

An Analysis of Tourist Perception Before Visiting Dark Destination, a Case of “Suicide” Forest, Japan

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Abstract

Dark tourism and its destinations is the most popular type of tourism visited by people globally. Dark tourism has a great connection to psychological effects on people that for this specific location have not been researched before properly - Aokigahara forest, Japan. According to OECD (2021) Japan has the biggest suicide rates in the world. Shondell Miller and Gonzalez's (2013) research found out that Aokigahara forest is visited due to it being connected to only “death”. Additionally, Yoshitomo (1988) discussed in his findings of Aokigahara the history and suicides but did not cover any of the researcher's aims. Therefore, the author decides to use a qualitative method to analyse in detail the reason behind visiting and their perception before visiting. The author will be asking 10 participants through social media by conducting semi-structured interviews. Accordingly, the findings showcase that culture's image plays a crucial role on “Suicide” forest and therefore influences their motivation and curiosity to visit. Aokigahara forest is also considered to be categorised as “dark/darkish”, which summarises people's purpose of visiting a destination with dark history being morbid curiosity and thrill-seeking. Lastly, sympathy and empathy are expected to show within the forest while visiting, but are unlikely to be found when revisiting. An example of recommendation would be to attempt to eliminate this researcher's bias towards the topic or addressing an invasion of privacy in a proper and correct manner.

Keywords: dark tourism, perception, “Suicide”/Aokigahara forest, emotions (curiosity, sympathy, empathy), awareness, culture image

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background information

Japan is known to be a country with one of the biggest suicide rates in the world (OECD, 2021). Apart from that, the Japanese have an infamous forest called Aokigahara, that is located at the foot of Mt. Fuji and is nicknamed by the world as the “Suicide” forest (Mckenna, 2015). Additionally, Shondell Miller and Gonzalez (2013) researched about dark destinations, in particular the “Suicide” forest, and viewed it as a connection to

death, however, this is not the only reason tourists visit these destinations.

Nonetheless, the tourism industry has expanded promptly since 2014 with over 13 000 international tourists coming to Japan and compared to the year 2018, it doubled in numbers and thus more than 31 000 tourists visited Japan (OECD, 2020). When visiting, tourists are looking for authenticity of the Japanese culture and its history (Uzama, 2009) while also seeing the dark destinations such as Hiroshima, Nagasaki that were the results of the atomic bombing (Shondell Miller and Gonzalez, 2013),

or not as widely known “Suicide” forest which grew in recognition after a certain youtuber's, Logan Paul, incident in 2017 (Pedersen, 2019). Nowadays, dark tourism has evolved and became one of the most travelled types of tourism people travel to. It is considered to be a niche among internet searches and growing more in popularity nowadays (Buda and Shim, 2017).

This research paper will be looking at how the tourists regard this sight before visiting with their curiosity, sympathy and empathy. Concentrating on psychological effects are Wei et al. (2019) and Buckley and Westaway (2021), while Wei et al.'s (2019) centre of attention is on which psychological effects influence people's destination experiences.

1.2 Rationale

The research on this topic is needed as there have not been any significant studies done regarding Japanese dark tourism being connected with tourists' psychological effects and dark destination's image from tourists' point of view. One of the few, who has done a research is McKenna (2015) who conducted research on suicide rates in the “Suicide” forest and discovered that mental illnesses and beliefs often play a certain role in deciding to visit or end one's life in the forest. On the other hand, Yoshitomo (1988) discussed the forest, but he looked more at the history of the suicides within the forest, the reasons were getting lost inside which resulted in worsened mental states that needed psychiatric help. Yoshitomo's (1988) research was about Aokigahara forest and in his research there was a lack of the tourists' psychological effects and what drives them to visit this destination. Correspondingly, McKenna's (2015) article solely focuses on suicide rates connected with religion and mental illnesses, yet it is missing out the influences tourists experience to visit the dark destination.

By doing this research about the tourists' perception before visiting the dark destination Aokigahara forest, located in Japan, the author will find what makes people come inside the forest and how curiosity, empathy and sympathy affects them in order to visit this dark destination. The results will then lead to the understanding of what type of destination people crave to visit and what in the end is the destination's image.

1.3 Aim and objectives

The aim of this paper is to analyse the tourists' perception and curiosity towards dark tourism sites as the “suicide” forest, Japan it's destination's branding:

- to investigate the impact of the dark destination visitation on tourist's psychological effects in order to revisit
- to critically analyse tourists' awareness before visiting the “suicide” forest and how the culture's image is being interpreted
- to explore the Japanese dark tourism history and define its types

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

In this literature review chapter the author will discuss and explain dark tourism, psychological effects - curiosity, empathy, sympathy, and destination branding that would help to achieve the aim of this paper. In the second part, the author will review the empirical research that has been done by other authors connecting to the theories as well as why the “Suicide” forest in Japan was chosen as the topic's destination.

2.2 Theoretical framework

2.2.1 Dark tourism

Dark tourism can be described, in other words, as “grief” tourism (Shondell Miller and Gonzalez, 2013) or thanatourism (Stone, 2013) where people travel purposely to a destination to remember a dark past or a situation (Stone, 2013). According to Shondell Miller and Gonzalez (2013) within dark tourism, there are different forms, such as suicide, atomic, terrorism, pagan, disaster, favela, fright, prison, genocide or grief tourism. For instance, atomic tourism, as reported by Cannon (2020), has a hold on people that only travel to a destination just to see the post effect of nuclear bombing. Therefore, dark tourism is considered to have two functions on society and the tourism industry, as a by-product of the world's actions and vice versa; it is used as an important consequence (Shondell Miller and Gonzalez, 2013). On the other hand, Seaton (1996) argues that destinations connected to death, called “thanatourism”, were mostly used in the past as a traditional way in European cultures, affected by religion and philosophical movements (Seaton, 2010). Ultimately, tourists visit different forms of sight depending on their perception and needs of knowledge, which as mentioned above has two important functions on them.

Alternatively, Sather-Wagstaff (2011) determined that dark tourism destinations have conceptual structures which affect/are affected by people's perspective, physical activities or fiction. Therefore, Edensor (2013) added that there is another possible understanding of feeling

negative, dreadful as well as excitement. Admittedly, Martini and Buda (2018) revealed that affect theories were not necessarily taken into consideration towards dark tourism theories by others in journals, yet other aspects received more intense awareness. The affect theory in regards to dark tourism was described by Anderson (2006, p. 735) as “a transpersonal capacity in which a body has to be affected - with fondness and to affect - a consequence”. Moreover, in a similar manner there is affective events theory by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996), that describes the events of any kind and how an individual is involved in the process of emotional change, contentment and time in a person's general sensation. Finally, affect theory together with affective event theory are theories with little to no research done in regards to dark tourism, while it is as well an important aspect to study.

In the meantime, Pagliari (2004) states that the modern world is in the phase of mocking deaths, in order to advertise a certain destination and make a business out of it, rather than making examples of history and not repeating it. As one of the eight influences (Dann, 1998) making tourists visit these types of destinations, curiosity is one of the main ones from the tourists' point of view. Tourists then make it a need for them to put a death destination on their list of places to visit (Stone, 2013). Further, according to Dale and Robinson (2011, cited by Shondel Miller and Gonzalez, 2013), they researched dark tourism a step further from Pagliari's statement. Dale and Robinson's (2011) consumers are compelled to physically visit a dark destination for the sole purpose of involving or witnessing themselves in death. In the end, visitors' intentions can be influenced and compelled in a positive aspect while watching television before making a decision of actually visiting the dark tourism destination (Lewis et al., 2021). This means that their behaviour towards a certain destination can be affected in a better way.

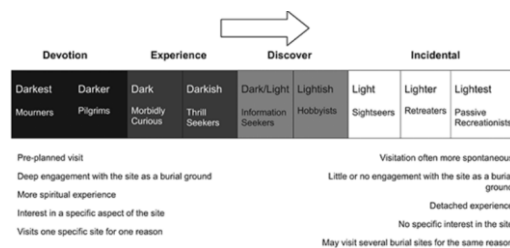


Figure 1: Dark tourism categories (Stone and Sharpley, 2009)

Alternatively (Fig. 1), Stone and Sharpley (2009) notes that there are numerous categories of dark tourism, going from “darkest” to “lightest” with different meanings behind each category. The

categories are sorted and correspond to how tourists are driven in visiting a site with dark history, together with their commitment in death experience (Raine, 2013). To clarify, the spectrum of the table has darkest and darker areas which fall into a theme of “devotion”, which represents mourners and pilgrims. While mourners are intensely connected with the dead, pilgrims, on the other hand, are not visiting purely because of religious purposes (Hyde and Harman, 2011). The next two on the spectrum are dark and darkish with the theme of “experience”, and as it states people come to experience and are captivated by death (Raine, 2013). Third is dark/light and lightish; meaning “discover”, as reported by Raine (2013), people tend to explore to uncover forgotten things. The last on the spectrum are light, lighter and lightest, placed in the “incidental” theme. Raine (2013) expresses these people as the opposite of the mourners and pilgrims, and to the contrary, as cited by Raine (2013), “their visits are often unplanned and impulsive with no real agenda”. Similarly, an article from Light and Ivanova (2021), researches about an alike topic regarding mortality mediation within “lightest” dark tourism destinations, yet from a different perspective. To summarise Stone and Sharpley's dark tourism categories, Light and Ivanova (2021) support the research from Raine's (2013) paper and asked people to participate only in the form of “lightest” dark tourism when visiting attractions.

Lennon (2017, p. 8) claims and concludes that the term dark tourism being cited by him is “inconclusive, which is incorporating the extensive and identifiable phenomena of visitation to sites associated with mass killing, extermination and death.” In fact, Stone and Sharpley's (2009) categorisation of dark tourism is closely related to people's motivations to explore them and its understanding of people visiting a destination is an essential element (Moscardo and Ballantyne, 2008). Frew (2012, cited by Podoshen, 2013) added that the way a place is interpreted is a decisive factor to tourists' visits. Furthermore, the public's comprehension of causes of tragedies can offer a coping approach within dark tourism, which then reminds the population of the misfortunate history and their loss (Korstanje, 2014).

2.2.2 Psychological effects (curiosity, empathy, sympathy)

Emotions, such as feeling curious, empathetic, and sympathetic, according to Roseman and Smith (2001) come from basic emotions perspective, connecting this with their research of appraisal theory, which says that it is a response to someone's evaluation of an occurrence or circumstance. In addition, Roseman and Smith (2001) have also commented on the appraisal

theory; it happens when emotions are drawn out by a certain interpretation of occurrence or circumstance. On the other hand, Scherer et al. (2001) described emotions and its inducements as being contradicted with different hypotheses towards the appraisal theory. In fact, Scherer et al. (2001) reveals that emotions as such, may be brought out by various developments - behaviours, facial expressions, desiring methods, in regards to no interruptions in judgements. Although, Ellsworth (2013) agrees with Roseman and Smith's (2001) theory being on the right track towards the beginning with basic emotions, it was discovered that two aspects contradict the theory; the appraisal theory cannot specify all emotions and sort them by types and people are not driven and described only with the appraisal's basic emotions. Having said that, Ellsworth (2013) stated, there is no specific answer to whether judgement can lead to one's emotions or not, due to the fact of many theories being multi componential (Niedenthal et al., 2006, cited by Ellsworth, 2013). Meaning they consist of more components and therefore play a substantial role in differentiating emotions.

At the same time, Nicely and Armadita (2018) have noted that sympathy, as an emotion, only happens when an intellectual assessment of someone is involved. Moreover, Stern (1994, cited by Nicely and Armadita, 2018) mentions that once sympathy transpires for someone, one tends to put himself in their situation of hardship. To summarise, the concept of sympathy was revealed by Wispé (1986) in conjunction with Hume's theory which explained humanity's nature and their understanding. This suggests that sympathy is an essential indicator of feeling certain emotions towards a person in a certain situation, while Scheler (1954; cited by Svenaeus, 2014) does not necessarily agree with Hume's theory, but rather wants to apply "other minds" and consider other prospects of sympathy.

Nevertheless, Chismar (1988) argues that people confuse the terms of empathy and sympathy. While sympathy includes empathising together with feeling solicitude towards a certain someone (Chismar, 1988), empathy as a concept reported by Wispé (1986) is acknowledging in one's mind a person's feelings. On the contrary, Violet Paget, from an article Jahoda (2005), states that empathy is only used for the purpose of understanding morality and moral sympathy. Roughley (2018), instead, argues that empathy is not only relevant through morality, but as well applied throughout somewhat overlapping phenomena. Having said that, despite having a different meaning of both sympathy and empathy, it is still deeply connected with each other according to Svenaeus (2014).

Another emotion, such as curiosity's essence, observed by Berlyne (1978), was to see whether it can be used as a driving force. Stern (1973, cited by Loewenstein, 1994) confirmed curiosity being a driving force specifically in children's growing and academic phase. In addition, Edelman (1997) noted that there are two types of driving theories of curiosity which vary if they are looked upon as primary or secondary. Berlyne (1978) found out that curiosity has 2 forms - perceptual and epistemic. According to him, perceptual curiosity "activates uncertainty-relieving perceptions", while epistemic "activates quests for knowledge". In fact, Loewenstein's (1994) interpretation of curiosity is affecting people's actions. Silvia (2012) connected curiosity with motivation and cited that: "Curiosity is motivating in its own right, not because it allows people to reduce an unpleasant state". Murray (1904, cited by Silvia, 2012) added that motivational curiosity is the strongest during people's childhood and adolescence, while throughout late adulthood it significantly decreases. He also revealed that certain men in their late years are curious towards petty, lascivious yearnings. To summarise, curiosity is an emotion that pushes people to participate in activities and helps them to achieve things easier rather than without any curiosity drive.

2.3 Review of existing empirical research

2.3.1 Visitations of dark sights

A lot of research has been done in regards to dark tourism and the cases of the Beichuan earthquake incident (Qian et al., 2021) in 2008 or internal conflicts and resentment in Spain, Israel and Turkey (Alvarez et al., 2020). Research in the mentioned cases found that there were different positive/negative aspects that were found throughout their research together with some limitations.

A study was done about a town called Beichuan located in the province of Sichuan in China, where an earthquake with a magnitude strength of 8 happened on 12 May 2008. Qian et al. 's (2021) research about Beichuan and its aim was focusing on how tourists perceive a new dark tourism destination and its image in connection to knowledge through visitation, the behaviour's objective and destination image. The first method was conducted with an open question survey attached to "image of leisure place and image of landscape of fear" in Beichuan in May 2014 with a total of 145 responses from tourist respondents to see the affiliation of the researcher's aim. The second one was done with a Likert scale (a scale from 1 to 5, where respondents can strongly disagree all the way to strongly agree) a year later in May 2015 and received 298 responses. The practical part of the result showed that the

acquired data truly fits with the criterias of the research; it was displayed through the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test. It says that a value of the survey obtained signified that the first one is greatly approved and the second being less approving compared to the first one done, reaching the conclusion of how suitable the data obtained and its understanding towards visitors in a destination is. The results from both methods showed that tourists' way of understanding the "image of landscape of fear" was indeed mediocre with having almost no contact with the gloomy mental state of a visitor. While the "image of leisure place" result indicates that it is unfavourably influenced by trying to keep the state of the site the same.

Likewise, Alvarez et al. (2020) did a similar study, but from a different perspective on terrorist attacks and resentment linked to each other and how it is viewed by the public in Turkey, Spain and lastly, Israel. The reason for these countries being chosen by the authors is because of their position as well as similar political situation (in past or present). The statistics were obtained from college graduates from an online survey. The authors also mentioned that none of the participants visited one of those two countries except their motherland. The complete number of respondents were 267 of adults and the results showed that everyone sees their countries separately from the other two ones. Furthermore, the element that played the biggest role is the current situation in one of the countries, the respondents showed in the results that the situation of armed forces is concerning. In addition, resentment indeed has had critical repercussions and distinguishes two types; disputes within a country and nation's democratic situation.

As described above, these two studies suggest that dark tourism visits can be affected positively and negatively by visitors depending on the destination being visited. As stated by Sather-Wagstaff (2011), it can as well be decided by how the location presents itself and if it is associated with any fictional or physical activity. Both of these studies described and showed results in how people perceive the situation in designated dark areas or destinations, and it is as well tightly connected to the theory of dark tourism from this researcher's paper and depending on what category dark tourism is (Stone and Sharpley, 2009).

2.3.2 Cognitive impact on the human mind

Significant amounts of studies have been written by authors regarding how cognitive thinking has an impact on the human mind and the influence

of it (Nicely and Armadita, 2018; Escalas and Stern, 2003; Ellsworth, 2013).

A research conducted by Nicely and Armadita (2018) aimed to investigate and determine variables of demographics, what kind of response a traveller would have after a molestation incident, if there are notable ties among a traveller being sympathetic after such an incident, and how loyal they are regarding a site. The method of discovering the result was over a survey (online and paper) with snowball sampling and accidental sampling. The total of participants was 634, the answers in the available survey could have been ranked and answered from 1 to 7 (rarely to greatly) and the answers received were in general around 2.16, which indicated how the levels of sympathy were relatively low when a molestation incident appeared. The results of the study appear to be that sympathy is not present generally when being bothered at a destination sight by a merchant and the variables of demographics do not play a significant role whether or not a traveller shows feelings of sympathy. Furthermore, the intensity of a traveller's sympathetic expressions involved in a molestation incident could affect whether they will further visit the designated location or advertise it to other potential travellers.

Escalas and Stern (2003) intended to find with their research a contrast between sympathy and empathy of a consumer in an ad. The method used was an experiment with a total of 150 college pupils where they firstly wrote their opinion in a survey prepared for them and afterwards were asked to view 8 different types of commercials. The participants were assigned to rate after each commercial how much inducement by sympathy or empathy happened. The respondents mostly answered that the commercial encouraged the most empathy and sympathy in a traditional commercial while on the other hand the lowest could be found in story ones. Overall the number of empathy throughout the commercials was slightly bigger than sympathy; .96 and .90. The presented outcome offered sympathetical reaction to being moderate and having an impact (within commercials) towards empathy and its reactions. In conclusion, these two outcomes are equally important and promote favourable views on commercials in general. Connected to Escalas and Stern's (2003) research, Ellsworth (2013) discovered that appraisal theory, which is tightly connected to sympathy and empathy, has hinted on defining the fundamental part of emotions where they are driven out by a certain circumstance, for instance sympathy and empathy. Ellsworth found two errors in the research which are; there exist only primitive emotions and that it is not only when an individual is in a certain state that he feels

emotions. This was refuted by Ellsworth and explained that it is certainly the opposite of that.

While the cognitive impact of the human mind is influenced by a specific occurrence, which is unique to every individual, sympathy and empathy studied by Nicely and Armadita (2018) and Escalas and Stern, (2003) prove that is indeed like that and crucial to understand when do people feel them.

2.4 Background to the primary research context

The case study that was chosen for this paper, Aokigahara forest, was picked out because of its infamy of having an irregular number of suicides (Yoshitomo, 1988). Japan, a country situated in East Asia, belongs to the category of the most visited countries by tourists in Asia (OECD, 2021). Apart from that, one of the most sought out types of tourism in the world is dark tourism (Lennon, 2017). As for Japan's popular dark destinations - Hiroshima, Nagasaki (Yoshida et al., 2016, cited by Qian et al., 2021) and Fukushima, Aokigahara forest also belongs on the list.

The World Health Organisation revealed in their statistics that Japan - well-known for being the country with the biggest number of suicide rates per capita, is at the moment declining (WHO, 2021). Yet the declining total of suicides, according to Kyodo (2012), is still the biggest in the prefecture of Yamanashi, where Aokigahara forest is located and has worse statistics than the capital city of Japan, Tokyo. The statistics from Kyodo (2012), published in *The Japan Times*, evaluated that in the year 2011, the Yamanashi prefecture had a 36.1 rate of suicide calculated for each 10 000 population, while Tokyo alone had just 23.7. The paper as well as statistics argue that it is strongly connected to the infamous "Suicide" forest that welcomed a large amount of Japanese to the forest alone. In 2017, the Aokigahara forest became famous overnight because of a youtuber, Logan Paul, that filmed a video of a dead body in the "Suicide" forest, which later on became viral and caused a big controversy over the internet (Kelly, 2018 cited by Rohde, 2019). Rohde (2019) also stated that this alone caused a huge uprising of visitors to the location. The forest itself has had a dark history of demons in Japanese mythology, which may be another reason as to why it is so cautiously regarded by Japanese (Bates, 2014). On the other hand, it was scientifically proven that Aokigahara forest and its "mysterious" effects on the visitors are caused by the numerous tectonic plates spread around Mt. Fuji and Japan itself, which thereafter have an impact on the perception of directions and its influence on the compass' true direction at some specific places (McElhinny, 1979; Isacks et al., 1968). The

"Suicide" forest is as well getting a lot of media attention, as there is a new horror movie inspired by the forest that came out in 2016 (Nedelman, 2018). The researcher therefore chose this case study as there are many criterias playing a role before visiting, and how and what is affecting people, as well as its history that need to be considered.

2.5 Conclusions

This chapter explained and developed two theories from existing authors to see the relation to this research's case study. The case study, Aokigahara forest, being most famous for its suicides and disappearance of people, showed that people in fact travel to this to either experience on of the "darkest" forms of dark tourism (Stone, 2009) or actually participate in it (Dale and Robinson, 2011). From Beichuan's study it shows that people travel to a dark destination depending on what type of catastrophe actually happened (Qian et al., 2021). While it also involves to which extent visitors feel empathetic/sympathetic when visiting the place, depending on the intensity of the dark past (Nicely and Armadita, 2018).

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research aim and objectives

The aim of this paper is to analyse the tourists' perception and curiosity towards dark tourism sites as the "suicide" forest, Japan it's destination's branding:

- to investigate the impact of the dark destination visitation on tourist's psychological effects in order to revisit
- to critically analyse tourists' awareness before visiting the "suicide" forest and how the culture's image is being interpreted
- to explore the Japanese dark tourism history and define its types

3.2 Research approach

The author of this research paper will be focusing on the tourist's perception before visiting the "Suicide" forest and what is the reason behind their visit, hence the aim objectives of this research paper. The method used for this research paper will be qualitative research based on the constructivism worldview. Creswell (2014) indicates that a qualitative approach to a research paper is in order to find and comprehend from a groups' perspective a social problem. The reason for choosing this perspective together with the qualitative research method is to know what

drives people to the forest and if they are influenced by society and social standing of the designated destination. Qualitative research will help the researcher achieve a better understanding of each individual, rather than using quantitative research methods where the researcher would not have such in-depth knowledge. The approach used for this paper will be inductive as it is closely linked to already advancing theory and the case study of this paper - "Suicide" forest (Creswell, 2014). The research design chosen for this research paper is going to be an interview, together with qualitative research, as this topic requires in-depth information from respondents (Given, 2008).

3.3 Sampling

The sampling method used will be non-probability sampling, from which snowball sampling was chosen, as it is a type of sampling, where participants will recommend another participant that may fit this research paper's criteria (Coyne, 1997). The reason for choosing this type of sampling is as well, because of the difficulty of finding the right potential respondents regarding the topic. Curtis et al. (2000) stated that sampling must not only have enough information about the desired topic, but also be feasible about whether or not the sampling fits the research that is about to be done. The author will be looking for their future respondents through social media and asking around who is interested in this research paper topic. The participants will be later on asked on what type of destinations attract them and whether or not they have visited Japan in the past. There will be altogether 10 participants needed, that will answer numerous questions in an open interview. The number of participants determined is due to the fact that it will take time to analyse their responses and later reach a conclusion.

3.4 Data collection

The research will be conducted through semi-structured interview questions as they are connected greatly with qualitative research methods and help find comprehension of the author's topic (Bevan, 2014). The idea behind selecting semi-structured interviews is to have constructed questions before the given interviews, and if necessary, there may be follow up questions asked throughout the interview alone. The interviews will take place online through a zoom call that will be arranged beforehand to let the participants know. The intention behind having an online interview is because of the Covid-19 situation still going on, people will feel much more relaxed and also the respondents may not live close to the researcher.

The data collection will start with Japanese participants located in the Czech Republic and move on to other Japanese participants out of the country in the English language. Last but not least, it is needed to have the participants' consent to have interviews as well as to have permission to be filmed.

3.5 Data analysis

Qualitative data analysis is an approach that increases the comprehension of a certain phenomena (Bailey, 2008). The researcher's chosen approach will also be inductive. Meanwhile, according to Bailey (2008) there are different ways of obtaining the results of a study, such as interviews, focus groups, social media or consultations. Qualitative data analysis consists of many different traditions - grounded, narrative, phenomenology or discourse, each of them being suitable for an individual kind of research (Thomas, 2006). Nevertheless, the chosen type of data analysis, for this research paper, will be phenomenological, as the topic of this paper is more subjective and looks at people's individual perception of the selected dark destination (Giorgi et al., 1985, cited by Cilesiz, 2010). Phenomenological analysis will identify the phenomena from the participants' point of view to understand the aim of this paper. In that instance, what is the outlook of the participants regarding the Aokigahara forest's curiosity and empathy concerning the visitation. Moreover, thematic analysis is about analysing, identifying and lastly reporting all themes/patterns in a phenomena (Saldaña, 2013). Correspondingly, there are a few steps that are needed in order to acquire the themes; the steps are familiarising the theme, producing codes, searching for the theme, reviewing them and lastly formulating the analysis (Stuckey, 2015). Afterwards, when the interviews are finished, the researcher will decipher the answers into codes. The type of coding used for this research will be In Vivo coding. According to Saldaña (2013), In Vivo coding is perfect to use, if it is the researcher's first time doing so, as well as seizing the "essence" of respondents by using their own words and therefore their own experiences and personal views. The author will use the In Vivo coding by clearly going through the participants' survey answers and putting them into phrases and terms.

3.6 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a crucial aspect of any research paper, it shows how much evidence the researcher has collected. Shenton (2004) notes that in order for a project/research paper to reach the amount of trustworthiness, it needs to present member checking, audit trail and triangulation.

In order to deepen the credibility of the findings mentioned above, the researcher will be conducting an audit trail. Audit trail is an approach used to preserve important verdicts of all 3 phases - methodological, systematic and theoretical (Carcary, 2009). Furthermore, Carcary (2009) adds that it is also recording the changing beliefs of the researcher in a research paper. Due to that, the researcher will be keeping documentation of all groups for analysing data and its interpretation. In short, proving the transparency of this research paper's findings. Member checking is another practice used for trustworthiness. It is used to pursue participants for the purpose of confirming the researcher's discoveries in their project (Iivari, 2018). The participants will be presented with a summary of findings from their answers to find out whether the analysis was correct. Among normal ones, open-ended questions will be asked to the participants and the subjectivity of the "Suicide" forest. This will confirm the genuinity of their collected findings of the participants' feelings and perceptions and will ensure validity.

Lastly, according to Jick (1979), triangulation can be described as a blend of diverging approaches while looking through the same case. Moreover, according to Thurmond (2001) triangulation has its different types (data, theory, investigator, methodological) to help increase the reliability of understanding the researcher's question. For instance, the author will be using different sources of data for examination of given questions. On this occasion, the researcher will be asking Japanese candidates residing in the Czech Republic and also living abroad who speak english. In consequence of this, the researcher will be able to verify the validity of given findings by contrasting over the participants.

3.7 Ethical issues

Ethical issues are nowadays something that needs extra attention when talking about a sensitive topic, such as someone's culture or tradition (Creswell, 2014). Types of bias that might occur during the author's interview may be the formulation of the questions in an incorrect way, which leads to wrong answers from the respondent. Another bias from the researcher's side would be going off the topic and asking personal questions that do not answer the aim of this paper. Acquiescence bias from the participant's side can happen when the question asked is making them uncomfortable, causing them to only comply with the research and what they say (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). Another ethical issue is talking about suicide as it is as well connected to religion and mental illnesses of people. These ethical issues could potentially affect the natives of the case study (Japanese) and

possibly the international respondents, since it may trigger their defensive system because of the sensitive topic (death). In order to minimise the issue, a solution would be to stay with the predetermined questions and in the process of probing, make sure to recognise the discomfort of the participants and change the questions on the spot or even eliminate them. Moreover, preventing these ethical issues would be also to carefully select and formulate all the predetermined questions in the interview, as well as document all the interviews.

3.8 Limitations

Limitations can be defined as a phenomena appearing during a project that is unmanageable to the researcher (Simon and Goes, 2013). Additionally, in any form of research, there will universally be a number of restrictions and biases that limit the overall results. However, one of the main limitations could be that the researcher is biased towards the topic and impacting the true results of the research paper. It could be the case as the author has chosen the phenomenological analysis as it is quite easy to be biased in this research paper's topic, due to the fact that the researcher has concluded certain things about the destination. Another limitation would be that the research may not correspond to the reality of the people's perception. The reason behind this specific limitation would be that it may not correspond with the reality of the destination and may be misleading before and after visiting it. Moreover, the question asked by the participants could potentially be an invasion of privacy, as the research paper's topic is already sensitive enough and may not receive the correct information and get the needed data. The type of invasion on potential people would be asking questions whether they have already experienced a dark destination like this before and what they think about this paper's topic. This can show the results of the participants not feeling comfortable. A language barrier and willing participants also face the difficulty of finding and communicating. Regarding the language barrier, the participants might use a word that is difficult to translate exactly and mean something different in their belief or culture, which may lead to confusion of the researcher.

Chapter 4: Discussion

4.1 Introduction

The paper's topic about tourist perception of dark destinations in Japan, were lacking since the beginning with small numbers of research done about them. Together with the given objectives, the researcher wants to see whether the found key findings of this research are valid or have any

limitations. For that reason, the researcher will be evaluating each and every one of the 3 objectives, as there is no proper primary research done in this way for the specific destination in Japan and thus needs to be addressed accordingly. The findings below will be from following objectives, from which there will be assumptions made - psychological effects, tourists' awareness and the culture's image and lastly dark tourism history discovery. To conclude, the discussion chapter will be analysing assumed findings of this study from the objectives as well as from the existing empirical research and theories mentioned in the literature review.

4.2 Objective 1 - To investigate the impact of the dark destination visitation on tourist's psychological effects in order to revisit.

Loewenstein (1994) established a theory regarding curiosity and motivation, its driving force and the influence on people's behaviour and actions. In this case, Qian et al. (2021) discuss this in their study about Beichuan's earthquake and people's approach. The outcome of the paper shows tourists' experience of the destination on-site, as well as the image having a great impact that motivates them to visit the place again. Connecting this empirical research to the Aokigahara forest in Japan, it can be said that that might be the reason behind their revisit of this dark destination. The impact of this could potentially become a problem, as it could attract more and more tourists to the destination and become overly popular, against Japanese beliefs in dark phenomenon. As discussed in Qian et al. (2021) there should be enough information and advice provided in order to warn the people from what they could expect. Likewise, the tourists' knowledge of destinations as such, could in these cases slowly lose their empathy and sympathy (Escalas and Stern, 2003), while still maintaining their curiosity in experiencing them (Qian et al., 2021). On that account, the possibility of people revisiting the "Suicide" forest, might result in them still feeling curious and motivated (Loewenstein, 1994), but not being able to keep their sympathy and empathy towards them (Escalas and Stern, 2003). Consequently, the dark destination's impact and its present image, for example in Aokigahara forest, may grow bigger due to its infamously, which can be found in the literature review by Yoshitomo (1988) and controversies (Kelly, 2018, cited by Rohde, 2019).

4.3 Objective 2 - To critically analyse tourists' awareness before visiting the "suicide" forest and how the culture's image is being interpreted.

Roseman and Smith's (2001) appraisal theory elaborates on the importance of people's emotions and the effect of a person's

understanding (attention, perception). On the other hand, as mentioned in the literature review, Ellsworth (2013) recognises appraisal theory, elaborates more on sympathy/empathy, but objects towards some points from Roseman and Smith (2001). The theory can be seen in a study about finding sympathy and empathy in commercial advertisements written by Escalas and Stern (2003). The results from Escalas and Stern (2003) suggest that they draw out people's emotions - sympathy and empathy, which may in this case promote certain destinations such as the Aokigahara forest. Roseman and Smith (2001) also add that appraisal theory is important to use in order to analyse and understand visitors' emotions and awareness as a whole. This can therefore be connected to the author's dark forest of people's interpretation. Another point acknowledged by Escalas and Stern (2003) is that an appropriate advertisement towards consumers can enhance their intentions and attitudes. This may again apply to the "Suicide" forest by making a suitable advertisement for potential visitors and their awareness and the culture's image. Lastly, Roseman and Smith (2001) call attention to circumstantial and most importantly cultural factors in regards to the appraisal theory, which showcases how human beings view social norms or culture values and emphasis on emotions and the emotional experience. In the matter of Aokigahara forest, it may be viewed from tourists' side on how much awareness they have on suicide and mental health in general. That is why it may be advised to study the cultural factors of appraisal theory, awareness (Roseman and Smith, 2001) and emotions - sympathy/empathy (Escalas and Stern, 2003) of such destinations in relation to this objective and how well it clarifies Aokigahara's culture image.

4.4 Objective 3 - To explore the Japanese dark tourism history and define its types.

Stone and Sharpley (2009) introduced the model about several types of dark tourism and the tourists' drive to visit them, where the phenomena of dark tourism destinations were mentioned. The phenomenon of Aokigahara forest is possibly rated on the spectrum of Stone and Sharpley's (2009) model as dark/darkish, which explains the people ("thrill seekers" in this instance) coming for the dark history of the destination, experience and its captivation. Moreover, Alvarez et al.'s (2020) empirical research regarding terrorism, tourism and the history of Spain, Israel and Turkey could be accordingly connected to the Aokigahara forest. The results, of the previously mentioned paper, talk how people from targeted countries of dark destinations (terrorist attacks) identify the risks of visitation, restrictions and their new dark history. On this occasion, Aokigahara forest may closely

be connected with its history as well as Japanese beliefs from locals (Bates, 2014), who still think of that place as the one with “no way out”. Additionally, the report specifically mentions the Civil War and the threats of visiting such sites in Spain (Alvarez et al., 2020), that may also apply to the “Suicide” forest because of its challenges. Stone and Sharpley (2009) also mention the reason behind visitors' motivation to visit these types of dark places, such as Nagasaki and Hiroshima after the atomic bombing, that now became places to remember the people that had passed away and learn from its history. This could maybe be implemented into Aokigahara forest, in order for visitors to learn not to continue with the tradition of Japanese coming in to give up their lives (Kyodo, 2012). As for recommendations for this objective, dark destinations in general categorised according to Stone and Sharpley (2009) for public's knowledge and properly establish “Suicide” forest's challenges and its history (Alvarez et al., 2020).

4.5 Conclusions

To summarise the key findings from the 3 objectives of the discussion chapter, the phenomenon of Aokigahara forest plays a crucial role in all of the objectives. It can be understood that tourists might feel strongly motivated and curious to visit dark destinations and mainly Aokigahara forest again, in order to experience the phenomenon and sympathy/empathy. Consequently, the second objective's key findings confirm and add on that awareness and culture's image of the “Suicide” forest should be properly viewed from tourists' perspective on the awareness and culture's image. The second objective's result also suggested connecting awareness and image of a destination to appraisal theory. Lastly, the third objective declares Aokigahara forest being on the spectrum of dark/darkish, which translates to people having a morbid curiosity/thrill seeking similar destinations with the reason behind it being for visitors to educate themselves on the place's dark history. Thus, tourists' perception (curiosity, sympathy, empathy), awareness and history being crucial in reviewing the dark destination - “Suicide” forest.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and recommendations

Tourist perception for a dark tourism destination cannot be evaluated easily, as there are many factors that play a role in getting results, such as curiosity, sympathy, and empathy of a tourist or dark tourism itself. To sum up, not only from empirical research but also from the theoretical framework, the research shows that Aokigahara forest indeed with its connection to suicides and death is set to be a destination that people are

interested in seeing and getting experience in (Shondell Miller and Gonzalez, 2013). The dark destination of this case study - Aokigahara forest or also nicknamed “Suicide” forest; which became part of “tourists gaze”, is considered to be one of the “dark/darkish” categories type of tourism (Urry, 1990a; Stone and Sharpley, 2009). Moreover, Stone and Sharpley's (2009) dark tourism spectrum identifies in other words this dark destination as an experience for visitors, who are morbidly curious/thrill seeking as their purpose behind visiting. Additionally, Berlyne (1978) confirms this by adding that having enough curiosity drive will push people to participate in it. Sather-Wagstaff (2011) notes that dark tourism destinations have an effect on visitors and can be as well affected by, in this instance, a phenomenon. Also, Dale and Robinson (2011) further comment that some tourists are especially travelling to a dark destination - “death”, for the sole purpose of witnessing it and being affected by it. As established in the findings, the culture's and destination's image plays an important role, which makes a big impact and motivates curious people to experience and be affected by once again, the “death” destination, but without the feeling of sympathy and empathy. This will probably in the near future lead to a big problem as destinations connected to death/suicides face a grow in popularity against the culture's beliefs and practices (i.e. Japan). Another crucial finding was that people experience sympathy and empathy if an advertisement of destination is done in a correct way. According to Escalas and Stern (2003) consumers sometimes confuse the terms sympathy and empathy, therefore from their research they saw that usually it is empathy that occurs rather than sympathy, moreover empathy can affect empathetical reactions of consumers. In this moment, Aokigahara forest is promoted in a way that motivates people to come experience it, as it is a destination that is forbidden to visit which therefore pushes them to get the feeling of sympathy/empathy. While certain types of dark destinations may be advertised in purpose to get financial bargains out of it, “Suicide” forest is certainly not this type of destination (Pagliari, 2001). By conducting a research through appraisal theory from Roseman and Smith (2001) and focusing on its cultural factors, it can be identified that people's awareness towards Aokigahara forest is clearly there and they know what to expect when coming inside the forest for experience. The conclusion of this finding is that, if the Japanese government were to do a good advertisement campaign it would influence their intentions of visiting and might rethink and change their attitude towards Aokigahara forest. However, it is still crucial to understand a traveller's behaviour when coming to a certain destination and should always be

mindful and respect dark destination sights and its history.

The author of this research paper is concentrating on reviewing tourists' impressions before visiting a dark destination, Aokigahara forest in Japan. As mentioned in the paragraph above, the key findings of this research paper mostly confirm the author's assumptions. However, in order for further and future researchers to get better results in this case, it is necessary to try to eliminate the language barrier as is mentioned in the limitations section, by knowing the language spoken by the people or having a translator at hand. Furthermore, another important limitation that needs to be addressed is the invasion of privacy, this paper's topic is quite dark and not openly spoken about as in some countries it might be a "taboo". The recommendation given by the author would be to first and foremost inform them of the topic the respondents would be participating in and ask for their consent in using the data, while not referencing their name for respondents' privacy. Correspondingly, another great limitation in this paper is the author's bias towards dark tourism and this specific destination, therefore, a further recommendation might consider future researchers conducting an additional study to be unbiased and new to this in order to get the best results. Lastly, the results mentioned above in conclusion as well as the discussion chapter, could possibly be used to stretch to alternative research done around dark tourism destinations in the world (such as Hiroshima, New York's 9/11, Auschwitz).

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