

The “Pearl of the Orient” as a dark tourism destination in Malaysia

Geraldine Anne Tan and Sonia Lim

Geraldine Anne Tan and Sonia Lim are both based at the School of Hospitality, Tourism and Culinary Arts, Taylor’s University, Subang Jaya, Malaysia.

Abstract

Purpose – *The purpose of this paper is to examine the potential of Penang in being a dark tourism destination in Malaysia with the influence of urban tourism development.*

Design/methodology/approach – *A systematic review was conducted to serve as a foundation by highlighting the number of dark tourism studies conducted in Southeast Asia (SEA).*

Findings – *The results projected a total of 23 dark tourism studies conducted within the SEA region. These papers revolve around the following key themes that were conducted in these countries: tourists’ behaviour (motivation, satisfaction and experience), nation building and narratives, dark tourism development (management, marketing and implications), theoretical underpinnings and the role of dark tourism. Amongst these, it was found that tourists’ behaviour is the most studied with eight papers while the least is on nation building and theoretical underpinnings of dark tourism with three papers each.*

Research limitations/implications – *The lack of dark tourism studies in SEA results in insufficient existing literature which justifies the need of exploring Penang as a potential dark tourism destination.*

Originality/value – *This paper builds on prior dark tourism studies that are significantly related to urban tourism but takes a step further by exploring the Asian settings. Specifically, into Malaysia which is more than just an SEA country, but a multicultural one which is rich and diverse with its culture and heritage that leads to many unique tourists’ destinations. This paper extends the geographical scope of the dark tourism literature as it focuses on Penang in Malaysia.*

Keywords *Malaysia, Southeast Asia, Urban tourism, Dark tourism, Penang*

Paper type *Conceptual paper*

Introduction

Travelling to sites of death, disaster and the seemingly macabre is becoming a pervasive cultural activity within the contemporary society. The growing number of studies conducted on dark tourism suggests its expansion in both the academic field and in the tourism industry. This is due to the interest and attention placed on the influence of media and extensive social network platforms, a result from the constant evolving tourism trends. Consequently, it influences the growth of urban tourism or some may claim that it serves as a paradox to the development of urban tourism. Despite the increasing number of contributions to this scholarship, there are plentiful of studies conducted in the western regions accompanied with “western” mindset (Light, 2017). Admittedly, there are more established and recognised dark sites in the western countries than in Asian countries. However, it is argued that the common usage of western frameworks in exploring dark tourism studies are not fitting for other parts of the world and academics are advised to explore new ways of thinking that considers the sensitivity of different societies in perceiving dark tourism (Lee *et al.*, 2012; Yoshida *et al.*, 2016). In a similar vein, Asian countries often relate dark tourism as being a “taboo” due to cultural differences. Yoshida *et al.* (2016) argue that it is inappropriate for a spectrum based on education or entertainment to be applied in Asian contexts. Nonetheless, although dark tourism may be regarded as a “taboo” in Malaysia, it is important to note that micro and macro factors are constantly changing, and countries will need to adopt strategies to strive in the competitive market. Amongst the Southeast Asian (SEA) countries, Vietnam, Cambodia and Thailand are some of the countries

Received 13 April 2017
Revised 30 August 2017
29 October 2017
Accepted 13 December 2017
© International Tourism Studies Association

that actively promote and acknowledge dark tourism. This illustrates that dark tourism is an untapped potential tourist product in SEA. Penang, being one of the most urbanized states in Malaysia, yet highly diverse in culture, has attractions that should be recognised as dark tourist sites. This is significant as Penang's urban tourism has the potential to promote the state as a dark tourism destination. With the current steadfast growth of dark tourism and urban tourism, this paper aims to critically examine Penang's potential in being a dark tourism destination with the influence of urban tourism development by adopting Philip Stone's dark tourism spectrum as the foundation.

Literature review

Theoretical underpinnings of dark tourism

Dark tourism carries a variety of labels, from being a new phenomenon in the tourism and academic industry, an expanding source of tourism revenues (Legault, 2011) to being a social interest due to people's growing fascination in death. However, it recently became the epitome of scholarly attention as well as in the dark tourism market (Foley and Lennon, 1996a, b; Sharpley and Stone, 2009; Biran *et al.*, 2011). Lennon and Foley describe dark tourism as a relationship between an interest in death and macabre with tourism attraction. Similarly, Stone (2005) defines it as "the act of travel and visitation to sites, attractions and exhibitions which have real or recreated death, suffering or the seemingly macabre as a main theme". Other sisterly terms such as "thanatourism" (Seaton, 1999), "morbid tourism" (Blom, 2000), "black-spot tourism" (Rojek, 1993) and "atrocious heritage" (Ashworth and Hartmann, 2005) are being introduced by fellow researchers over the years of studies conducted in this area. Additionally, it is considered as a hype due to media's response towards this budding attention by the public (Sharpley and Stone, 2009) which is projected in the increasing number of demand and supply of dark tourism products. Ruane (2004) states that disaster and death appear to be profitable commodities that are marketable within the expanding tourism industry. It is also recognised as a form of niche tourism or special interest tourism (Suhaini and Chai, 2008; Masanti, 2016).

Despite that, Powell and Kennell (2015) point out that there is a lack of focus towards the relationship between dark tourism and urban tourism. Clearly, it is important as urban tourism itself is complex in its own nature, making it impossible to have a singular definition to it. According to the National Conference on Urban Tourism (Rennes, 1988), it is defined as "a set of resources or activities located in the city and made available to visitors outside having the purpose of entertainment, business or other reasons". Gârbea (2013) states that it is a result due to changes in peoples' behaviour who succeeded in transforming cities into a place of relaxation, cultural centres or even as a leisure or business place.

Hence, this leads to a stiff competition between cities, even for places that were not intentionally built for tourism purposes but becomes an integral part of the process along the way due to globalisation that opens up the pathway for the emergence of new economies into the global economy (Ben-Dalia *et al.*, 2013). Following to that, it is critical for cities to have a better understanding of the different segments in the tourism market to meet or exceed tourists' expectations of unique experiences. In light to that, the dark tourism market has the potential to offer cities a more competitive edge due to the growing demand of its dark tourism supplies (Stone, 2006; Stone and Sharpley, 2008; Biran and Hyde, 2013). Thus, this paper attempts to critically examine Penang's potential in being a dark tourism destination with the influence of its urban tourism development. With that, it examines the ability to market Malaysia as a dark tourism destination (Braithwaite and Lee, 2006).

The dark tourism phenomenon receives different perspectives whereby some advocates that it has been within the tourism business ever since medieval executions (Stone, 2006). However, some consider it to be a result of postmodernity (Genov, 2008) wherein dark tourism exists due to the recent demand from the public for new thrilling experiences (MacCannell, 1999). Lennon and Foley (2000) cite that dark tourism is regarded as "intimation of postmodernity" due to the repetition of reconstructions that are reliant on the usage of contemporary audio-visual media with the aim of continuous popularity (Rojek, 1993). Indeed, this is viewed from the increasing

numbers of visitors who consumes both commodified and real dark tourism products through media, popular culture and audio-visual representations (Stone and Sharpley, 2008). This paper is based upon the belief that dark tourism is part of a post-modern world due to the sudden uprising of dark tourism market in the industry which is enhanced by technological advances. The wide array of studies conducted in this occurrence leads to a discourse in defining this phenomenon.

The extensive scholarly attention placed upon dark tourism leads to a variety of dark tourism products projected in the typology of dark sites and attractions pointed out by Stone (2006) in his dark tourism spectrum. This spectrum explains the six different shades starting from lightest to darkest. For example, the darkest level represents “sites of death and suffering” like “the Killing Fields in Cambodia” while the lightest refers to “sites associated with death and suffering” such as “Celebrity Graveyards”. These variations showcase the diverse levels of intensities which effects the interpretations and experiences to visitors. This is depicted in Figure 1.

In other words, this explains the existence of numerous forms of dark tourism supplies (Sharpley, 2009) which leads to the nature of subjectivity in experiences and interpretations. The demand for more dark tourism products increases based on the changing and growing tourist trends such as the need to experience new and authentic mode of tourist activities (Lee, 1991). Despite that, it also highlights that the curiosity within individuals who seek for such mode of touristic activities is unexplainable (Suhaini and Chai, 2008). Hence, it is undeniable that it is within the human nature to seek for excitements and thrilling experiences which are unpredictable as it takes them away from their daily routine of life (Nunnally and Leonard, 1973). In other words, the “need to escape from the pressures and conditions of life in a tourist’s home society” is an extrinsic tourist motivation (Sharpley, 1994).

In view of the current literature on dark tourism, it is discovered that people are motivated to visit sites of atrocities due multiple reasons. However, the three main motivations consist of:

Figure 1 A dark tourism spectrum: perceived product features of dark tourism within a “Darkest-Lightest” framework of supply by Dr Philip Stone (2006)



“morbid fascination with death” (Seaton, 1996; Seaton and Lennon, 2004), to experience the contemplation of life and mortality (Stone and Sharpley, 2008) and the longing to understand these atrocious events such as how these incidents took place (Biran *et al.*, 2011; Kang *et al.*, 2012; Biran and Poria, 2012). As such, this advocates that tourists’ motivations to dark tourism sites are subjective and unique which are mirrored in their interpretations of dark tourism experiences.

Sharpley (2009) mentions that the fascination is not placed on the manner but with the meaning or implication attached to the variety of atrocities that is significant to the experience. Additionally, Korstanje and Ivanov (2012) explain that individuals holds different meanings and ways of experiencing a site, hence the interpretation of another’s suffering is based on perception and experience. Chronis (2005) and Kang *et al.* (2012) argue that these interpretations could be influenced by what is displayed, how other visitors experience the dark attractions and the way a guide shares information to elicit emotions of empathy or convey a message to fellow visitors. Consequently, countries are becoming more innovative in developing destinations that can offer complexities and uncertainties to meet the current demands of tourists (Wahlers and Etzel, 1985).

In this context, dark tourism is not just a mode of touristic attraction, but it plays a significant role in “identity construction”, “remembrance and commemoration”, “emphatic identification”, “education”, “curiosity” (Biran *et al.*, 2011; Kang *et al.*, 2012; Biran and Poria, 2012) and as way to “face trauma” (Korstanje, 2015). Furthermore, dark tourism is also regarded as a “guardian of history in heritage terms” (Seaton, 2009; Stone, 2009) wherein effective distribution of information about the site’s heritage and history values allows visitors to have a better comprehension of the atrocities that happened in the past (Braithwaite and Lee, 2006). Hence, it serves as a means of unification the past, present and future into a discourse which enriches history and heritage to visitors.

Stupart (2013) adds that visitation to dark touristic sites provides added value experiences to visitors. This is mirrored by the ability of dark tourism in enhancing emotional and educational elements through the way knowledge and information is conveyed to visitors (Lennon and Foley, 2000) as well as emotional sentiments (Nahimana, 2011). For example, sites such as public memorials, historical monuments and museums enable visitors to visualise historical events. Additionally, visitors to dark sites are able to enhance their knowledge with regard to heritage, at the same time to be connected with its interpretations (Biran *et al.*, 2011).

Dark tourism and urban tourism

Similarly, to special interest tourism and niche tourism market, urban tourism is also on the rise (Uysal, 2013). Urban tourism is widely acknowledged for its ability in providing economical and societal benefits to a city or country as it aids in generating income and offering job opportunities (Uysal, 2013). Undoubtedly, this is seen by the number of countries and cities that started to develop and depend on its tourism industry as it contributes significantly to their economy. For example, Barcelona with its effective tourism strategies since the 1990s and Los Angeles with its construction of successful brand image due to the Summer Olympics in 1984. However, in terms of tourism in general, some of the examples cover Glasgow (Paddison, 1993), Rotterdam (Richards and Wilson, 2004) and Cape Town (Bickford-Smith, 2009). Delitheou *et al.* (2010) support this claim as they agreed that urban tourism plays a role in the increase of economic status of European cities.

Hence, there is a distinctive relationship between dark tourism and urban tourism as the growth of dark tourism in a country would play a role in the development of the country’s urban tourism as well. In light of dark tourism destinations, examples that can be referred to are the following: National 9/11 Memorial and Museum in New York due to the 9/11 attack; the France catacombs in Paris and the atomic bombings in Hiroshima, Japan. These are globally recognised dark tourism destinations that play a role in the development of urban tourism in their respective countries. As in the context of urban tourism, some of the popular benefits consists of: creating new work places, new perspectives for local tourism firms, new investment possibilities, increase of incomes and improvement of local community living standards,

improvement of local infrastructure and assurance of the financial sources for conserving the natural areas, art, handicraft, archaeological and historic areas and cultural traditions (European Commission, 1998).

Therefore, it is strongly suggested that the growth of dark tourism destinations plays a role in contributing towards the development of urban tourism. This is said because dark tourism being a main product can be considered as an educational, fascination, humorous, in which case, strongly depends on the specific social and cultural milieu (Stone, 2006). Hence, with the appropriate degree of infrastructure that revolves around the supply of dark tourism products, it aids in encouraging dark tourism to be socially acceptable and its reconceptualization for varying purposes such as for entertainment, memorial or education (Stone, 2006). Furthermore, the production of dark tourism products is not only driven by consumer but is subjected to possible changes in the wider social, cultural and political climate (Seaton, 1999).

Noticeably, western countries are more readily in accepting dark tourism phenomenon as compared to Asian countries. Evidently, this is due to the nature of their society that has a significant fascination with things related to the death, be it real or fictional, as well as if it is media driven or otherwise (Stone, 2006). Light (2017) states that other non-western countries may result differently in which the relationships between the living and the dead can take diverse forms seeing that it was essentially a “western” concept. Prominently, the growth of dark tourism market in the western countries is proven by the number of dark tourist attractions/sites or destinations that are being globally promoted and recognised. For example, the London Dungeon in England, the Chernobyl site in Ukraine and Alcatraz in the USA. Likewise, Liyanage *et al.* (2015) further inform of the wide variety of dark tourism products in Europe.

Despite the lack of awareness from the stakeholders in Asian countries in promoting dark tourism, it is vital to take note of some dark tourism sites which are being promoted by some of the SEA countries. Similarly, it was cited that greater emphasis was placed on North American and European cases, but Asia-Pacific is progressing in becoming a source of more examples (Henderson, 2000). For example, Cambodia promotes the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Killing Fields while Vietnam displays its Cu Chi Tunnels and National War Museum. Peleggi (1996) highlights attractions resulted from the World War II being developed in North Thailand and some in Singapore (Henderson, 1997). The following are some of the dark tourism studies conducted in the Asian region for example countries like Korea (Connell, 2017), China, Taiwan (Zhang and Crang, 2016) and Sri Lanka (Fallon and Robinson, 2016).

Although SEA is slowly progressing in terms of its dark tourism market, it is obvious that the Asian continent is less enthusiastic towards the dark tourism phenomenon due to its strong cultural and heritage values in which Asians are deemed to be more conventional and traditional in comparison to their western counterparts. Masanti (2016) points out that in the case of Malaysia, the local community is not keen in acknowledging dark tourism market in the country as they view it as an exploitation of atrocities in exchange of satisfying touristic experiences. Therefore, it explains on why dark tourism is less acceptable in the country despite the countless dark tourist sites which are not widely promoted by the respective Asian countries. However, it is important to stress on how these dark tourism sites are projected to the local community as “what experiences and dark sites are produced” plays a vital role in altering local community’s negative perceptions of dark tourism.

Considering this, the government should play an active role in examining local communities’ perceptions and attitudes towards dark tourism as well as educating them of this growing tourism phenomenon (Kim and Butler, 2015). Nonetheless, it was noticed that SEA countries are gradually depending on tourism as being a vehicle for rebuilding and economic growth due to garnering interest from the public towards their demand for such authentic experiences (Henderson, 2000). Benton (1999) states that collective memory differentiates the important events of a nation’s past, transforming perceptions into narratives that are conveyed as heritage for the consumption within the tourism industry. Hence, the following section critically reviews Penang’s potential in being a dark tourism destination.

A systematic review of literature on dark tourism studies in SEA was conducted to highlight the lack of dark tourism studies in this region. This is illustrated in Table I. The research design is based on a

Table 1 Number of dark tourism articles in SEA

Countries	Number of journal articles
Cambodia	6
Malaysia	4
Singapore	2
Thailand	4
Vietnam	8

Source: Created by authors

ten years' interval (2010-2017) and only analyses scholarly articles which excludes books, conference papers and book reviews. Four academic search engines were selected and keywords such as "dark tourism", "thanatourism", "war", "heritage", "dissonant heritage", "thanalogical", "visitors" and "tourists" were used to identify the papers. Amongst the 11 SEA countries, only 23 scholarly articles were found focusing on only five SEA countries. These papers revolve around the following key themes that were conducted in these countries: tourists' behaviour (motivation, satisfaction and experience), nation building and narratives, dark tourism development (management, marketing and implications), theoretical underpinnings and the role of dark tourism. Amongst these, tourists' behaviour being the most studied with eight papers while the least is on nation building and theoretical underpinnings of dark tourism with three papers each.

Study context: Penang

Penang is famously labelled as the "Pearl of the Orient". This title was based on a virgin paradise (Penang) that took her name from the plenitude of betel nut palms scattered all over her soft, sandy beaches. The capital city of Penang is George Town, named after King George III. On 1 January 1957, George Town was granted the city status by Queen Elizabeth II, which made it the first town in the Federation of Malaysia, after Singapore to become a city. Penang is rich in heritage; it was listed as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site in 2008. Melaka and George Town are the only two cities in Malaysia that were listed as UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Within the first nine months of 2016, the figure for international tourist arrivals reached 1.03 million as compared to 928,000 in 2015 (Tan, 2017). For domestic tourist, the number of arrivals was 1.39 million in 2016, higher than in 2015, which was 1.38 million (Tan, 2017). The increase of tourist arrivals is strongly suggested to be influenced by three reasons: the steady growth in popularity of Penang as a destination, George Town is developing as a desired stopover for international cruises because the heritage enclave is located near the port (Tan, 2017) and the implementation of standardized paging board at the Penang International Airport (Intan, 2016). Penang has always been a preferred destination for both local and international tourists (*The Malaymail Online*, 2016). Recently, a famous travel magazine, *Condé Nast Traveller*, named Penang as the second-best place to retire in the world and Penang is the only destination from Asia in this top ten lists (Drescher, 2016). Penang is strategically located; near two major cities, Kuala Lumpur and Singapore and a beach vacation, Langkawi.

Dark tourism in Malaysia

Comparable to other SEA countries embedded with their own history in being war victims, Malaysia is a victim of the Japanese occupancy during the Second World War (Masanti, 2016). Dark tourism products are considered as a niche market in the Malaysian tourism industry (Mohd Zahari *et al.*, 2016) which are untapped (Suhaini and Chai, 2008; Masanti, 2016). In the context of dark tourism, Malaysia has a variety of dark tourism sites such as museums, cemeteries, churches, war relics, prisons, memorials, etc. Suhaini and Chai (2010) classify dark tourism in Malaysia into four categories: graveyard tombs – tombs belonging legendary warriors, dynastic burial places – royal mausoleum that have graves built for each royal family members that are over decades or centuries, prisons, a famous example is the Pudu Jail and cemeteries – war memorial

and war cemeteries. Pudu Jail was a 115-year-old building built by the British, one of the famous dark sites that underwent many controversies (Ruban, 2016). The former jail was located at the city centre of Kuala Lumpur and public tours were opened from 1997 to 1998. It served as a prison for the past 100 years, and it was turned into a museum that offered visitors tools that were used for caning and hanging. It was labelled as the Alcatraz Prison of Malaysia, but it was demolished for commercial development without any proper study (Ruban, 2016).

Pudu Jail is an example of dark tourism product that co-existed with the urban development of a city. Pudu Jail was viewed negatively, something that the authorities were not proud of, especially when it was located right in the heart of the city (Zappei, 2010). Critics were received stating that despite the location, it should be kept because it has heritage and tourism value (Malaysiakini, 2010). Given that the building was more than a century old and the location was strategic, it could potentially be turned into tourist magnet, locally and internationally (Nor Shahid, 2014). Potentially, Pudu Jail can be categorised as being a part of heritage tourism which is considered as a dark tourist attraction as it coincides with the characteristics of a dark tourist attraction. Consequently, in 2010, the year when the prison was demolished, the 10th Malaysia Plan announced that an estimated amount of MYR5 million was assigned to preserve and to improve dark tourism sites (Bhuiyan *et al.*, 2013).

In recent years, dark tourism in Malaysia begun to receive attention from researchers (Braithwaite and Lee, 2006; Suhaini and Chai, 2010; Masanti, 2016). In Masanti's (2016) study, she lists out the potential dark tourism product in Malaysia as projected in Table II.

Potential dark attractions in Penang

Penang is widely acknowledged for its multiple attractions which are not just limited to cultural or heritage tourism. Penang has been repeatedly recognised as a potential dark tourism destination in Malaysia (Suhaini and Chai, 2010; Algie, 2014; Masanti, 2016; Mohd Zahari *et al.*, 2016). Here, we examine some of the potential dark attractions of Penang. First, we explore the Penang War Museum which was listed as one of the five macabre SEA destinations by CNN (Algie, 2014). It is also widely known as "Bukit Hantu" or Ghost Hill, a fortress built in 1930 by the British for defence, but fell during an attack by the Japanese soldiers. The Japanese took over the fortress and turned it into a camp for prisoners of war. Hundreds of prisoners were reported to be tortured and beheaded publicly at the site.

Today, the fortress was turned into a museum that offers tours and serves as a memorial with an education element that showcases Malaysia's history and conveys a reflective message. Penang's rich history becomes the prominent link in associating the museum with dark tourism, especially since its past is in relation to death. The Penang War Museum offers night tours in conjunction with the "Hungry Ghost Festival" since 2012. The museum is listed the "Top Ten Most Haunted Sites in Asia" by National Geographic and CNN. This museum became an international spotlight when it was featured in a National Geographic documentary series called "I Wouldn't Go in There" by Robert Joe, an urban investigator for Asia's scariest places.

Table II Potential dark tourism products in Malaysia

<i>Potential dark tourism product in Malaysia</i>	<i>Location</i>
Penang War Museum	Penang, West Malaysia
Jerajak Island	Penang, West Malaysia
Pulau Bidong	Terengganu, West Malaysia
Batu Lintang	Kuching, Sarawak, East Malaysia
Labuan	Federal Territory of Malaysia
The Second World War Sandakan – Ranau Death March	Sandakan to District of Ranau area, Sabah, East Malaysia
Pulau Berhala	Sandakan, Sabah, East Malaysia
Brothel No. 8	Sandakan, Sabah, East Malaysia
Jesselton (Kota Kinabalu)	Sabah, East Malaysia
Ranau	Sabah, East Malaysia
Mantanani Island	Kota Belud, Sabah, East Malaysia

Source: Adopted from Masanti (2016)

The second attraction is the Fort Cornwallis, a defence fortress built in 1786 by Captain Francis Light to serve initially as a stopover for free trading and to protect the base from enemy invasions. Today, the fort offers tour featuring cannon, gun powder magazine, the first Christian chapel in Penang and row of barracks and small jail cells. However, the most iconic feature of Fort Cornwallis is the legendary Captain Francis Light bronze statue. The statue was built by F.J. Wilcoxson in 1936 to honour the 150th years after Light's historic landing in Penang island.

Captain Francis Light is the founder of British colony in Penang and had contributed a significant part in the Penang history (Penang Global Tourism, 2017). Light passed away in 1794 from malaria and he was buried in the Old Protestant Cemetery (Banji, 2015). Most of Penang's European pioneers are buried in this cemetery. For example, a renowned nineteenth-century lawyer named James Richardson Logan was buried in this cemetery (Banji, 2015). Logan made the name Indonesia famous which was coined by George Windsor Earl, an English ethnologist and Thomas Leonowens. Thomas's wife, Anna Leonowens, taught Siam's King Mongkut's wives, concubines and children for seven years from 1862 to 1867. The famous musicals: *The King and I* and *Anna and the King* were inspired by Anna's memoirs of *The English Governess at the Siamese Court* (Banji, 2015).

The British Lieutenant, Colonel Gregory Jackson, was buried in this cemetery with his wife and son (Intan, 2016). Other colonial society buried in the cemetery consists of high-ranking government officials, civil servants to merchants, engineers, doctors and judges (Banji, 2015). The earliest recorded burial was in 1787, William Murray, the Lieutenant Fireworker in the Bengal Artillery. In this cemetery, there are also 12 surviving memorials claimed to be of Hakka Christian refugees from the Taiping Rebellion in China from the year of 1850 to 1864 (Banji, 2015). The cemetery is also next to the Roman Catholic Cemetery, signifying the early tolerance between Protestants and Catholics during that period (Banji, 2015).

The Old Protestant Cemetery is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is the third potential dark attraction. It is considered as one of the best preserved Christian cemetery of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century in SEA (Banji, 2015). The Penang Global Tourism organises educational tours to this cemetery for free (Intan, 2016). During the last Halloween celebration, the tour was themed as the "Horror Night at the Cemetery", where each tourist is given candle as they tour the cemetery (Intan, 2016).

The fourth attraction is a Ghost Museum that features local "ghosts" and "ghosts" from Europe, Egypt, Japan and China. It is the first of its kind in Malaysia (Logeishwary, 2016). This museum allows visitors to take pictures with the "ghosts" display and to educate visitors about the history of the "ghosts" as well as to debunk the fear of "ghosts" (*The Sun Daily*, 2016). Since its opening in 2016, the museum has been receiving a considerable amount of attention from the media. Finally, another event that features "ghosts" is the Hungry Ghost Festival. This traditional Chinese festival falls in the Seventh Lunar Month of the Chinese's calendar (generally in between August and September) and it is celebrated widely in Penang. It is believed that the "Gates of Hell" will be opened during this time for "spirits" and "ghosts" to return to earth and to roam freely for food (Penang State Tourism, 2017). This cultural activity is then converted to a tourist attraction featuring opera performances, religious activities, prayers and puppet theatres. The festival is recognised and promoted heavily by the authorities in Penang.

Drawing from this, it concludes that authorities in Penang are becoming more innovative in developing tourist products to meet tourists' demands. This can be viewed as a way of acknowledging the offering of thrilling experiences that can boost tourism in Penang (*The Sun Daily*, 2016), despite not being widely labelled as dark tourist attractions. Dark tourism products can be considered as educational, fascination, humorous as well as depending on the social and cultural milieu (Stone, 2006). The "ghosts" feature in this museum are educational, fascination and humorous according to the Malaysian's social and cultural environment.

These highlighted dark attractions are under the dark tourism spectrum by Dr Philip Stone. Table III projects the potential dark sites in Penang, according to Stone's typology of dark destination which was constructed from his dark tourism spectrum.

According to the Sustainable Tourism Research Cluster (2016), a study was conducted wherein 4,767 international and domestic tourists were grouped based on their activities in Penang.

Table III Potential dark sites in Penang

<i>Potential sites in Penang</i>	<i>Connection</i>	<i>Typologies</i>
Penang War Museum	Memorial site museum	Dark conflict sites
Fort Cornwallis	Battlefield remnants	Dark conflict sites
Old Protestant Cemetery	Cemetery memorial site	Cemeteries
Roman Catholic Cemetery	Cemetery memorial site	Cemeteries
Ghost Museum	Fun museum	Dark fun factories
Hungry Ghost Festival	Educational/entertainment festival	Dark exhibitions

Source: Created by authors

Findings showed that three of the top five tourist activities recorded include visiting and participating in dark activities. The highest recorded activity is sightseeing in the city (36.4 per cent), followed by visiting historical sites (23.19 per cent) and visiting museums and art galleries (12.6 per cent). This is in support with Penang being a potential dark tourism destination with the influence of urban tourism as the dark attractions projected in Table III are located within the city and considered as historical sites as well.

Following to that, the dark sites are also categorised as being a museum. Liyanage *et al.* (2015) further state that dark tourism is considered as part of wider urban and city-based tourism. Although visitation to the dark sites may not be the primary dark attraction for tourists, it is still accounted as one of the touristic activities while participating in city tourism (Liyanage *et al.*, 2015). In terms of the number of tour guides found, Kuala Lumpur ranks the first (2,645), followed by Selangor (2,379) and Penang (1,150). The high figure of tour guides in Penang proves the strong touristic demand that supports the growth of urban tourism.

In the context of Penang, there are six dark sites available to the urban tourists, but it is hardly recognised as such. Dark tourism is an unexplored tourist product in Malaysia (Suhaini and Chai, 2008; Masanti, 2016). This signifies a gap, wherein, Penang has sites that can be developed into dark sites, but has not been marketed as a dark tourism destination. Given that Penang has these potential sites, it can be the first state in Malaysia to set the trend of dark tourism. Arguably, Sabah has more potential sites, but Penang holds the urbanized city status that Sabah lacks. The established urbanized city status in Penang provides a solid foundation for Penang to attract more tourists. On these terms, it provides complimentary benefits to both dark tourism and urban tourism in Penang.

Dark tourism sites propose the chance to capture and conserve Malaysia's history and collective memories of humanity and make them accessible to the wider public (Liyanage *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, Penang is already listed as a World Heritage Site. Light (2017) suggests that phrases such as "dark heritage" and "dark heritage tourism" show the growing convergence of dark tourism and heritage tourism. In this case, by promoting Penang as a dark destination, this indicates a strong sign for potential growth. The indications of expected growth in terms of income are unclear because dark tourism attractions are considered as complementary tourist values (Minic, 2012). The mass package tours are oversaturated and by adding dark tourism in these tours, it will increase touristic experience (Minic, 2012). Furthermore, local authorities in Penang collected funds to increase the tourism growth in Penang and they seek for new ideas to promote and market Penang's tourism industry (Ngu, 2017).

Conclusion

Malaysian authorities are encouraged to realise the potential of dark tourism in Malaysia. By venturing into dark tourism market, it will assist in sustaining other forms of tourism from being overused in Malaysia such as eco-tourism (Masanti, 2016). According to Masanti (2016), to establish dark tourism in Malaysia, the cultural consideration needs to be a priority. It is possible to tap into the dark tourism market and make it as a tourism revenue product, if it is marketed in a suitable manner that does not ignore the cultural sensitivity of the local community (Masanti, 2016). Penang is a fitting place to initiate the dark tourism trend in Malaysia as some of the dark sites are recognised internationally by CNN and National Geographic. This shows that the foundation of Penang as a dark site has already

been introduced internationally without sufficient awareness from the local authorities in Malaysia. In other words, the foundation in promoting Penang as a dark tourism attraction has been established, which will be enhanced by further promotional efforts.

Furthermore, Penang is a city rich in culture, history and at the same time, is modern but with very little seasonality. By offering dark tourism, it will increase its attractiveness and competitiveness (Stone, 2005; Stone and Sharpley, 2008; Biran and Hyde, 2013; Powell and Kennell, 2016). To conclude, Penang boasts of a strong potential in being a dark tourism destination as it is recognised that a state that promotes urban tourism, branding and promotion of dark tourism would only aid tourism growth of the country. To be specific, the stakeholders consist of the government, the industry and the civil society. In terms of its contributions to the government, by promoting Penang as a dark tourism destination with the aid of urban tourism, it will increase tourism growth of the state by providing a new niche market for the country.

Additionally, it will strengthen the nation's identity and image as dark tourism promotes national branding. As for the tourism industry, it will benefit from the availability of more job opportunities and provide competitive advantage to the tourism suppliers. A strong tourism market results in positive benefits to the nation's economic status. Finally, the civil society will be able to enjoy better infrastructure that stems out from the growth of tourism development in the county. Furthermore, locals will be given the prospect to participate in tourism businesses wherein will alleviate the issue of unemployment. Hence, it is vital for related stakeholders to explore further into the dark tourism market as it is proven to be benefiting for countries in light of their economic status while improving the socio-cultural element of the country.

References

- Algie, J. (2014), "Dark tourism: 5 macabre Southeast Asia destinations", *CNN*, 10 July, available at: <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/07/10/travel/dark-tourism-southeast-asia/>
- Ashworth, G. and Hartmann, R. (2005), "The management of horror and human tragedy", in Ashworth, G. and Hartmann, R. (Eds), *Horror and Human Tragedy Revisited: The Management of Sites of Atrocities for Tourism*, Cognizant Communications Corporation, New York, NY, pp. 253-62.
- Banji, C. (2015), "Glimpses of tough early life in George Town", *The Borneo Post*, 24 May, available at: www.theborneopost.com/2015/05/24/glimpses-of-tough-early-life-in-george-town/
- Ben-Dalia, S., Collins-Kreiner, N. and Churchman, A. (2013), "Evaluation of an urban tourism destination", *Tourism Geographies*, Vol. 15 No. 2, pp. 223-49.
- Benton, T. (1999), "From the Arengario to the Lictor's axe: memories of Italian fascism", *Material Memories*, Berg, New York, NY.
- Bhuiyan, M.H., Siwar, C. and Ismail, S.M. (2013), "Tourism development in Malaysia from the perspective of development plans", *Asian Social Science*, Vol. 9 No. 9, pp. 11-18.
- Bickford-Smith, V. (2009), "Creating the city of the tourist imagination: the case of Cape Town the fairest cape of them all", *Urban Studies*, Vol. 46 No. 9, pp. 1763-85.
- Biran, A. and Hyde, K.F. (2013), "New perspectives on dark tourism", *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 191-8.
- Biran, A. and Poria, Y. (2012), "Re-conceptualizing dark tourism", in Sharpley, R. and Stone, P. (Eds), *The Contemporary Tourist Experience: Concepts and Consequences*, Routledge, London, pp. 62-79.
- Biran, A., Poria, Y. and Oren, G. (2011), "Sought experiences at (dark) heritage sites", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 38 No. 3, pp. 820-41.
- Blom, T. (2000), "Morbid tourism-a postmodern market niche with an example from Althorp", *Norwegian Journal of Geography*, Vol. 54 No. 1, pp. 29-36.
- Braithwaite, D. and Lee, Y.L. (2006), "Dark tourism, hate and reconciliation: the Sandakan experience", Occasional Paper No. 8, International Institute for Peace Through Tourism.
- Chronis, A. (2005), "Co-constructing heritage at the Gettysburg storyscape", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 32 No. 2, pp. 386-406.

Conferința Națională a Turismului Urban (Rennes) (1988)

Connell, J. (2017), "Shining light on the darkness. Placing tourists within North Korean tourism. Comment on: desiring the dark: 'a taste for the unusual' in North Korean tourism?", *Current Issues in Tourism*, Vol. 20 No. 4, pp. 356-62.

Delitheou, V., Vinieratou, M. and Touri, M. (2010), "The contribution of public and private investments to the growth of conference tourism in Greece", *Management Research and Practice*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 165-78.

Drescher, C. (2016), "The 10 best places in the world to retire", *CN Traveller*, 3 March, available at: www.cntraveler.com/galleries/2016-03-03/the-10-best-places-in-the-world-to-retire

European Commission (1998), "Sustainable urban development in the European Union: a framework for action", Communication from the Commission, 28 October.

Fallon, P. and Robinson, P. (2016), "'Lest we forget': a veteran and son share a 'warfare tourism' experience", *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, Vol. 12 No. 1, pp. 21-35.

Foley, M. and Lennon, J. (1996a), "Editorial, heart of darkness", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 2 No. 4, pp. 195-7.

Foley, M. and Lennon, J. (1996b), "JFK and dark tourism – a fascination with assassination", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 2 No. 4, pp. 198-211.

Gârbea, R. (2013), "Urban tourism between content and aspiration for urban development", *Management and Marketing*, Vol. XI No. 1, pp. 193-201.

Genov, G. (2008), *Special Interest Tourism*, Cigura Print, Belgrade, pp. 13-15, 169-72.

Henderson, J.C. (1997), "Singapore's wartime heritage attractions", *Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 8 No. 2, pp. 39-49.

Henderson, J.C. (2000), "War as a tourist attraction: the case of Vietnam", *The International Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 2 No. 4, pp. 269-80.

Intan, H. (2016), "Penang expects more tourist this year", *The Sun Daily*, 1 March, available at: www.thesundaily.my/news/1715071

Kang, E.J., Scott, N., Lee, T.J. and Ballantyne, R. (2012), "Benefits of visiting a 'dark tourism' site: the case of the Jeju April 3rd peace park Korea", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 33 No. 2, pp. 257-65.

Kim, S. and Butler, G. (2015), "Local community perspectives towards dark tourism development: the case of Snowtown, South Australia", *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, Vol. 13 No. 1, pp. 78-89.

Korstanje, M. (2015), "The anthropology of dark tourism: exploring the contradictions of capitalism", *Centre for Ethnicity & Racism Studies*, pp. 1-13.

Korstanje, M.E. and Ivanov, S. (2012), "Tourism as a form of new psychological resilience: the inception of dark tourism", *Cultur: Revista de Cultura e Turismo*, Vol. 6 No. 4, pp. 56-71.

Lee, C.K., Bendle, L.J., Yoon, Y.-S. and Kim, M.-J. (2012), "Thanatourism or peace tourism: perceived value at a North Korean resort from an indigenous perspective", *International Journal of Tourism Research*, Vol. 14 No. 1, pp. 71-90.

Lee, T. (1991), "Conceptualising and measuring the novelty construct in tourism", unpublished PhD dissertation Texas A&M University, College Station.

Legault, M. (2011), "Future research directions for dark and heritage tourism: a systems perspective", pp. 1-17.

Lennon, J. and Foley, M. (2000), "Intimations of dark tourism", in Lennon, J. and Foley, M. (Eds), *Dark Tourism: The Attractions of Death and Disaster*, Continuum, London, p. 184.

Light, D. (2017), "Progress in dark tourism and thanatourism research: an uneasy relationship with heritage tourism", *Tourism Management*, Vol. 61, pp. 275-301.

Liyanage, S., Coca-Stefaniak, J.A. and Powell, R. (2015), "Dark destinations – visitor reflections from a holocaust memorial site", *International Journal of Tourism Cities*, Vol. 1 No. 4, pp. 282-98.

Logeiswary, T. (2016), "Horror fans flock to ghost museum in Penang for a chilling good time", *The Star Online*, 11 April, available at: www.thestar.com.my/metro/community/2016/04/11/up-close-with-ghouls-and-vampires-horror-fans-flock-to-ghost-museum-in-penang-for-a-chilling-good-ti/

- MacCannell, D. (1999), *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, 3rd ed., University of California Press, Berkeley.
- Malaysiakini (2010), "Authorities begin tearing down historic Pudu Jail", *Malaysiakini*, 22 June, available at: www.malaysiakini.com/news/135176
- Masanti, M. (2016), "Understanding dark tourism acceptance in Southeast Asia: the case of WWII Sandakan-Ranau death march, Sabah, Malaysia", *Development of Tourism and the Hospitality Industry in Southeast Asia*, Springer, Singapore, pp. 113-25.
- Minic, N. (2012), "Development of dark tourism in the contemporary society", *Journal of the Geographical Institute "Jovan Cvijic"*, Vol. 62 No. 3, pp. 81-103.
- Mohd Zahari, M.S., Hanafiah, M.H., Syed Mahboob, S.S. and Md. Zain, N.A. (2016), "Dark tourism: is it a growth segment for the Malaysia tourism industry?", *Tourism and Hospitality Management*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 47-56.
- Nahimana, F.M. (2011), "The attitude and perception of local and international tourists regarding the protection of the genocide memorial sites in Rwanda", doctoral dissertation, The Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town.
- Ngui, A. (2017), "Penang local government fee used for tourism promotion: MAH Penang", 24 April, available at: www.thesundaily.my/news/2017/04/24/penang-local-government-fee-used-tourism-promotion-mah-penang
- Nor Shahid, M.N. (2014), "Challenge to create Pudu Jail museum", *New Straits Times*, 1 December, available at: www.nst.com.my/news/2015/09/challenge-create-pudu-jail-museum
- Nunnally, J.C. and Leonard, L.C. (1973), "Exploratory behaviour and human development", *Advances in Child Development and Behaviour*, Vol. 8, pp. 59-109.
- Paddison, R. (1993), "City marketing, image reconstruction and urban regeneration", *Urban Studies*, Vol. 30 No. 2, pp. 339-49.
- Peleggi, M. (1996), "National heritage and global tourism in Thailand", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 23 No. 2, pp. 432-48.
- Penang Global Tourism (2017), "Francis Light cemetery tour", available at: http://mypenang.gov.my/itemfull.aspx?cid=602&id=9179&name=francis_light_cemetery_tour&lang=English
- Penang State Tourism (2017), "Penang Hungry Ghost Festival 2017", available at: www.visitpenang.gov.my/portal3/penang-tourism-news/2368-penang-hungry-ghost-festival-2017.html
- Powell, R. and Kennell, J. (2015), "Dark tourism and cities in Europe – an overview of the field", *Cultural Tourism in a Digital Era Second International Conference, Springer Proceedings in Business and Economics*, Springer, Athens.
- Powell, R. and Kennell, J. (2016), "Dark cities? Developing a methodology for researching dark tourism in European cities", in Katsoni, V. and Stratigea, A. (Eds), *Tourism and Culture in the Age of Innovation. Springer Proceedings in Business and Economics*, Springer, Cham, pp. 303-19.
- Richards, G. and Wilson, J. (2004), "The impact of cultural events on city image: Rotterdam cultural capital of Europe 2001", *Urban Studies*, Vol. 41 No. 10, pp. 1931-51.
- Rojek, C. (1993), *Ways of Escape: Modern Transformations in Leisure and Travel*, Macmillan Press Ltd, London.
- Ruane, L. (2004), "Ghost tours mix history, Lore", *News-press*, 20 February, available at: www.newspapers.com/newspage/220727826/
- Ruban, A. (2016), "Unchecked development, demolishing old buildings can alter city's identity, forum told", *The Malaymail Online*, 15 October, available at: www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/unchecked-development-demolishing-old-buildings-can-alter-citys-identity-fo
- Seaton, A. (2009), "Thanatourism and its discontents: an appraisal of a decade's work with some future issues and directions", *The Sage Handbook of Tourism Studies*, Sage Publications, pp. 521-42.
- Seaton, A. and Lennon, J. (2004), "Moral panics, ulterior motives and alterior desires: thanatourism in the early 21st century", in Singh, T. (Ed.), *New horizons in Tourism: Strange Experiences and Stranger Practices*, CABI Publishing, Wallingford, CT, pp. 63-82.
- Seaton, A.V. (1996), "Guided by the dark: from thanatopsis to thanatourism", *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 2 No. 4, pp. 234-44.

- Seaton, A.V. (1999), "War and thanatourism: Waterloo 1815-1914", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 130-58.
- Sharpley, R. (1994), *Tourism and Tourist Motivation*, Elm Publications, Hutingdon, pp. 96-126.
- Sharpley, R. (2009), "Shedding light on dark tourism: an introduction", in Sharpley, R. and Stone, P.R. (Eds), *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, Channel View Publications, New York, NY, p. 275.
- Sharpley, R. and Stone, P.R. (2009), *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, Channel View Publications, Bristol.
- Stone, P. (2005), "Dark tourism consumption: a call for research", *E-Review of Tourism Research*, Vol. 3 No. 5, pp. 109-17.
- Stone, P. (2006), "A dark tourism spectrum: towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites, attractions and exhibitions", *Tourism: An Interdisciplinary International Journal*, Vol. 54 No. 2, pp. 145-60.
- Stone, P. and Sharpley, R. (2008), "Consuming dark tourism: a thanatological perspective", *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 35 No. 2, pp. 574-95.
- Stone, P.R. (2009), "Making absent death present: consuming dark tourism in contemporary society", in Sharpley, R. and Stone, P.R. (Eds), *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*, Channel View Publications, New York, NY, pp. 23-38.
- Stupart, C. (2013), *The Development of Dark/Cultural Heritage as Attractions in Falmouth, Jamaica*.
- Suhaini, I. and Chai, A. (2008), "Challenges and opportunities for developing dark tourism in Malaysia: a pilot study on understanding visitor motivations at Jerajak Island, Penang", National Symposium on Tourism Research, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, pp. 12-18.
- Suhaini, I. and Chai, A. (2010), "The dark within – exploring challenges and opportunities for dark tourism in Malaysia", *Tourism Research in Malaysia*, UUM Press, Sintok.
- Sustainable Tourism Research Cluster (2016), "Penang tourist survey 2016", available at: www.ptga.my/content/display/article/site:ptga-param:penang_tourist_survey_2016-link:5502
- Tan, D. (2017), "All the suite factors", *The Star Online*, 9 January, available at: www.thestar.com.my/metro/smebiz/focus/2017/01/09/all-the-suite-factors/
- The Malaymail Online* (2016), "DPM praises outstanding Penang tourism sector", *The Malaymail Online*, 18 December, available at: www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/dpm-praises-outstanding-penang-tourism-sector
- The Sun Daily* (2016), "Penang to diversify its tourism attraction", *The Sun Daily*, 14 October, available at: www.thesundaily.my/news/2003627
- Uysal, Ü.E. (2013), "Urban tourism promotion: what makes the difference", *Current Research Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 5 No. 1, pp. 17-27.
- Wahlers, R.G. and Etzel, M.J. (1985), "Vacation preferences as a manifestation of stimulation and lifestyle experience", *Journal of Leisure Research*, Vol. 17 No. 4, pp. 283-95.
- Yoshida, K., Bui, H.T. and Lee, T.J. (2016), "Does tourism illuminate the darkness of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?", *Journal of Destination Marketing and Management*, Vol. 5 No. 4, pp. 333-40.
- Zappei, J. (2010), "Malaysia tears down iconic mural wall at prison", *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, 21 June, available at: www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-malaysia-tears-down-iconic-mural-wall-at-prison-2010-jun21-story.html
- Zhang, J.J. and Crang, M. (2016), "Making material memories: Kinmen's bridging objects and fractured places between China and Taiwan", *Cultural Geographies*, Vol. 23 No. 3, pp. 421-39.

Corresponding author

Geraldine Anne Tan can be contacted at: geraldine_anne3@hotmail.com

For instructions on how to order reprints of this article, please visit our website:

www.emeraldgroupublishing.com/licensing/reprints.htm

Or contact us for further details: permissions@emeraldinsight.com