

Disaster Tourism

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Article Information

Received: February 27, 2023

Accepted: March 28, 2023

Published: April 29, 2023

Keywords: *Disaster tourism, Chernobyl, UNWTO, Kathmandu, earthquake, New Orleans, hurricane, mosque, Pompeii, Hindenburg incident.*

ABSTRACT

Today, there are many types of tourism and they are developing rapidly. This article highlights the importance and development of disaster Tourism. Disaster tourism involves visiting environmental disaster places that are either natural or man-made. People are attracted to this type of tourism because of its social, academic or cultural essence. The perceived benefits in this type of tourism are intellectual, emotional, physical, and psychological gains that people derive from visiting natural disaster sites. Disaster tourism is not a new phenomenon. Yet, it is a part of the tourism industry that has yielded little attention to date.

What is disaster tourism?

Disaster tourism is the practice of visiting locations at which an environmental disaster, either natural or man-made, has occurred. Although a variety of disasters are the subject of subsequent disaster tourism, the most common disaster tourist sites are areas surrounding volcanic eruptions

Opinions on the morality and impact of disaster tourism are divided. Advocates of disaster tourism often claim that the practice raises awareness of the event, stimulates the local economy, and educates the public about the local culture, while critics claim that the practice is exploitative, profits on loss, and often mischaracterizes the events in question.¹

Disaster tourism destinations can be permanently popular with tourists, such as Chernobyl, or they can be popular only in the aftermath of the disaster, such as Kathmandu after the 2015 earthquake or New Orleans after the 2005 hurricane.

¹https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disaster_tourism#:~:text=Disaster%20tourism%20is%20the%20practice,are%20areas%20surrounding%20volcanic%20eruptions.



1-photo A mosque that was previously partially submerged sits at an angle after it was knocked off its foundations by an earthquake and a tsunami in Sulawesi.

Classification of catastrophes in the tourism of natural disasters:

- ✓ catastrophe of cosmic bodies;
- ✓ disasters in the geosphere;
- ✓ disasters in the biosphere;
- ✓ social disasters;
- ✓ catastrophes man-made ;
- ✓ disasters in people's lives;
- ✓ crashes.

Motivations of disaster tourists

There are many reasons that people come to visit disaster sites. Some tourists may have personal connections to the tragedy as survivors, relatives of victims, or witnesses while other visitors have an intellectual or cultural interest, wanting to understand what happened or connect the tragedy to other cultural events. This latter group typically comprises educators, historians, academics and students. Another population of visitors hope to aid in providing relief to the affected areas-some directly through volunteer work and some indirectly through donations. Other visitors have no connection to the site or the event, but happen to be there as tourists and visit those places as part of their sightseeing. A common example of this is tourists who come to Italy to sightsee in Rome and end up visiting Pompeii and its neighboring cities without initially intending to do so.

Depending on the site or tour, disaster tourism can be seen to be an educational experience or exploitative. Whether or not a tourist site is handled in a respectful and tactful manner often is determined both by those organizing the events and the tourists themselves. Moreover, advocates of disaster tourism point out those attractions are capable of re-examining disasters in an educational manner despite that the operators are motivated by profit. Many of these advocates

argue that when distasteful disaster tourism occurs, the blame lies primarily on the tourists for providing an insensitive demand rather than on the operators for fulfilling such a demand. For both tourists and operators, however, parsing the difference between an educational and an exploitative one requires asking what areas are crucial for understanding the disaster and clarifying how behavior that is appropriate in a destroyed area is often different from behavior that is appropriate in newly built homes or temporary camps.

What is the effect on the economy?

The effect of tourism on the local economy is often nuanced due to the specifics in how tourism affects local income. It is generally accepted that if the tours comprise public events organized by volunteers, then there are consistent but small increases to charity donations. However, if the tours are organized by private companies, then it is not always clear how what proportion of the profits go back into relief efforts. Furthermore, while governmental regulation typically prevents private tours from slowing down or reversing reconstruction in areas where reconstruction has already begun, critics argue that private touring may de incentivize the reconstruction of locations and sites, in which reconstruction has yet to occur. Another possible situation is that the tours are not organized by formal entities but instead by less cohesive groups of citizens. These cases are relatively unstudied due to their rarity.

Examples of disaster tourism

79 AD eruption of Mt Vesuvius. When the nearby volcano Mt Vesuvius erupted in 79 AD, the eruption buried the city of Pompeii and the nearby city of Herculaneum and preserved everything from its streets to its frescoes under mounds of pumice and ash. Although Pompeii was initially rediscovered in 1599, tourism was undesirable until Spanish engineer Rocque Joaquin de Alcubierre performed a much larger evacuation in 1748, which revealed many noteworthy structures, such as a fully intact Roman theatre.

Today, Pompeii belongs to the much larger Vesuvius National Park and is one of Italy's most popular tourist sites, attracting approximately 2.5 million visitors annually.

Hindenburg incident (1937). In the early evening of May 6, 1937, the German passenger airship LZ 129 Hindenburg burst into flame during a docking attempt at the Lakehurst Naval Air Station, just outside Lakehurst, New Jersey. With the cause of the fire unknown and a death toll of thirty-seven passengers, the Hindenburg disaster became one of the biggest news stories of its time.

Today, a bronze plaque and cement outline the site of the incident. Immediately east of the crash site, volunteers of the Navy Lakehurst Historical Society will conduct public tours of Historic Hangar One, the location where the Hindenburg was kept.

How tourism benefits from disasters?

Post disaster leaves a door open for the tourism industry. Museums may open up to educate tourists about the disaster. There could be organized tours about the disaster. There could also be entertainment based around the disaster. This may sound strange, but think Titanic, Auschwitz or Chernobyl.

Increased tourism in the area can help bring in much needed income. Disaster tourism can increase visitor arrivals and support local economies financially through an increase in hotel bookings, restaurants, etc.

Disaster tourism can help rebuild and reform broken communities and provide a means of support for facilitating infrastructure development, especially when a community notices a decline in other forms of tourism, i.e. leisure tourism.

The problems with disaster tourism

There seems to be an inherent conflict between the terms ‘disaster’ and ‘tourism’. Tourism is typically associated with leisure, with inevitable connotations of happiness, fun and enjoyment. This is in direct contradiction to a disaster, where sadness, stress and struggle are likely at the heart.

In fact, many would argue that tourists should not visit disaster sites at all, particularly if this is during the immediate aftermath. Problems can include poor tourist behaviour or a lack of respect towards the local community and its peoples.

Tourists may also be a hindrance instead of a help. They may get in the way of lifesaving efforts or put themselves in unnecessary danger.

Tourists may also use up resources which should be prioritized for those in need, such as food and water.

In her blog ‘Women on the road’ Leyla explained how her visit to Lebanon in the 1980s made her realise why indulging in disaster tourism could be a ‘tragic mistake. Leyla explains how the problems with disaster tourism may not appear obvious at first.

The UNWTO created a handbook on natural disasters produced by WTO and WMO experts, demonstrating how to combat natural disasters in tourist areas and mitigate their impacts. Organizations and DMOs are advised to use this as a guide.

The ethics of disaster tourism

So, is it really ethical to visit sites of sorrow? Or to photograph people who are in moments of grief?

Many communities welcome disaster tourists as they raise awareness about the issue, in turn helping to attract further aid. Others, however, may argue that disaster tourists are more trouble than they are worth. Following the New Orleans Hurricane Katrina, for example, local residents criticised tour operations for making financial gains from their disastrous misery.

Here is a list of some of the behaviours demonstrated by disaster tourists, which have been deemed offensive or inappropriate:

- Photographing people in moments of sorrow;
- Smiling and laughing around those experiencing hardship;
- Treating people as if they are museum exhibits;
- Making inappropriate remarks;
- Wearing disrespectful clothes;
- Using inappropriate language;
- Committing to disaster tourism for personal gain (e.g. personal satisfaction, to enhance CV etc);
- Making money from others’ hardships;
- Talking loudly about unrelated issues;
- Showing general signs of disrespect;

Summary

We can see that disaster tourism is a small, but growing industry. More people are becoming aware of disaster tourism, both in an academic and a community sense, which has brought

with it a greater awareness of the associated negative impacts. Whilst there are some benefits of disaster tourism, the negative impacts tend to outweigh these. Tourists are sometimes a hindrance rather than a help, they behave inappropriately and they can use up scarce resources. On the other hand tourists work with local organizations to rebuild communities and provide charitable and even relocation services to residents who have lost their homes, jobs, and families. While there may be some opportunity for tourism during these trips, the emphasis of the journey is on assisting communities rather than recreational travel. This can be the basis for the improvement and change of many people's lifestyle.

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