now attracts nearly two million visitors per year, comparable with Auschwitz-Birkenau where atrocities actually took place.

During 1975–1979, the Khmer Rouge killed an estimated 2–2.2 million people, approximately one fifth of the population of Cambodia. There are two main sites for genocide tourism. The first, the Tuol Sleng Museum of Genocide, a former school requisitioned by the Khmer Rouge for torture and detention, has been mostly preserved in situ. The second site, Choeung Ek, which lies to the south of the capital Phnom Penh, is an example of the 'Killing Fields', where mass executions took place. The site is dominated by a large Buddhist stupa, filled with skulls.

Seattle, USA also has a memorial site, established by a survivor to honour the dead, and to remind those Cambodians who resettled in the city of their dark history.

The genocide in Rwanda took place between April and June

of 1994. Some 800,000 Tutsi people were murdered by their Hutu rivals. The Kigali Memorial Centre is one of six major commemorative centres throughout the country. At this site alone, over 250,000 victims are buried. The former technical school at Murambi is also a genocide memorial centre. It is estimated some 45,000 were killed there. In a number of rooms, preserved bodies are laid out, including those of children and infants, the evidence of their violent and brutal ends apparent.

There is now a highly recommended day tour, 'Never Forget Srebrenica', referring to July 1995 when an enclave of Bosnian Muslims were surrounded by units of the Army of Republika Srpska. Over 8,000 men and boys were massacred and buried in mass graves, the largest mass murder in Europe since WWII.

The excursion takes in a cemetery, memorial, and museum housed in the former barracks of the UN peacekeepers, and also provides the opportunity to talk with a survivor of the genocide. Reviewers unanimously award the excursion five star ratings, commenting on how moving they found the experience, and saying that they now have a deeper understanding and knowledge of the events.

Some of these conflicts are relatively recent, so bizarrely perpetrators still share territory with their former victims, with reconciliation between the factions ongoing.

ALTHOUGH DARK TOURISM WAS ONLY CHRISTENED as recently as 1996, the practice of travelling to encounter death and its representations has been around for centuries. Academia references those making a pilgrimage to a bone relic, and there was mass attendance for public hangings in the UK, before the practice was abolished in 1868. In France public executions by guillotine were carried out as recently as June 1939.* Authorities

* France continued to use the guillotine until 10th September 1977, when Hamida Djandoubi was the last to be executed by the device, having been convicted of rape, torture and murder. France abolished the death penalty in 1981.

subsequently moved the blade behind closed doors in response to the behaviour of the spectators, including surreptitious filming of the execution.

The idea of taking a tour to one of the few domains that continue to practice public executions seems perverse, and tourists would likely be unwelcome. However there are independent travellers venturing into ongoing conflict zones, wannabe war correspondents who are likely to encounter death. Yet for the majority, dark tourism is perfectly safe and sanitised to draw large numbers to its sites.

Naturally dark tourism can only profit after a disaster or tragedy has occurred. Although the creation of two exclusion zones for visitors to explore in the wake of nuclear accidents at Chernobyl and Fukushima in the space of twenty-five years is impressive, the industry also relies on sites and experiences being created for them.

Rumours have circulated in media articles for several years over the potential development, for dark tourism purposes, of 'Jonestown', in the Guyanese jungle. Here over 900 people drank Kool-Aid laced with cyanide at the incitement of megalomaniac preacher, Jim Jones, founder of Peoples Temple, in 1978. There is currently no infrastructure, and the threadbare site has been reclaimed by jungle.

The Government of Guyana has a dichotomy: do they develop the site for dark tourism, or forgo the revenue and consign Jonestown to fading memory? It may be that speculative media articles are simply testing the waters, but if Guyana were to develop Jonestown, tourists would inevitably follow.

Dark tourism also profits from anniversaries. To mark the centenary of the loss of the *Titanic*, the *MS Balmoral* cruised the same route to the site of the sinking. Passengers dined over the wreck, enjoying the same menu, eating from replica china, serenaded by the same music. Many dressed in period costume to enhance their experience, and the tour company made every effort to achieve authenticity wherever possible, without hitting an iceberg with insufficient lifeboats, etc.

Yet despite the revenue that both packaged sites and

celebrated anniversaries provide, there is a reluctance to be associated with the dark tag. Profit from dark tourism can be seen as exploiting the dead. Indeed it is difficult to see it from any other perspective.

In 2005, the Municipality of Phnom Penh agreed to lease the Choeung Ek Killing Fields to JC Royal Company, a Japanese consortium, for thirty years. The company were allowed to develop the site and increase the entrance fee. It was estimated that the company would earn \$18,000 a month, with any profit invested in a fund jointly owned by Cambodian government officials. Whether those officials include former members of the Khmer Rouge who perpetrated the atrocities is unclear.

This raises the question of who actually owns the memory of the dead. Is legacy merely a euphemism for commercial exploitation, utilised as a legitimizing, sanitising term by those who benefit? Within dark tourism, unlike real life, the status of the dead is not determined by those bereaved.

If the leasing of the Killing Fields seems strange, consider the National September 11 Memorial and Museum in New York. This was designed and constructed in the knowledge that it could not function without the tourist revenue that covers some 60-70% of its annual budget, which some estimates put at \$72m. There is no state or federal funding, therefore the National September 11 Memorial and Museum depends on tourism.

This begs the question: why build a memorial that is literally “only possible because of your support”, relying on perceived macabre curiosity, tourism, and patriotism? Staff salaries totalled a staggering \$6.5m in 2010, an increase of 22% over the previous year, with the CEO reported to be on \$378,288, and the National September 11 Memorial and Museum actively recruits volunteers to assist with its upkeep. The site has to keep tourists coming to survive. It has to promote itself.

Naturally the National September 11 Memorial and Museum has a Facebook page, where a daily drip feed of posts can fuel a chosen narrative, or counter any misconceptions that might deter the public from visiting. When the media suggested local people were avoiding the memorial, the story was subtly negated by

a slick video campaign, fronted by Robert de Niro, where New Yorkers were corralled to advocate the positive aspects of their visit. Both the National September 11 Memorial and Museum website and Facebook page now features, ‘Our City Our Story’, reaching out to Gothamites, appealing for their engagement.

In this battle for hearts, minds, and the tourist buck, the mainstream media plays an important role in promoting dark sites. For example, UK newspaper, the *Daily Mail*, have published articles on how Fukushima’s dark tourism aids with “remembrance and healing”; how Chernobyl receives “TEN THOUSAND” tourists every year; that tourists visit the Killing Fields “in an effort to learn more about Cambodia’s brutal history”, and that “Auschwitz has become the world’s most unlikely tourist hot spot”.

Interestingly the *Daily Mail* has also featured articles on the Berlin Wall, and the former concentration camp on Jersey in the Channel Islands. Perhaps it too is following in the footsteps of the Sex Pistols.

THIS EVENING’S RIPPER EXPERIENCE RUSHES towards its conclusion like a Benny Hill posse. Pounding the pavement at the head of the gaggle, Phillip confides in me.

“I sometimes feel it’s a bit of a circus.”

When he started guiding Ripper walking tours thirteen years ago, he knew all the other guides on the Whitechapel beat. Not now, there are too many. I ask if it’s a seasonal business. He dismisses this. Day of the week, month of the year,

“Makes no difference at all.”

He tells me there can be half a dozen guides with their respective groups in Mitre Square, all vying for centre stage, shouting out over the heads of their audience. Business is booming and the competition is suitably cut throat.

Phillip has been obsessed with the macabre since childhood. He became an actor, touring the school circuit, raising ‘issues’ with the kids, “as you can probably tell,” before becoming

a renowned expert on Ripperology. He knows his brand of 'edutainment' isn't for everyone, but suggests it would be a very depressing couple of hours walking the streets of Whitechapel without a touch of gallows humour.

He recalls the couple that thanked him for his honesty, for not window-dressing the murders in mythology, but for giving it to them straight. Phillip spreads his arms open wide on the kerb at Duke's Place to prevent his charges pouring into the oncoming traffic.

"I took a lot of comfort from that," he adds.

We cross the road, enter the passage opposite, marching double-time, then our guide makes a dash over the last few yards to jump onto the coveted bench in Mitre Square, where he takes centre stage to tell us about the discovery of Catherine Eddowes. Phillip highlights the physical changes made to the pavement since the body was discovered by PC Edward Watkins, in the small hours of 30th September 1888, and naturally shows us the photographs to prove it. The only downside for our chaperone is that none of us are actually standing on the exact spot the corpse occupied.

"You're standing a couple of feet from where her head was, sir, to your right..."

He indicates with his laser pointer. The gentleman respectfully sidesteps away, giving the phantom cadaver more air. We collectively titter.

"And her feet would have been about there..."

And of course, we all look.

The square is filling up. The Kiss of Death guide with the bowler hat and overcoat has taken the bench behind us. Another, sporting a flat cap takes his group to one side. Then yet another group emerges from the passage, led by a character in a theatrical black cape.

The tour concludes as honestly as it began. Phillip can't tell us who Jack the Ripper was, because he admits he doesn't know. But he has debunked the myths and sensations of Ripper lore, and has shared his passion in his own inimitable style. It has been a thoroughly enjoyable experience, highly educational,

and we have definitely had our money's worth. And of course we got to see where the prostitutes were murdered, which may, or may not, have been our primary reason for attending in the first place. There's a polite round of applause, then we disperse as quickly as we arrived. It will be dark soon.

It is incredible to think that Jack the Ripper, a legitimate historical figure, retains such infamy and pulling power after all this time. There were in excess of 100 tourists jammed into a tiny unremarkable square in the City of London at 9 p.m. on a summer's evening, who paid to see the scenes of his crimes, none of which remotely exist in their original settings. The suited City traders standing outside the wine bar down the street didn't know quite what to make of it.

Whoever the Ripper was, he could have had no idea his bloody exploits would create a thriving tourist industry over a century later. He evaded capture, and therefore through fortune or design, retained his anonymity. This in turn led to a guessing game, which fuelled his legend. His legacy would provide the living with a reliable source of income for generations to come.

Going Darker: Why This Book?

I FIRST DISCOVERED THE TERM 'DARK TOURISM' WHILE researching a site I intended to visit in Japan in 2017. It soon became apparent that I'd visited a number of dark sites over the years. This made me uneasy. Naturally I didn't care for being pigeonholed, and felt disconnected, having never encountered the term previously, and I didn't care for the implications the tag evoked.

Then I remembered scuba diving. I couldn't possibly be a dark tourist! I'd learned to dive, and spent a decade travelling the world to exotic locations, diving... shipwrecks. Underwater graveyards, where the casualties of naval warfare lay, or those lost to storms and the reef. I'd written articles about them. Worse still, I'd even had one piece published in the UK, USA,

and Australia, which focused on the *morality* of diving wrecks where souls were lost.

Interestingly, when confronted by the possibility of being a so-called dark tourist, my initial reaction was denial, recalling the underwater adventures like a drowning man clutching at straws. I dug out old holiday photograph albums and discovered a disproportionate number of images of graves. The well-thumbed South American phrasebook from '97 provided confirmation; in the pages for notes the only phrase I'd bothered to compose was, "*Estoy buscando el cementerio*," "I am looking for the cemetery." Then there was my last annual holiday: a weekend trip to Chernobyl.

Having now seen the bigger picture, my wreck diving being the proverbial nail in the coffin, there was no escape from the fact that I was likely defined as a dark tourist, whatever that might actually mean. Inexplicably I'd reached my fifties, seemingly oblivious to who I was, or what I was. I'd been visiting dark sites for forty years with no inkling of the constant theme running through my chosen destinations, indulging myself in the luxury of total autonomy, with no checks, balances, or compromise as to where I went, why I went, or what I did when I got there. The lack of self-awareness was frightening.

While I accepted the label of 'Graveyard Rabbit', someone who toured cemeteries, that wasn't a problem. Twitchy nose, long floppy ears, cute; what's not to like about bunnies? The ridiculous thing was that the dark tourist tag alone was making me re-evaluate myself. It felt vampiric, feeding off grief.

The next morning saw me in the local bookshop, ordering academic publications relating to dark tourism. I dutifully read them as if they were self-help books, looking for answers as to why people might go on their travels searching for death, or representations of it, consciously, or otherwise. Essentially I was looking for a diagnosis.

As Nietzsche noted: "If you gaze long into the abyss, the abyss gazes also into you." I thought I'd just been having a look over the edge, out of curiosity; "How far down is it?" The reality was I'd been in serene, oblivious freefall for years.

Philip Stone, director of the Institute of Dark Tourism Research, maintains that, "There's no such thing as a dark tourist, only people interested in the world around them."

Yet reflecting on my travels, characterised by dark sites, and justifying this gravitation because I found such places 'interesting', seemed somewhat disingenuous.

The posters in the travel agent's windows sell the idyllic family escape poolside, the romantic fantasy, or exotic wildlife and adventure for the singleton. They are not pitching morbidity. Yet behind this glossy veneer, under the counter in the proverbial brown paper bag lay something darker that would cater for the likes of me, just as there had been when Thomas Cook, founder of the high street chain, offered tours to public hangings.

Perhaps I could apportion blame onto the authorities and the tourism industry. Both appeared to be colluding to make a buck. Remember Dealey Plaza; tourists came of their own volition and the authorities, recognising this, sanitised, legitimized, and capitalised. Increasing numbers were buying into this dark market that was expanding to cater for the demand. By visiting such sites I contributed to this industry. Furthermore, I was taking something positive from the experience that made me want to return, or seek other sites in a similar vein.

In truth, what had actually changed? A tag. A recognition and awareness of a behaviour pattern that now came with a pang of guilt. I couldn't un-visit all those places, or deny I'd ever been, and I wasn't about to stop visiting dark sites and sit beside a pool. Tourism wasn't turning my money away on the grounds of taste and decency, rather facilitating the likes of me. I didn't consider myself as particularly morbid, and cared enough to want to know why I'd been consistently visiting dark sites, although now the penny had dropped I'd inevitably see the destinations, those who presented them, the tourists who visited, and my own presence there, in a very different light.

Given the diversity of sites, the reasons for visiting them varies, from the simplistic, such as taking the kids to the Chamber of Horrors for entertainment, to the intensely

personal, paying respects at a renowned suicide spot where a loved one found closure.

Yet there were individuals whom, knowingly or otherwise, visited a range of sites, as if compelled. I now only had to look in the mirror to see one. Certainly from the questionnaires drawn up by PhD students studying the subject, it's the key question: 'why do you go?' One might wryly reply, 'you first.'

Fortunately for the industry that caters for the increasing demand, why tourists are attracted to dark sites may be a moot point, just as long as they keep coming.

So I decided to revisit sites with fresh, honest eyes, and try to engage with those who administered them in order to further my understanding. I'd also visit that site in Japan I'd been researching when I first discovered the term. Now enlightened, my motives for going there were not only questionable, they could be considered morally indefensible. Then there was that dark place, much closer to home — the one that until now I'd never contemplated visiting, because going there wasn't just dark, but beyond the pale.

However, by writing this book, as John Lydon prophesied with *Holidays In The Sun*:

"Now I got a reason."

He was right.

"It's no real reason."

I suspected Lydon might be right about that too.

THIS BOOK FOCUSES PRIMARILY ON ESTABLISHED dark sites. Some have better tourist infrastructure, (Auschwitz-Birkenau) than others (wreck of the *Salem Express*), and some (Aokigahara) have no specific dark tourism infrastructure at all. It also features a 'control' site that has, for fifty years, steadfastly rejected the very notion of tourism.

It does not include trips to so-called dark states, such as North Korea, or spontaneous travel in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, such as those who bought radios to track official search and recovery operations in the wake of the NASA Challenger space shuttle disaster in 1986.

9/11 INC.

SEPTEMBER 11TH, 2001, AMERICAN AIRLINES FLIGHT 11, Mohammed Atta at the controls, the North Tower of the World Trade Center rushing towards him. In a split second there will be a blinding flash, Atta will be vaporized, and, he trusts, on his way to paradise, free from earthly constraints, bequeathing only grief, war, suspicion, fear, and a sulky driving licence photo.

Yet in his wildest dreams he could never have envisaged what his actions would ultimately be employed for: an inappropriate quote stamped on souvenir stones sold to tourists at over thirty bucks a pop, from a hothouse gift shop sited atop the mass grave of his own design.

It dawned a beautiful Tuesday, with 'severe clear' skies. Egyptian Mohamed Atta, thirty-three, the son of a Cairo lawyer, boarded a Boeing 767 at Boston's Logan airport, destined for Los Angeles. Atta, his travel companion, Saudi Abdulaziz al-Omari, and three other conspirators, carrying concealed knives, took their respective seats. American Airlines Flight 11 took off at 8:00 a.m., with ninety-two on board.

Approximately fifteen minutes into the flight, when the fasten seat belts sign was switched off, Atta's accomplices hijacked the plane, and he swapped seats, upgrading from 8D to the one at the controls, where he turned the Boeing north, away from its southerly flight path. Air traffic control tried to raise Flight 11, but there was no response from the man with the commercial pilot's licence, now ensconced in the cockpit. Communication came instead from a flight attendant, who informed American Airlines that two of her colleagues had been stabbed, and a passenger had had his throat cut.

Listening to the conversation, with the benefit of hindsight, is excruciating; the 'i's' and 't's' laboriously dotted and crossed, right up to the point where the call abruptly terminated,