

Consuming Post-Disaster Destinations The Case of Sichuan, China

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ABSTRACT

Addressing the call for a better understanding of tourist behavior in relation to post-disaster destinations, this study explores the motivations and intentions of potential domestic tourists (from non-hit areas) to visit Sichuan, China in the aftermath of an earthquake. Drawing on dark tourism theories, this study offers a more comprehensive insight into the consumption of destinations recovering from a disaster, aiming to capture the impact of the changes to the destination's attributes on tourist behavior. The findings move beyond the common approach to tourism recovery which solely focuses on reviving the destination's traditional 'non-dark' products. In contrast, this study reveals the importance of newly formed dark attributes emerging from the disaster as another vehicle to destination recovery, reflected in the emergence of new tourist segments.

Keywords: disaster, destination recovery, dark tourism, motivation, intention.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism research has traditionally focused on the consumption of "pleasant diversions in pleasant places" (Strange & Kempa, 2003, p. 387). In contrast, the understanding of tourist behavior in the context of sad or distressing sites, and particularly at destinations recovering from natural disasters, is limited (Rittichainuwat, 2008; Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Studies on post-disaster tourism predominantly focus on providing guidelines for tourism recovery (e.g., Faulkner, 2001; Ritchie, 2004) or explore tourists' risk perceptions (e.g. Floyd & Pennington-Gray,

2004). Conversely, attempts at clarifying tourists' motivations and intentions to visit post-disaster destinations are lacking. This is surprising as evidence suggests that many disaster sites transform into popular tourist attractions, such as New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and Ground Zero after 9/11. This study aims to enhance the understanding of tourists' consumption of destinations recovering from disasters.

Thus, while previous studies have focused on the recovery of the destination's 'traditional' products and markets (Huan, Beaman & Shelby, 2004), examined here is the development of new attributes emerging from the disaster, which has been largely overlooked, particularly from a demand-side perspective. These new attributes incorporate features generally associated with dark tourism consumption, underlining tourists' fascination with sites of death and atrocity (e.g., Lennon & Foley, 2000; Stone, 2012a). The inclusion and application of dark tourism theories to post-disaster destinations allow for a more comprehensive understanding of tourist behavior in relation to the potential changes to the destination's attributes. Hence, to address the aforementioned research gaps, domestic tourists' motivation and travel intentions are explored in the context of Sichuan, China, in the aftermath of the Wenchuan earthquake (May 12, 2008). Attention is given to tourists' intention to visit to experience the destination's newly formed dark sites or its traditional non-dark leisure attractions. Additionally, to facilitate the identification of potential tourist segments, the relationships between behavioral intentions and the push-pull factors that stimulate tourists to visit post-disaster destinations are explored.

TOURISM AND DISASTERS

It is acknowledged that due to population growth, increased urbanization, greater use and dependence on technology and globalization, disasters are becoming more frequent and geographically diverse (Pelling, 2003a; 2003b). Thus, contemporary conceptualizations view disasters as a disruptive state to systematic function, resulting from a complex interaction between potentially damaging natural, physical and environmental elements (e.g., earthquakes, violent eruptions) and the vulnerability of a society, its infrastructure, its economy and environment, as determined by human behavior (Birkmann, 2006; Pelling 2003a; United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2004). A natural disaster is a "humanitarian disaster with a natural trigger" (Pelling, 2003b, p.4). However, with the increasing interdependency of human and natural systems, distinguishing between natural and man-made disasters becomes more difficult (Birkmann, 2006).

As an area of human activity, tourism is not immune to disasters and with the growth of global tourism and the attractiveness of exotic (often high-risk) destinations, tourists and tourism destinations are exposed to greater levels of risk (Rittichainuwat, 2013; Ritchie, 2004). Indeed, Faulkner (2001) observes that tourism destinations in every part of the world are faced with the likelihood of experiencing a disaster. Equally, media inform potential tourists of the most recent and distant disasters on a continuous basis (Hystad & Keller, 2008). Yet, while the relationship

between disaster and tourism has received more attention recently, it is generally agreed that there remains a lack of comprehensive knowledge in this area (Carlsen & Liburd, 2008; Ritchie, 2004). Previous studies have mainly adopted a supply-side perspective (Rittichainuwat, 2013), exploring the response to a disaster by particular organizations, such as small tourism businesses (Cioccio & Michael, 2007), Destination Management Organization (Carlsen & Liburd, 2008; Ladkin, Fyall, Fletcher & Shipway, 2007) and hotels (Henderson & Ng, 2004), or developing tourism disaster management and recovery frameworks (e.g., Faulkner, 2001).

In terms of tourism recovery following a disaster, previous studies stress the necessity of diversifying both the product offer and the market (Ladkin et al., 2007; Carlsen & Hughes, 2008). In this context, it should be recognized that a disaster may change the destination's attributes and appeal. Apart from the physical damage, a natural disaster may lead to a negative destination image as unsafe, deterring tourists from visiting (Huan et al., 2004). Additionally, while some natural or cultural attractions may simply disappear, other places not previously visited may become prominent aspects of tourism consumption after a disaster. This might be due to the need for creating new attractions and disaster-hit areas transforming into tourist attractions in their own right (Rittichainuwat, 2008; Robbie, 2008). Nonetheless, academics and practitioners have largely focused on the need to re-establish the destination's image as safe and to emphasize the recovery activities to restore the destination's traditional, 'pre-disaster', tourism markets and products (Gotham, 2007; Rittichainuwat, 2011). This approach ignores other tourist segments that may develop due to the changes in the destination's attributes, such as those with a general interest in disaster sites or those wishing to commemorate the victims. As a result, the understanding of tourist behavior at a post-disaster destination is likely to be incomplete.

Post-Disaster Destinations and Dark Tourism

This current gap in the literature supports the need to further explore disaster-affected destinations beyond the narrow scope of studies on disaster management. It is suggested that this can be achieved by drawing on "dark tourism" (Lennon & Foley, 2000). Although different terms have been used to describe visits to sites associated with death, disaster and atrocity, such as *black spots tourism* (Rojek, 1993) *thanatourism* (Seaton, 1996), *morbid tourism* (Blom, 2000) and *grief tourism* (see www.grief-tourism.com), *dark tourism* is the term most commonly used (Biran, Poria & Oren, 2011; Stone & Sharpley, 2008). While this term has been criticized as conveying negative connotations (due to anxiety and moral panic, or negative emotions associated with visits to such sites), visits to dark sites may also lead to enlightened experiences with positive benefits, e.g., commemoration, identity construction, educational experiences and feelings of hope (Biran & Poria, 2012; Seaton, 2009; Sharpley, 2009). As the debate over the term "dark tourism" is beyond the scope of this study, following the majority of the literature in the field, its definition as "the act of travel to sites associated with death, suffering or the seemingly macabre" (Stone, 2006, p.146) is adopted here. Whereas this definition reflects a supply led understanding of dark tourism (Stone, 2006), the current study also considers the demand perspective, i.e., exploring tourists' motivations

and intentions. The adoption of an integrated supply-demand perspective reflects the multifunctional nature of death-related sites (Biran et al. 2011; Sharpley, 2009).

Visits to death related sites are not a new phenomenon and people have long been attracted to places or events linked with death and disaster, for example the Roman gladiator games and visits to Pompeii as part of the “Grand Tour” (Seaton, 1996; Sharpley, 2009; Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Yet, sites associated with death and disaster are increasingly forming part of the modern tourism landscape (Lennon & Foley, 2000; Stone, 2012a). Indeed, Seaton and Lennon (2004) propose dark tourism to be a contemporary ‘leisure activity’ (p. 63). Also Stone (2012a) suggests that visits to dark sites are now ‘part of a broader visitor economy and often packaged and promoted with other mainstream attractions’ (p. 1578). Nevertheless, empirical research is still in its infancy to provide greater evidence for the co-consumption of leisure and dark tourism.

Considering the prospects of dark sites as leisure and tourism products, the potential of combining leisure and dark elements, particularly for restoring post-disaster destinations has been stressed. Few authors (Amujo & Otubanji, 2012; Medway & Warnaby, 2008) have proposed dark tourism as a framework for rebranding places following events of genocide, conflict or natural disasters. Others underline the political and social role of visits to disaster sites, as a means to raise awareness, international sympathy and support for the recovery process (Kelman & Dodds, 2009; Miller, 2007). Likewise, destinations are increasingly making deliberate use of sites of tragic events to promote themselves (Medway & Warnaby, 2008; Rittichainuwat, 2008). For example, following Hurricane Katrina, alongside the promotion of the traditional tourist spaces of New Orleans as being safe, strategic efforts were made to capitalize on ‘tourist’s desire for the dramatic’ (Gotham, 2007, p. 828). However, these studies have mostly taken a theoretical approach, discussing the benefits and challenges in developing a dark tourism product at post-disaster destinations (e.g., Amujo & Otubanjo, 2012). Furthermore, past studies mainly focused on the supply side, providing guidelines and ethical codes for developing dark attractions (e.g., Kelman & Dodds, 2009), or simply describing the actions taken by the tourism industry (e.g., Gotham, 2007; Miller, 2007).

Thus, only a few studies explored the role of dark sites in attracting tourists to post-disaster destinations. Rittichainuwat (2011) indicates that some people avoid disaster-hit destinations, such as post-tsunami Phuket, due the perceived risk or belief in ghosts and bad luck. Yet, Kelman & Dodds (2009) note that others may find tragedy and the possibility of visiting a disaster area unique and appealing. For example, Rittichainuwat (2008) found that domestic tourists are particularly interested in visiting the disaster-hit area, whereas the inbound market prefers Phuket’s traditional sun, sea and sand product. Further, Robbie (2008) notes that even after several years, while traditional tourism to New Orleans has recovered or surpassed pre-Katrina level, Hurricane Katrina tours are still a “much required experience” (p. 259). While limited in number and scope, these studies show that different tourist segments react differently to a disaster and the subsequent changes to the destination’s attributes and image (Carlsen & Hughes, 2008; Prideaux, Coghlan,

Falco-Mammone, 2008; Huan et al., 2004). However, it is argued that a more nuanced understanding is needed to better clarify the contribution of dark tourism to post-disaster destinations. This can be achieved by not only investigating tourists' varied motivations but also examining travel intentions of potential visitors.

Post-Disaster Destinations, Motivations and Intentions

Motivation is critical for understanding why people travel and engage in a particular activity (Pearce, 2005). Thus, motivations are commonly used as a means for defining tourism subgroups, and are important for product design and marketing (Park & Yoon, 2009; McKercher, Okumus & Okumus, 2008). While various approaches were adopted to classify travel motivations, there is an agreement that push and pull factors are central for understanding the tourist decision-making process (Kim, Lee, & Klenosky, 2003). Push factors refer to internal, socio-psychological drivers that create the initial desire to travel, such as escape, rest and relaxation, excitement, novelty seeking, prestige and social interaction (Klenosky, 2002). Pull factors are external factors, arising from the specific attributes of a destination as perceived by potential tourists and thus, contribute to explaining the actual choice of a destination or type of activity. Pull factors include tangible aspects such as friendliness of local people, natural and culture attractions, and intangible perceptions and expectations, such as destination image (Kim et al., 2003; Klenosky, 2002). People consider various pull factors and are faced with multiple push motives for valuing the same pull factor (Klenosky, 2002). Thus, people may visit the same destination not only for different reasons, but also for seeking different tourism products and experiences (Rittichainuwat, 2008). Hence, adopting the push-pull framework assists in clarifying the diversity of tourists' motives and sought experiences at a post-disaster destination.

So far, the understanding of tourist motivations to visit a destination recovering from a disaster is limited, with only a few studies exploring this issue. Moreover, existing studies (e.g., Prideaux et al., 2008) focus mainly on generic leisure motives (rest and relaxation, etc.), thus paying limited attention to the unique context of such destinations. Specifically, the significance of motives associated with the destination's emerging dark appeal following a disaster is overlooked (Rittichainuwat, 2008). Further, only two studies adopted the push-pull factor framework within the context of post-disaster destinations. Thi Le and Pearce (2011) suggest a segmentation approach of tourists to a man-made disaster site (battlefield) based on various push-pull motives. In relation to post-Tsunami Phuket, Rittichainuwat (2008) found curiosity to be a key motive serving as both push and pull factor. Moreover, Rittichainuwat (2006; 2008) emphasizes the importance of general leisure motives (value for money, hospitality, etc.) alongside motives of dark tourism (e.g., curiosity over the disaster's impact). Yet, none of these studies explores the impact of the various motives on tourists' travel decision or intention to visit the disaster relics as opposed to the destination's traditional attractions.

Drawing on dark tourism research reveals three main reasons for visiting death related sites (Biran & Poria, 2012; Dunkely, Morgan & Westwood, 2011). First, early studies advocate for the key role of *morbid fascination with death* (Seaton, 1996; Seaton & Lennon, 2004). Recent works suggests that motivation to visit dark sites is not to experience death *per se*, but rather the benefits of contemplating life and one's mortality (Stone & Sharpley, 2008; Stone, 2012a; 2012b). By offering entertainment, education or memorialization, dark tourism serves as a contemplative mechanism helping to neutralize the sense of dread death inevitably brings (Stone, 2012a). This notion is in line with the understanding that visits to death-related sites can also involve positive and enlightened experiences (Biran & Poria, 2012; Seaton 2009). In this context, past studies have identified *mortality related motives*, such as a desire to understand how these atrocities happened, curiosity, sense of social responsibility (i.e., "lest we forget," "Never again", helping in the recovery actives), identity construction, emphatic identification, remembrance and commemoration (Biran & Poria, 2012; Biran et al., 2011; Kang, Scott, Lee & Ballantyne, 2011; Rittichainuwat, 2008). Other studies have also stressed the relevance of *leisure pursuit motives*, similar to those of visiting 'regular' attractions (Biran & Poria, 2012). These include novelty seeking, education and special interest, "must do" and convenience, as well as socialization and entertainment (Dunkely et al., 2011; Hyde & Harman, 2011; Thi Le & Pearce, 2011). As such, the literature on dark tourism and its motives may offer a meaningful understanding of visits to disaster-hit destinations, reflecting the multifunctional nature of disaster sites. This range of functions is overlooked by the literature on post-disaster recovery, which largely emphasizes the restoration of the destination's pre-disaster, non-dark product.

Still, exploring motivations alone only provides a partial understanding of visitations to post-disaster destinations. Specifically, tourist behavior studies highlight the influence of intention on actual behavior, emphasizing that individuals are unlikely to behave in a given way, even if they have the opportunity to do so, if they do not intend to carry out the behavior (Line, Chatterjee, & Lyons, 2010). Studies in this area mainly focus on the theory of planned behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) as a framework for predicting behavioral intentions. These studies stress that intention represents an important mediator that transforms motivation into future behavior (e.g., Jang, Bai, Hu & Wu, 2009; Huang & Hsu, 2009). The need to explore intentionality is also noted by recent dark tourism research. Seaton (2011) highlights that for some people the decision to visit dark sites may emerge during the tourism experience, rather than representing a pre-trip decision. However, only a few studies examine these relationships in relation to specific destinations or tourism products (Jang et al., 2009; Sparks, 2007). This is possibly due to tourism researchers employing intention and motivations as a synonym, unaware of the need to differentiate them (Philips & Jang, 2007).

In summary, research into post-disaster destinations still remains a new and under-researched area, particularly with regard to moving beyond the narrow focus on restoring traditional destination's attributes to developing new attributes deriving from the disaster. Mostly, empirical research on tourist behavior in the context of such destinations is limited. Further, the few studies

that examine motivations to post-disaster destinations only draw attention to actual visitors, hereby neglecting the importance of potential visitors or latent demand in the recovery of the destination. Thus, this study aims at broadening the understanding of post-disaster destinations consumption by addressing three main objectives. Firstly, following the assumption that individuals will vary in their intention to visit, the diversity of potential tourists' intentions is examined. Specifically, attention is given to tourists' intention to visit for engaging with the destinations' dark disaster sites and its traditional leisure tourism product. Secondly, and given the need to distinguish between intention and motivation, the underlining push and pull factors that motivate tourists to visit are identified. Thirdly, as individuals' consumption of certain tourism products is associated with different motives, the relationships between motivations and behavioral intentions are explored. Considering the importance given to the domestic market in the recovery of tourism following a disaster (Hystad & Keller, 2008; Prideaux et al., 2008), the research objectives are explored in the context of Sichuan, China following the Wenchuan earthquake, among Chinese tourists.

Study Methods

Sichuan province, in Southwestern China, is known for its beautiful scenery, cultural and natural attractions, local minority cultures and cuisine (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2010), and is a popular destination for both international and domestic tourists, with Guangdong, Beijing and Shanghai as its major domestic tourist origins (Yang, Wang & Chen, 2011). On May 12, 2008, Sichuan suffered a massive earthquake (Wenchuan earthquake) and more than 80,000 people died or were reported missing and hundreds were injured (Dunford & Li, 2011). Many of the province's traditional leisure attractions were not damaged, such as the Jiuzhai Valley World Natural Heritage Site and the World Cultural and Natural Heritage Site of Mount Emi-Leshan Giant Buddha (Yang et al., 2011). Nonetheless, the earthquake had a disastrous effect on Sichuan's landscape, changing its tourism attributes and resources. An abundance of cultural and scenic attractions have been damaged with a few being destroyed completely, for example, Yingchang Valley (Yang et al., 2011). Simultaneously, new sites of tourist interest were created, such as the 32 "quake lakes" (US Today, 2008) as well as sites associated with "death, suffering or the seemingly macabre" (Stone, 2006, p.146). Soon after the disaster, tourists flocked the quake relics as well as memorials erected across the province. A prominent example is the previously unknown town of Beichuan which was one of the most severely hit areas, with its ruins being the graveyard of thousands of victims whose bodies were never found (Hwang, 2011; Yang et al., 2011). Thus, tourism was adopted as a main force in the province's recovery plan, focusing on the quake-hit areas and providing new tourism products resulting from the disaster (Yang et al., 2011). For example, Tangjiashan Lake, the largest lake formed by the quake, was planned to become a tourist attraction (US Today, 2008; Yang et al., 2011). Similarly, the local government decided to evacuate Beichuan permanently and preserve its ruins as a memorial (Hwang, 2011).

Aiming to identify general patterns and relationships between behavioral constructs (motivations and intentions), the preferred strategy for this kind of investigation is a positivist

approach (Bryman, 2012) as the development of tourist typologies is among the most fundamental positivist movements (Phillimore & Goodson, 2004). Tourist behavior studies have commonly adopted a positivist approach and a quantitative inquiry to the exploration of motivations (e.g., Park, & Yoon, 2009; Prideaux et al. 2008), behavioral intentions (e.g., Lam & Hsu, 2006; Line et al., 2010) and the relationships between them (e.g., Jang et al., 2009; Huang & Hsu, 2009). Not only have these studies established the relationships between tourist motivations and intentions but they also provided evidence that these constructs can be measured by a quantitative research strategy. Similarly, recent dark tourism studies draw on positivist and quantitative investigation to the understanding of tourist behavior and experiences at such sites, and particularly tourist motivations (e.g., Biran et al, 2011, Hyde & Harman, 2011; Kang et al., 2011; Thi Le & Pearce, 2011). In relation to this study, a positivist approach also allows uncovering the scale of the phenomena explored (Bryman, 2012), namely the appeal of the traditional leisure attractions and the destination's dark disaster sites to different tourists, which is imperative to destination recovery and product diversification. Yet, some other issues investigated in this study, such as the particular motivations to visit a post-disaster destination, have received limited academic attention, necessitating the employment of interviews as part of the exploratory stage of the research. Interviews followed an essentialist/realist epistemological approach, often used to theorize motivations by assuming a largely unidirectional relationship between meaning, experiences and language (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thus, the research design consisted of two stages:

First, as part of the exploratory stage, semi-structured interviews were conducted in February 2009 to reveal potential tourists' motives to visit Sichuan and destinations recovering from a natural disaster in general. Participants included Chinese residents of Beijing (n=10), one of the key source markets of domestic tourists to Sichuan. The decision to focus on individuals living in an area which was not hit by the earthquake was due to the assumption that experiencing a recent disaster would affect individuals' motivation and travel behavior. For example, it may affect their risk perception levels (Uriely, Maoz & Reichel) or they may be more sensitive to ethical and moral tensions arising from the function of disaster sites as tourist attractions (Coats & Ferguson, 2013). To obtain a reasonable diversity of participants, who may perceive a visit to Sichuan in different ways and give a range of responses, a purposive sampling method was used. Purposive sampling has the advantage of selecting individuals on the basis of being able to provide information-rich data with regard to a particular phenomenon (Cresswell, 2007). Potential participants included both people who had visited Sichuan in the past and people who had not. The final sample included an equal number of male and female participants, aged from 20 to 55, with secondary school or college education. Additional interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of members of the Chinese National Tourism Administration and the Tourism Bureau of Sichuan (n= 6).

Interviewees were asked what motivated them (or what they believed would motivate tourists) to visit Sichuan following the earthquake. The interviews lasted from 30 to 90 minutes. Interviewees' responses were recorded and the main issues arising from the interviews were transcribed verbatim. Thematic content analysis was employed to identify and analyze themes

related to different push and pull motives. The interview process terminated at the point where analytical themes became theoretically saturated (Bloor & Wood, 2006) as indicated by the depth and breadth of opinions needed to analyze the data. Key arguments raised by interviewees became sufficiently repeated that continuing to explore the subject further with more people was considered not necessary. The resulting themes were also compared to motives identified by Rittichainuwat (2006; 2008), revealing additional motives (e.g., desire to commemorate the victims, contemplate fate and media images of the disaster) which assisted in reaching a more nuanced understanding when dealing with the complexities of tourist behavior.

For the second and main stage of the research, a structured questionnaire comprising three main sections was used. The first section included questions regarding participants' motives for visiting Sichuan. These questions were based on the semi-structured interviews conducted in the first stage and previous research. Given the aforementioned lack of research into motivations for visiting post-disaster destinations (with the exception of Rittichainuwat, 2006; 2008; Prideaux et al. 2008), attention was also given to motives revealed in the dark tourism literature (e.g. Biran et al. 2011; Hyde & Harman, 2011; Stone & Sharpley, 2008) and general studies into travel motivations (e.g., Jang et al., 2009; Kim et al., 2003). The final list of push and pull motives used in the questionnaire consisted of motives identified in both past literature and the interviews, with greater weight giving to the wordings and keywords used by the interviewees. Participants were asked to indicate the importance they assign to different reasons (push factors) and destination attributes (pull factors) in their decision to visit Sichuan on a seven-point scale (1- *extremely unimportant*, 7- *extremely important*).

The second section of the questionnaire aimed at assessing participants' intentions to visit Sichuan. Behavioral intention denotes the individual's expectations of a particular behavior in a particular setting and is operationalized as the likelihood to act (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Therefore, respondents were asked to rate their likelihood of visiting Sichuan in the following 12 months (e.g., Lam & Hus, 2006; Sparks, 2007). More specially, participants were asked for their intention to visit for: 1) visiting the traditional leisure tourism attractions (national and cultural sites not affected by the earthquake, such as Jiuzhai Valley, Mount Emi-Leshan Giant Buddha) and 2) visiting sites associated with the earthquake (e.g., the quake ruins in Beichuan, the earthquake memorials). This was measured by a seven-point scale, ranging from 1- *very unlikely* to 7- *very likely*. The third part of the questionnaire sought participants' socio-demographic characteristics. The questionnaire, written in English, was translated into Chinese under the principles of blind translation-back-translation method (Brislin, 1976). A pilot test aiming to evaluate the wording and clarity of the questionnaire was conducted in March 2009 among 20 Chinese individuals, residents of Beijing. The final version of the questionnaire was reached after minor amendments based on the comments received from the pilot test. For example, "to seek the stories of the black spots of the earthquake without the encouragement of mainstream media" was changed to "to seek the black spots of the earthquake without the encouragement of mainstream media", and "travel arrangement" was rephrased to "reliable travel arrangement".

The main data collection was conducted over a one week period in April 2009 using self-administered questionnaires. The target population was domestic Chinese tourists living in a non-quake-affected area. Beijing was chosen for conducting the survey, due to the fact that it is one of the major origin markets of domestic tourism to Sichuan (Yang et al, 2011) as well as the wide diversity of its population. To reflect the range of potential tourists' motivations and behavioral intentions, the sample included both individuals who had previously visited Sichuan as well as those who had not. Furthermore, to increase the diversity of respondents, data were collected on major pedestrian streets and public locations in Beijing (parks and shopping malls). A quasi-random sampling (also named One Stage Cluster Sampling or Systematic Sampling, Churchill, 2001) which is based on a random sampling frame was applied. At each location every n th participant was approached, where n was determined by the level of crowdedness (ranging from 15 to 20). Among those approached on the street, approximately 25% refused to participate, while in areas like public parks and shopping malls the refusal rate was lower (15%). International tourists and individuals living in earthquake-affected areas were excluded from the study by using screening questions.

FINDINGS

The final sample used for the analysis comprised 284 respondents. In terms of gender distribution, the sample contains 52.1% males and 47.9% females. The dominant age groups are 26-35 (51.1%), 16-25 (28.9%) and 36-45 (13.0%). In terms of education, most participants were educated to a college or university level (66.2%). More than two-thirds (70.1%) stated that they had never been to Sichuan and no significant differences in behavioral patterns were found when comparing those who previously visited with those who did not. Most respondents (73.2%) declared they were neither descents of Sichuan nor affected by the earthquake, and 26.8% stated to know someone affected by the Wenchuan earthquake personally.

Intention to Visit

Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with two statements aiming to capture their intention to visit Sichuan for: 1) Engaging with the destination's non-dark, traditional leisure tourism products and 2) For the purpose of engaging in dark tourism experiences. As reflected by the overall mean scores (Table 1), participants displayed a stronger interest to visit for experiencing the destination's traditional leisure products rather than the newly formed dark sites. Yet, participants' intention to visit Sichuan to experience these dark sites was relatively high too (mean score above four). Thus, while Sichuan still seems to hold a strong image of a mainstream leisure destination, tourists are also interested in its dark earthquake-related attributes.

As individuals vary in their willingness to visit post-disaster Sichuan, a cluster analysis was carried out using the two intention statements as the basis for classifying participants (the

clustering variables). Cluster analysis was used as it allows for the identification of different groups (clusters) within the sample based on the individuals' common features and the natural grouping of the data themselves (Aguiló & Rosselló, 2004; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson & Tatham, 2005). As a result, cluster analysis tends to yield different groups with low degree of intra-group and high degree of inter-group variation (Aguiló & Rosselló, 2004; Hair et al. 2005). A dual process of cluster analysis was conducted in order to attain the benefits of each of them (Hair et al., 2005). First, a hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's method was applied to obtain the agglomeration schedule. This method was preferred as it minimizes the increase in the total sum of squares across clusters (Hair et al., 2005). The four cluster solution was selected due to the largest increase (41.48%) in the agglomeration coefficient occurring in the step between four clusters to three. Additionally, the four cluster solution seemed to provide more interpretable results, and the ANOVA tests indicated that the clusters differ significantly (at $p \leq 0.001$) on both the intention to engage in non-dark leisure attractions and the intention to visit the dark disaster sites. In the second stage, a non-hierarchical method using the K-mean algorithm was conducted. The mean for each variable, deriving from the hierarchical analysis, was used as the initial seed points. The results of the K-mean cluster analysis yielded four clusters of tourists, with reassignment of few respondents and minor changes to the means of each cluster.

Table 1. Intention to visit among clusters

| Travel intention | Cluster 1 (n=46) | Cluster 2 (n=35) | Cluster 3 (n=136) | Cluster 4 (n=67) | Overall mean | One-way ANOVA |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Non-dark leisure attractions | 6.50 | 3.37 | 6.37 | 3.12 | 5.25 (1.81) | F= 241.852** |
| Dark disaster- related sites | 1.65 | 6.40 | 5.36 | 3.10 | 4.36 (1.90) | F= 220.697** |

Note: Standard deviations are presented in parentheses. ** $p \leq 0.01$

As seen from Table 1, Cluster 1 (16.2% of the sample) displays the highest intention to visit for experiencing the traditional, non-dark, leisure attractions of Sichuan and the lowest interest in visiting its disaster-related sites. The smallest cluster identified (12.3%) is Cluster 2. This cluster represents those participants who have the highest interest in visiting the destinations' dark sites and a low intention to visit for its traditional mainstream attractions (mean score lower than four). The largest cluster identified is Cluster 3 (47.9%) which includes those who are interested in visiting Sichuan to experience both types of products, namely the traditional non-dark attractions and its dark sites. Finally, Cluster 4 (23.6%) displays low intention (mean scores under four) to visit Sichuan for either its traditional leisure products or for experiencing its disaster sites. This group of participants was unlikely to visit Sichuan in general. Given the focus of this study, together with the common agreement that it is more effective to focus marketing and recovery

efforts on those groups who more likely to visit (Hystad & Keller, 2008), the following analysis concentrates on Clusters 1-3 and excludes Cluster 4.

Push motives

To identify common dimensions of push motives, factor analysis was conducted using the principal component analysis method. A Varimax rotation was implemented as it generally results in more interpretable factors (Field, 2009; Hair et al., 2005). Only items loading with an absolute value higher than 0.4 were included in the factors (Field, 2009). No items were excluded from the analysis and none was loaded on more than one factor. The results indicate that the push motives for visiting Sichuan can be grouped into six distinct factors, explaining over 60% of the total variance (Table 2). The first factor, labeled “special interest in earthquake”, reflects participants’ curiosity with the disaster and its impact, as well as willingness to help the survivors, grieving and commemoration. The second factor, “novelty seeking”, highlights participants’ interest in new and exciting experiences. The third factor was named “prestige” and is composed of motives of social recognition and esteem. The other three factors pertain to motives of “escape and relaxation”, “socialization” and “fun and recreation”. While “fun and recreation”, “prestige” and “escape and relaxation” emerged as the most important push factors in motivating participants to visit (mean scores above five), all the other three motives (“novelty seeking”, “special interest in earthquake” and “socialization”) were also ranked relatively high.

To explore the differences between the three clusters (Cluster 1-3 in Table 1) in terms of their push-pull motivations a One-way ANOVA test was used. Since the sizes of the clusters are unequal, the Games-Howell procedure was adopted for the post-hoc analysis as it is the most powerful and accurate in such a case (Field, 2009). The results (see Table 3) reveal several issues with regards to the nature of each cluster and the differences between them. First, looking at the mean scores *within each cluster*, it can be seen that for Clusters 1 and 3 (i.e., those preferring the traditional leisure attractions and those interested in both traditional leisure attractions and dark sites) “fun and recreation” is the main push motive. While also motivated by fun and recreation, Cluster 2 (those preferring Sichuan’s dark sites) is mostly motivated by special interest in the earthquake. A paired-sample t test revealed significant difference between this cluster’s motivation to visit for “fun and recreation” needs and satisfying curiosity about the disaster ($t=1.70, p\leq 0.1$). On the other hand, special interest with the disaster is the least important reason for the visit among those oriented towards Sichuan’s traditional leisure tourism products (Cluster 1). For those participants interested in both the traditional leisure and the dark attractions (Cluster 3), fascination with the disaster is also one of the least important motives for the visit. Yet, the relatively high mean score (above four) suggests that this is still a key motive in their decision to visit.

Table 2. Factor analysis of push motives

| | Factor Loading | Eigen Value | Variance explained | Cronbach's Alpha | Mean |
|---|----------------|-------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------|
| 1) Special interest in earthquake | | 3.49 | 13.43 | 0.82 | 4.44 |
| See the wreckage/debris after the disaster | 0.78 | | | | |
| See the improvements/changes after the disaster | 0.79 | | | | |
| Give a remembrance | 0.74 | | | | |
| Take contemplation of fate at the disaster sites | 0.69 | | | | |
| Help local people recover from disaster | 0.61 | | | | |
| Seek out the black spots (sites associated with death and disaster) of the earthquake without the encouragement of mainstream media | 0.59 | | | | |
| 2) Novelty seeking | | 2.82 | 10.85 | 0.81 | 4.59 |
| Experience new and different lifestyle | 0.75 | | | | |
| Find thrills and excitement | 0.74 | | | | |
| Engage in outdoor activities | 0.72 | | | | |
| Go to places many people have not been to/wish to visit | 0.51 | | | | |
| 3) Prestige | | 2.76 | 10.61 | 0.74 | 5.10 |
| Visit well-recognized places | 0.78 | | | | |
| Go to places that can make a profound impression on friends/relatives | 0.71 | | | | |
| Gain an opportunity to broaden horizon and enrich knowledge | 0.47 | | | | |
| 4) Escape and relaxation | | 2.64 | 10.17 | 0.78 | 5.05 |
| Be emotionally and physically refreshed | 0.73 | | | | |
| Do exercise | 0.60 | | | | |
| Relieve stress | 0.64 | | | | |
| Change pace and get away from routine | 0.62 | | | | |
| Do nothing at all but relax | 0.51 | | | | |
| 5) Socialization | | 2.35 | 9.04 | 0.76 | 4.38 |
| Make friends and develop relationship | 0.83 | | | | |
| Meet new people with similar interest | 0.81 | | | | |
| Visit friends/relatives | 0.49 | | | | |
| Have enjoyable time with family/friends | 0.41 | | | | |
| 6) Fun and Recreation | | 2.26 | 8.69 | 0.70 | 5.50 |
| Enjoy traveling as a hobby | 0.66 | | | | |
| Taste Sichuan cuisine | 0.63 | | | | |
| See ethnic groups' performances | 0.63 | | | | |
| Get close to nature and see remarkable scenery | 0.57 | | | | |
| Total Variance Explained | | | 62.81 | | |

KMO = 0.85, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity= 3445.07, df= 325, $p \leq 0.01$

Second, looking at differences *between the three clusters*, significant differences are found in their motivation to visit for satisfying their curiosity about the disaster, fun and recreation, socialization and novelty seeking needs. In terms of the special interest in the disaster, significant differences are found between all three clusters. Specifically, those who prefer the traditional leisure attractions are the least motivated by fascination with the disaster, compared to the other two clusters. However, those mainly interested in visiting the dark sites are those most motivated by fascination with the earthquake. Thus, the greater the participants' curiosity about the disaster and its impacts, the greater is their desire to include a dark element in their visit to Sichuan. Additionally, those mainly interested in the disaster sites (Cluster 2) are significantly less driven to visit due to motives of "fun and recreation", in comparison to Clusters 1 and 3.

In terms of "socialization", Cluster 3 is significantly more motivated by such needs compared to the other two clusters. This may reflect the perception of a "mixed product", including both non-dark leisure and dark tourism activities, as allowing something for everybody, and thus better addresses socialization motives compared to a trip based on a single tourism product. Additionally, Cluster 3 displays significantly higher motivation to visit than Cluster 1 (those preferring the tradition leisure attractions), due to novelty seeking and escape and relaxation needs. No significant differences are found between Clusters 2 and 3 in this particular context. This may suggest that those interested in visiting dark sites as part of a wider leisure itinerary seek to engage with different types of tourism products to maximize their experiences at the destination and to fulfill multiple needs.

Table 3. Intention to visit and push motives

| | Cluster 1 | Cluster 2 | Cluster 3 | One-way ANOVA | Differences found between groups | Games-Howell |
|--------------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------|----------------------------------|----------------------|
| Special interest in earthquake | 2.92 | 5.61 | 4.88 | F=77.73** | 1 & 2 1 & 3 2 & 3 | 0.00 0.00 0.00 |
| Novelty seeking | 4.27 | 4.44 | 4.96 | F= 4.282* | 1 & 3 | 0.048 |
| Prestige | 5.08 | 5.00 | 5.43 | NS | NS | NS |
| Escape and relaxation | 4.78 | 4.98 | 5.42 | F=5.571** | 1 & 3 | 0.01 |
| Socialization | 3.81 | 4.00 | 4.72 | F=9.051** | 1 & 3 2 & 3 | 0.00 0.03 |
| Fun and recreation | 5.76 | 5.10 | 5.77 | F=5.890** | 1 & 2 2 & 3 | 0.04 0.02 |

Note: * $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, NS not significant

Pull motives

To identify common dimensions of pull motives, a factor analysis was conducted using principal component analysis method with Varimax rotation. As seen on Table 4, the pull motives can be grouped into four factors, explaining 63.20% of the total variance. The first factor was termed “safety and accessibility” and includes functional attributes important for participants’ safety (personal safety, health) and ease of access. The second factor, “tourism infrastructure”, relates to the importance of varied tourist attractions and facilities. The third factor highlights the importance participants place on value for money. The fourth factor, named “the earthquake”, illustrates the role of the disaster and its media coverage as attributes pulling people to the destination. The mean scores suggest participants most valued “safety and accessibility” and “tourism resources and infrastructure”. Although the publicity of the earthquake is overall the least important pull motivator for visiting Sichuan, it is still ranked relatively high (mean score above four).

Table 4. Factor analysis of pull motives

| | Factor loading | Eigen Value | Variance explained | Cronbach’s Alpha | Mean |
|--|-----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| 1) Safety and accessibility | | 3.68 | 23.00 | 0.85 | 5.75 |
| Personal safety | 0.81 | | | | |
| Service quality | 0.72 | | | | |
| Public transportation | 0.72 | | | | |
| Hygiene and cleanliness | 0.64 | | | | |
| Reliable travel arrangement | 0.63 | | | | |
| Quality of the environment, water, air, and soil | 0.60 | | | | |
| 2) Tourism infrastructure | | 2.36 | 14.78 | 0.75 | 5.41 |
| Various ethnic and folk customs and activities | 0.73 | | | | |
| Well-known historical heritage | 0.72 | | | | |
| Beautiful natural scenery | 0.54 | | | | |
| Gastronomy | 0.60 | | | | |
| Hospitality, recreation, accommodation and shopping facilities | 0.56 | | | | |
| 3) Value for money | | 2.28 | 14.27 | 0.72 | 5.12 |
| The best deal | 0.77 | | | | |
| A high value for money | 0.73 | | | | |
| Special tour promotion | 0.69 | | | | |
| 4) The earthquake | | 1.78 | 11.12 | 0.72 | 4.80 |
| Wenchuan earthquake | 0.84 | | | | |
| Media image of the destination during/after earthquake | 0.77 | | | | |
| Total Variance Explained | | | 63.20 | | |

KMO = 0.86, Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity= 1862.46, df= 120, $p < 0.01$

Table 5 presents the differences between the three clusters based on their intentional behavior and pull motivations factors identified in Table 4, highlighting three main issues. First, the mean scores suggest that considerations of safety and accessibility and the state of the tourism infrastructure are the most important features for all three clusters, regardless of their travel interest (no significant differences were found between the clusters). Second, significant differences are found between the clusters in the importance assigned to value for money. Particularly, Cluster 3 is more motivated by considerations of value for money than the other two clusters. This group of participants is concerned with maximizing their visit experience and sought benefits at the destination by engaging in various kinds of activities. Finally, those mainly interested in disaster-related attractions (Cluster 2) and those preferring a joint product of both dark sites and traditional attractions (Cluster 3) are significantly more motivated by the pulling effect of the earthquake, compared to those more interested in the traditional leisure product. In fact, for Cluster 1, Sichuan’s new dark attributes are the least motivating pull factor.

Table 5. Intention to visit and pull motives

| | Cluster 1 | Cluster 2 | Cluster 3 | One-Way ANOVA | Differences found between groups | Games-Howell |
|--------------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Safety and accessibility | 5.53 | 5.69 | 5.86 | NS | NS | NS |
| Tourism infrastructure | 5.37 | 5.31 | 5.82 | NS | NS | NS |
| Value for money | 4.64 | 4.33 | 5.39 | F= 8.334** | 1 & 3 2 & 3 | 0.01 0.01 |
| The earthquake | 2.79 | 5.30 | 5.12 | F= 45.44** | 1 & 3 1 & 2 | 0.00 0.00 |

Note:* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, NS not significant

CONCLUSION

Drawing on the literature of post-disaster tourism recovery and dark tourism, this study explored domestic tourists’ motivations and travel intentions to visit a disaster-hit destination, previously known for its cultural and natural attractions. The findings further advance the understanding of tourist behavior and sought experiences at such a destination. In terms of motivations, the findings indicate that potential tourists are mainly motivated by push factors related to leisure pursuits (fun and recreation, prestige, escape and relaxation). This suggests that following a disaster, a destination may still be seen as suitable to fulfill such psychological needs. In relation to Sichuan, this might be due to the fact that many of its natural and cultural resources were not affected by the earthquake, or recovered quickly (Yang et al., 2011). In terms of pull factors, safety and accessibility and tourism infrastructure are the most important attributes. Thus,

the findings support the general emphasis given to communicating a safe image in reviving the destinations traditional product offer (Rittichainuwat, 2011).

Nonetheless, the findings also suggest that individuals' motives for visiting a post-disaster destination are beyond mere leisure pursuits and safety considerations. The results reveal the significance of mortality-related motives, evident in the dark tourism literature (Biran & Poria, 2012; Stone, 2012a; 2012b). Consistent with Rittichainuwat (2008), these include push motives (e.g., curiosity to see the magnitude of disaster, desire to commemorate the victims and help the recovery) and pull factors related to the disaster's images in media and marketing. Such motives have been largely overlooked by post-disaster tourism recovery research (Rittichainuwat, 2008). These findings empirically support Huan et al. (2004) arguing that given the changes to the destination's attributes after a disaster, people may visit for different reasons, seeking other experiences than before. Thus, opposing the general understanding that a disaster discourages people from visiting (Rittichainuwat, 2011), it is suggested that the newly emerging dark attributes actually motivate some people to visit, creating demand for a new type of tourist experiences. As such, tragic events and their associated sites can assist in diversifying the destination's product and markets following a disaster to revive tourism further.

The findings regarding behavioral intentions further support the potential of drawing on the destinations' dark resources alongside the recovery of the traditional leisure products. While overall, participants are mostly interested in visiting Sichuan's mainstream attractions, they also display a high interest in its disaster-related sites. However, as people react differently to a disaster, three distinct market segments, differing in their travel intentions and motivations, were identified. The first segment comprises individuals which are *leisure oriented*, interested in the traditional (pre-disaster) leisure products. This group is characterized by push motives of leisure pursuit (fun and recreation, escape and relaxation), yet is unmotivated by the emerging dark attributes. The earthquake had little effect on this segment's perception of Sichuan and their travel intentions. The second segment includes *dark tourism oriented* participants, who are mainly attracted to visit the disaster-related sites. This segment is more concerned with satisfying their curiosity over the disaster, desire to grieve and help in the recovery, compared to mere leisure pursuits. Following Stone (2012a), this segment engages in mortality mediation through memories and memorialization.

The largest segment includes those who are likely to pursue a *joint consumption* of dark disaster sites alongside a leisure itinerary. This segment is highly driven by general tourism and leisure pursuit motives as well as mortality-related motives. These individuals seek to maximize their utility by experiencing a variety of activities during a single trip (McKercher et al., 2008). Moreover, their interest in 'joint consumption' suggests that this segment seeks contemplation of mortality through entertainment, as a kind of "recreational grief" (West, 2004, p.11), or "dark leisure" (Stone, 2012a, p. 1578). Thus, while past studies focus solely on the recovery of the traditional attractions and markets (i.e., the leisure oriented segment), the findings stress that the

potential for recovery lies with the joint consumption segment and the diversification of the destination's product offer based on its new dark attributes.

These findings directly respond to Rittichainuwat's (2008) call for the need to provide "a border perspective" (p. 431) in understanding the consumption of destinations recovering from a disaster. Particularly, this study contributes to expanding the theoretical scope of research on tourists' consumption of post-disaster destinations in three main areas. First, by investigating not only motivations but also different intentions of potential tourists as opposed to actual tourists, a more nuanced understanding of tourist behavior could be gained. While Rittichainuwat (2008) differentiates between international and domestic tourists based on their motives, this study establishes further differences among potential domestic tourists. Thus, offering a more comprehensive approach to market segmentation. Moreover, while motivations provide explanations as to why people visit post-disaster destinations, individuals' behavior can usually be predicted by their intention (Jang, et al., 2009; Huang & Hsu, 2009). Thus, the investigation of intentionality is useful in determining the attractiveness of the product offer to potential tourists as well as the viability of new segments to destination's marketers.

Second, the findings underline that dark tourism theories should be employed to better understand the consumption of post-disaster destinations. Such theory is able to capture the impact of the changes to the destinations' attributes and image on tourist behavior and mainly, their motivations and travel intentions. Particularly, this approach highlights the newly formed dark sites and attributes as a key feature in attracting tourists and facilitating recovery. Although previous destination recovery studies stress the importance of proactive planning (e.g., Faulkner, 2001; Ritchie, 2004), these studies have merely focused on the revival of the traditional (non-dark) attractions and have been slow to recognize the potential of the new attributes emerging from the disaster (Huan et al., 2004). Further, previous studies largely consider the changes to the destination's attributes as a problem (i.e. harming the destinations' safe image), highlighting the need for a swift physical rehabilitation. Yet, this may only represent one aspect of tourism recovery, as many tourists are interested in experiencing sites of devastation and destruction. Moreover, this raises the need to separate between the recovery of the destination's image as safe and the recovery of its physical attributes. Although tourists are concerned with safety and tourism infrastructure issues, their interest and motivation to visit the disaster sites suggest that some 'evidence' of the physical destruction should be maintained. Thus, marketers need to differentiate between those attributes emerging from the disaster which may harm the destination's safe image, and those with the potential to become tourist attractions to enhance the destination's unique and attractive image.

Finally, the joint consumption segment emphasizes the need to expand the research scope and consider the consumption of dark sites in the wider context of the tourist experience at the destination as a whole. As destinations are an amalgam of different attractions (Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000) and to clarify the potential contribution of dark tourism (or other types of tourism) to the recovery process, there is a need to understand tourists' engagement with disaster sites as

opposed or in addition to consuming the mainstream products of such destinations. This is in contrast to most studies which explore the engagement with particular activities (i.e. local food, heritage sites) in isolation, and thus misrepresents the scale of special interest tourism (McKercher & Chan, 2005). In particular, dark tourism research would benefit from this approach as it currently tends to focus only on the exploration of tourist experiences at the specific site. To enhance the understanding of dark tourism consumption, there is a need to further explore the relationships between the consumption of sad and distressing sites alongside tourist engagement with more leisurely attractions. Moreover, while Lennon & Foley (2000) suggest that dark tourists are those visiting dark sites serendipitously, the findings suggest that the joint consumption segment actually premeditates the visit in advance and is motivated also by ‘meaningful reasons’ (i.e. commemoration, help the local community). This further raises the question as to who is a dark tourist and who is a tourist to a dark site.

In terms of practical implications, the results suggest that post-disaster recovery strategies should recognize the opportunities manifested in the destination’s dark resources and customize product offers to various segments. To attract the largest segment of those interested in a joint consumption, promotional messages should find a balance between accentuating the restored natural and historic sites of Sichuan as well as providing an opportunity to satisfy curiosity about the disaster, pay respect to the victims and support the local community. As this segment seeks to maximize their benefits of the visit, promotional deals which emphasize value for money are important. For those individuals mostly interested in the new dark sites, an itinerary can be developed that focuses only on visits to the disaster-hit areas, reflecting the destruction and providing opportunities to empathize with the local community and commemorate the victims. Furthermore, marketing communications geared towards these two segments should also highlight the contribution of tourism to the area, helping the local population in recovering from the disaster. Yet, for leisure-oriented individuals, the product offer should focus on the restored and unharmed traditional attractions of the destination. For all identified segments, the findings suggest the necessity to assure tourists’ safety. Here, and in line with Faulkner (2001), the communication of restoration activities should be a priority.

Limitations and Future research

This study has certain limitations which provide opportunities for further research. First, the relatively small sample size and the choice of only one cosmopolitan city for data collection may limit the generalizability of the findings. Considering China’s population size and diversity, further research should include other cities and compare regional differences of domestic tourists’ behaviors. Additionally, future research can include people residing in the quake-hit areas as well as international tourists to provide further insights regarding potentially conflicting demands and interests of these different stakeholders. Second, as in any tourist behavior study, it might be the case that participants are reluctant to admit to less socially acceptable motives and emotions (Biran et al., 2011) such as, taking pleasure in other persons’ suffering. A purely qualitative study might

be able to provide further insights in that respect, for example, by adopting projective techniques which could uncover the innermost thoughts and feelings of a person (Kline, 1983). Third, Seaton (2011) suggests that the interest in dark sites might be an ‘emergent motivation’ for some people, developed during the consumption process, rather than representing a pre-travel decision. Thus, achieving a more accurate understanding of tourists’ interest and reasons to engage with dark sites at post-disaster destinations may require additional explorations of actual tourists and their on-site experiences. Having insights into travel intentions and motivations of both potential and actual visitors would also allow a thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of promotional messages for the identified segments before, during and after the trip.

Fourth, this study was conducted in a particular point in time. However, the characteristics of tourism resources at the destination and tourists’ sought experiences may change over different stages of the disaster. Further research is needed to examine the effect of the disaster on tourist behavior at various time periods, providing a much-needed longitudinal approach to destination recovery and dark tourism research. It is anticipated that certain motives are more prevalent immediately after the disaster (as suggested by Rojek, 1993), whereas in the long run and due to changes to the destination, these characteristics are transformed, possibly including lighter dark motives within wider leisure consumption. Additionally, considering Lennon & Foley’s (2000) call for research into the psychology of dark tourism consumption, future investigation could explore the internal conflicts tourists may experience (or suppress) when consuming sites of tragedy along leisurely experiences. Adopting the psychological construct of emotions can assist to examine the specific positive and negative emotions that tourists experience during a visit to a dark site as well as the changes in these emotions across the vacation (following Lin, Kerstetter, Nawijn & Mitas, 2014). Similarly, consumer psychology research on coping (e.g., Duhachek, 2005) could provide the grounds for a better understanding of the various ways tourists (and local residents) cope with the stress and negative emotions associated with visitation to dark disaster sites.

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