



## Dark tourism: The effect of visiting a mausoleum on a tourist's psychological mood state in the central Asian city of Samarkand, Uzbekistan

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### ABSTRACT

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This paper examines the psychological effects of dark tourism by analyzing the feelings and emotions of domestic and international tourists who visited a mausoleum. Dark tourism sites have received considerable attention as a growing phenomenon in the 21st century. Dark tourism is associated with death, disasters, and atrocities; and includes places such as murder sites, battlefields, cemeteries, and places where tragedies have taken place. The Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum in the Central Asian city of Samarkand in Uzbekistan was chosen as a dark tourism site. A convenience sample of 21 visitors, of which 10 were international travelers and 11 were from Central Asian countries, agreed to be individually interviewed using a qualitative methodology. The results found that a range of emotions were expressed during the visit, with the majority of visitors expressing positive emotions on a scale from good to great, which included feelings of contentment, astonishment, excitement, and admiration at the conclusion of their visit. For many of the local visitors of the Islamic faith, it also provided a religious experience that for, some included prayer and meditation.

**Contribution/Originality:** This study focuses on the affects or emotions that are experienced by tourists visiting a dark tourism site (i.e., a Mausoleum) in a Central Asian city. Very few studies have studied the psychological effects of visiting a dark tourism site in non-western countries where attitudes toward death vary considerably based on different religious beliefs.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Dark tourism has been recognized and gained considerable attention in the 21st century from tourism scholars as a growing phenomenon, especially in regard to the motives of visitors who visit these sites and the provision of on-site interpretation and visitor facilities. Dark tourism is described as a category of special interest tourism that involves visits to tourist attractions and destinations that are often associated with death, suffering, disaster, and tragedy (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). Among the first researchers to connect dark tourism to places of death was Rojek (1993) who explored the popularity of visiting grave sites and places associated with the deaths of celebrities. He concluded that these grave sites were commercially exploited by tourism operators who were motivated by greed and to milk the macabre', and labelled these places as 'black spot' tourism because he associated them with the means for confronting death in post-modern societies.

Further terms such as negative sightseeing (MacCannell & Lippard, 1999) than tourism (Seaton, 1996) morbid tourism (Blom, 2000) and grief tourism (O'Neill, 2002) have been used by several scholars to provide different labels

to this niche market. However, the most popular name that is used in the academic literature is 'dark tourism' (Lennon & Foley, 2000) which is defined as '...the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites' (p. 198). Conversely, Seaton (1996) defined than tourism differently, '...travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death' (p. 240). That is, for many dark tourists, the main attraction is the historical and cultural aspects rather than the associations with death and suffering. For example, Holocaust tourism contains aspects of both dark tourism and heritage tourism. However, many researchers use the terms dark tourism and than tourism interchangeably, which are somehow related to death, suffering, atrocity, tragedy, or crime (Light, 2017).

This study builds upon previous contributions to encourage scholars to provide a deeper understanding of the psychological underpinnings of dark tourism. Some visitors acquire a morbid curiosity and fascination about thanatological concerns (i.e., the study of death and its related phenomena) in a socially acceptable environment that provides them with the opportunity to construct their own contemplation of mortality (Stone & Sharpley, 2008). However, other visitors are motivated to visit scary places and to enjoy the feelings associated with them (Wilson, 2004). The modern-day interest in celebrities, famous places, and the development of communication that produces images of violence, war, and tragedy may also support an individual's desire to visit these types of death sites (Lennon & Mitchell, 2007). Research has also shown that sensitive issues are often associated with museums (Miles, 2002; Wight & Lennon, 2004) while novelty, the desire to participate in your own adventure narrative, and nostalgia are also posited as potential reasons (Sharpley & Stone, 2009). According to Urry (2004) this transformation from a murderous site to a tourist site is quite common, as places of death are often transferred into places for visitors, and new tourist itineraries are established that have become an accepted part of the dark tourism spectrum, as highlighted by Stone (2006).

Stone (2006) suggested that some dark tourism sites offer darker products than others, depending on the degree of suffering. He proposed that there was a need to construct 'a firm and comprehensive typological foundation' which would lead to a better understanding of dark tourism sites. That is, he classified them on a spectrum that includes different shades of darkness based on such variables as the nature of the site, historical context, entertainment, education, and the time duration of the event. He categorized them into seven main types, which he described as: dark fun factories; dark dungeons; dark resting places; dark shrines; dark conflict sites; and dark camps of genocide.

However, Stone, in his typology of dark tourism sites, did not specifically include religious sites such as mausoleums. 'Dark Resting Places' can be regarded as the closest category as it focuses on graves or cemeteries that can be commercialized or toured by potential visitors. However, a mausoleum is an external free-standing building constructed as a monument or a large tomb, enclosing the interment space or above-ground burial chamber of a deceased person (or people) rather than in the ground. Mausoleums are generally large and impressive structures for a deceased leader or a person of great importance. Public mausoleums are also known as community mausoleums, and often entomb multiple individuals inside one building. A public mausoleum is similar to a public cemetery in that anyone may be entombed there, allowing the public to visit and pay their respects to the deceased. One of the most famous mausoleums is the Taj Mahal in Agra, Uttar Pradesh, India. It was commissioned in 1631 by the fifth Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan, to house the tombs of himself and his favorite wife, Mumtaz. It was designated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1983. Because it is regarded as a famous mausoleum and not a temple, can we pose the question, 'Is the Taj Mahal a dark tourism site'? Dark tourism has been defined by several researchers as disturbing, troubling, weird, morbid, or perverse, leading to negative emotions and experiences, such as horror, fear, depression, or sadness (Biran & Poria, 2012). However, to most people, the Taj Mahal evokes representations of the power of love, art, and religion. It would be interesting to determine what feelings are expressed by visitors when they visit mausoleums such as the Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum in Samarkand, Uzbekistan.

### 1.1. Aims of the Study

1. To determine whether a dark tourism destination (i.e., a mausoleum) should be included in Stone (2006) classification as a dark resting place.
2. To gain a deeper understanding of the psychological impact of dark tourism destinations (i.e., a mausoleum) by analyzing the feelings and emotions of tourists before, during and after visiting a dark site.

### 1.2. Significance of the Study

This research provides a deeper understanding of dark tourism and investigates how people feel after experiencing a dark tourism destination. This research will help tourists and tourism providers to more deeply understand the concept of dark tourism through an analysis of people's feelings and emotions. The gap in the research is that studies have previously investigated dark tourism destinations as places of war, murder, cemeteries, and prisons, but not mausoleums. This paper contends that mausoleums (i.e., the Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum in Samarkand, Uzbekistan) should be included in Stone (2006) typology of dark resting places, as well as to determine visitor's attitudes and emotions before, during, and after visiting this site.

This paper explores the perceptions of dark tourists in Central Asia, and more specifically in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Although more researchers are becoming interested in dark tourism, there are still many dark destinations around the world that still need to be researched. Previously, most of the research studies were conducted in western settings. It is important to widen this generalized fascination with death to include non-western societies. People's perceptions toward death vary across nationalities, religions, cultural beliefs, and practices, and in Central Asia, the Islamic religion is the most practiced. In addition, the academic literature is primarily centered on war tourism memorabilia sites such as battlefields, war museums, concentration camps, and memorials. Ramlee, Hussin, and Hashim (2018) have suggested that more research should be conducted on the 'lighter shades' of dark tourism in non-western settings to enable comparisons between western and non-western societies.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Dark tourism has become one of the most popular types of special-interest tourist visits in recent years. For example, the Statista Research Department (January 17, 2023) reported that nearly 73.1 thousand tourists visited the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone in Ukraine in 2021, which was the site of the worst nuclear disaster in history that occurred in 1986. Many tourists are fascinated by visiting these types of dark places of death, disaster, and atrocity (Lennon & Foley, 2000). Such sites represent a range of different types of events that include natural and accidental disasters, broad group atrocities, wars, large-scale killings or massacres, and genocide (Ashworth, 2002).

What is unique about dark tourism is its engagement with catastrophic places; such as battlefields, prisons, and cemeteries, that exhibit strong emotions because they involve death, suffering, pain, and sometimes murder. However, the motives for visiting dark tourism sites have revealed that interest in death is often the least important reason for the visit. According to several studies Isaac and Çakmak (2014) and Yan, Zhang, Zhang, Lu, and Guo, (2016) many visitors have a desire to learn more about the history of the location. However, Seaton (2009) was one of the first researchers to appeal for more enhanced psychological discourse related to dark tourism research. Nawijn, Isaac, Liempt, and Gridnevskiy (2016) also noted that little is known about the emotional effect on visitors who visit dark places. As a result, there has been greater scholarly interest in researching and analyzing the emotional aspects or feelings associated with the nature of the tourism experience at a dark tourism site.

### 2.1. Emotional Responses from Dark Tourism Sites

Seaton and Lennon (2004) argued that a dark tourist visit often exhibits certain emotional states, including what has been termed 'moral panic'. Cohen (1972) defined moral panic as 'a condition, episode, persons, or group of

persons that emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests' (p. 1). That is, it is seen as a widespread feeling of fear that is often based on false or exaggerated perceptions or information that exceeds the actual threat to society's values, interests, and safety. For dark tourists, another question can also be posed: how do they morally engage with death in its various forms of representation (Sharma, 2020). For other tourists, visiting a dark site can be a fulfilling experience because they develop empathic responses. While for others, it can result in negative emotions such as horror, fear, depression, or sadness.

However, little research has been conducted on the affect or emotions experienced at dark tourism sites. Affect is defined as an other-than-conscious potentiality that can be brought to the surface at an intensity that, when spiked, can be perceived as emotion (Ngai, 2005). Emotions are short-lived responses to external stimuli (Reeve, 2008). The potential of dark places can have a strong impact on visitors, where affect can often occur in unpredictable forms and with unexpected intensities related to death (Martini & Buda, 2020). Recently, Sigala and Steriopoulos (2021) concluded from their study that emotional engagement (type and intensity of emotions elicited during the dark tourism experience) plays an important role in helping visitors to generate meaning from their dark tourism experiences.

## 2.2. Disaster/Dark Tourism in Uzbekistan

Dark and disaster tourism is not a new phenomenon in Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan is a country with a number of dark tourism destinations that have not yet been fully explored. Although there are a number of dark sites in Uzbekistan, the concept of dark tourism is largely unknown among tour providers and travellers. One particular site that qualifies as dark tourism is the environmental disaster area of the dying Aral Sea (or Lake Aral), which is over 90% arid desert. The former fishing town of Muynak is now largely a ghost town, and is now 100 kilometers from the current shoreline. The former fishing fleet (or ship cemetery) consists of several 'rusting hulks' that have been left abandoned in the middle of the new desert that once was Lake Aral's seabed (<https://dark-tourism.com/index.php/uzbekistan/15-countries/individual-chapters/499-the-aral-sea>).

## 2.3. Location of the Dark Tourism Site

The Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum is the final resting place of Amir Timur (1336-1405), a.k.a. Tamerlane, the famous but often regarded as cruel and ruthless conqueror of Asia in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It is located in Samarkand and is considered by the researchers to be a dark tourism site as it has seven tombs inside (including that of Amir Timur himself). The inside consists of a fairly large room that contains the above-ground remains of the deceased. The crypts that hold the remains are above-ground tombs that are horizontal to the floor. Timur was a Turco-Mongol conqueror who founded the Timurid Empire around modern-day Afghanistan, Iran, and Central Asia, becoming the first ruler of the Timurid dynasty. He was undefeated in battle and is widely regarded as one of the greatest military leaders and tacticians in history. Manz (1989) one of Timur's most highly regarded biographers, argues that his story possesses, 'a stature bigger than life and a charisma bordering on the supernatural'. Opposing theories state that his armies have been described as levelling enemy cities, massacring urban populations, and leaving behind pyramids of human skulls to mark their passing" (Bartos & Dunn, 2013).

Figure 1 shows the interior of the Gur-e-Amir mausoleum, which appears as a large, high chamber, with the ornately carved headstones in the inner room of the mausoleum indicating the location of the actual tombs in a crypt directly underneath the main chamber. This mausoleum was originally built by Timur in memory of his grandson, Muhammad Sultan, in 1403. The structure was built in the middle of the courtyard of the madrasah created for Muhammad Sultan. Only the building of the shrine and the columned gate in front of it remain to this day. Amir Timur, his spiritual mentor Mir Said Baraka, the commander's sons Umar Sheikh, Miranshakh, and Shahrukh, grandsons Muhammad Sultan, Ulugbek and several others are buried in the shrine. Mualla (2015) stated that,

'Timur's tomb stands with its battered beauty as a monument to all of the pain and suffering on one hand, happiness and good fortune on the other; that the city has witnessed all throughout history' (p. 163).

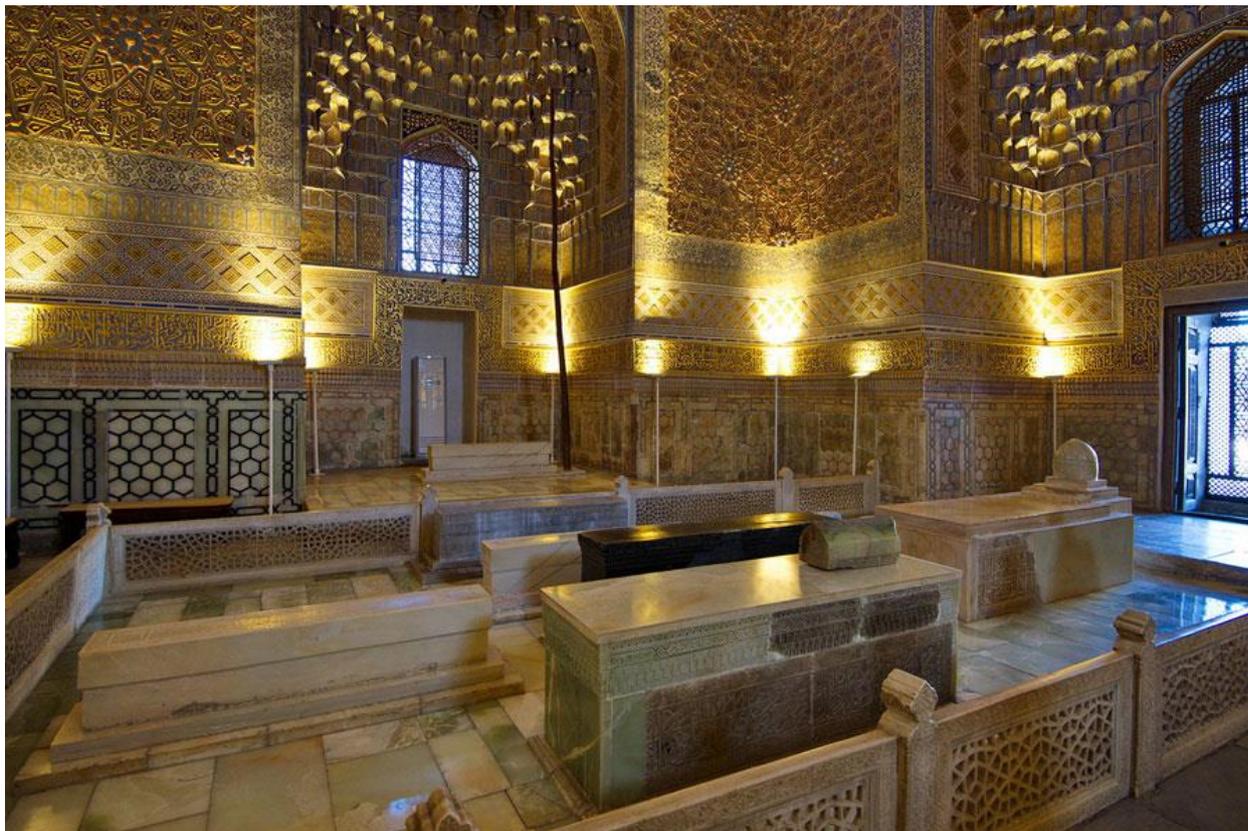


Figure 1. Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum XV century.

### 3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A qualitative research method using semi-structured interview questions was selected as the main method of collecting data for this study. The researchers decided that this was most suitable approach to use to determine the effect of the dark tourism experience on the psychological state of tourists. The interviews were conducted over two days in a semi-structured format at a dark touristic place in 2022 (i.e., Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum) to determine the feelings, emotions, and opinions of tourists about visiting a dark tourism site.

#### 3.1. The Interview Process

A convenience sampling method was used, which involved the researchers approaching potential respondents over the age of 18, immediately after leaving the Amir Temur Mausoleum in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. We asked them if they would agree to answer a series of questions about the dark tourism experience, and showed the potential interviewees a letter of support signed by the Head of the Department of Tourism Management at Silk Road International University of Tourism and Cultural Heritage. The purpose was to inform potential respondents that the research had been approved, and to assure them that the information would be kept confidential and that no names would be used to identify the interviewee as a participant in the study.

The interview schedule consisted of three sections totaling 10 questions. The questions were designed to ask respondents about their opinions about specific aspects of their visit-before, during, and after, and to allow them time to freely talk about their feelings and emotions. The first questions were based on socio-demographic factors of respondents, followed by questions relating to the psychological effect of a dark tourism mausoleum on the respondent's emotional mood state.

The following semi-structured questions were developed to guide the interview process:

1. Which country and city are you from?
2. Are you travelling alone? Or with a husband or wife, family, and friends
3. What is your marital status? Married or single?
4. Do you have children or grandchildren? If yes, what are their ages?
5. Are you working, retired, or at home?
6. Do you mind telling me your age?
7. Is this the first time that you have visited Amir Temur Mausoleum? If this is your first time, why did you visit? If you came before, why have you returned?
8. I now want you to tell me about your feelings or emotions that you felt:
  - A. before you went into the mausoleum?
  - B. when you were in the mausoleum
  - C. when you left and were outside the mausoleum.
9. What were your overall impressions of the visit?
10. Would you come again at a later time?

At the conclusion of the interview, the researchers thanked the respondents for answering the questions. The interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed into English so that they could be used for further analysis.

### 3.2. Analysis of the Data

Using an iterative interpretative and analysis process, the text from the interviews was initially transcribed verbatim using a series of Word documents, with the researchers manually reading and re-reading the text as a form of preliminary analysis. According to [Veal \(2017\)](#) when analyzing qualitative data, the most common approach is to look for emerging themes. Recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, and the most commonly found responses were highlighted by color coding, which is called 'flagging'. Relationships between common themes were then identified and documented using cross-tabulation, which involved counting the number of responses that were similar and those that demonstrated a common theme, and were grouped according to the relationships that they had with other common variables.

By coding and sorting the data in this manner, the researchers were able to compare different 'pieces' of data relating to each question and separate them into different file folders for further analysis. A research team conducted a frequency count of various key words or categories to determine their significance ([Miles & Huberman, 1994](#)). All the results will be presented in the next section in a de-identified form using respondent numbers to ensure the anonymity of the study respondents.

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Sample Characteristics

[Table 1](#) presents the main socio-demographics of the sample population. The respondents consisted of 10 males and 11 females, totaling 21 overall. The largest numbers who were interviewed were in the age group 18 to 35 (9 - 43%); five were aged between 36 and 45 years; three were aged between 46 and 55 years; and four were aged 60 years or older. They were equally divided between international travellers (10) and those from Uzbekistan (8), Kazakhstan (2), and Tadjikistan (1). In regard to marital status, two thirds of the respondents (14 - 66%) were married with at least two children, four were divorced, and three were single. Most respondents were employed (15 - 71%), while 4 were retired, and two were students.

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of the respondents.

Respondent	City/ Country	Gender	Age	Travel companion	Marital status	Children	Working
1	Uzbekistan Urgut region	Female	60	Husband 3 grandchildren	Married	Five children 40, 37, 35, 32, 30 years	Retired
2	Uzbekistan Jizzakh region	Male	32	Wife	Married	Two children 6 and 4 years	Working
3	Tadjikistan	Male	30	Alone	Married	One child	Working
4	Uzbekistan Tashkent	Male	27	With colleagues	Single	No children	Working
5	Uzbekistan Samarkand	Male	30	Wife and children	Married	Two children 12 and 10	Working
6	France	Female	62	Alone	Divorced	Two children 28 and 32	Retired
7	Germany	Male	38	Wife	Married	Two children 8 and 10	Working
8	Kazakhstan	Male	36	Wife	Married	Three children 3, 8 & 12	Working
9	Spain	Female	41	With colleagues	Married	One boy 10 years	Working
10	Spain	Female	60	Husband and colleagues	Married	Two children 24 and 28	Retired
11	Uzbekistan Samarkand	Female	51	Alone	Divorced	One girl 20 years	Work as a teacher
12	Uzbekistan Samarkand	Female	25	Alone	Single	No children	Student
13	Spain	Female	35	Husband	Married	Two children	Working
14	Germany	Male	52	With daughter	Divorced	One girl 22 years	Working
15	Kazakhstan	Male	38	Wife	Married	Two children 8 and 12	Working
16	France	Female	40	Colleagues	Married	One girl 10 years	Working
17	Uzbekistan Samarkand	Female	60	Husband and colleagues	Married	Two children 28 & 24	Retired
18	Uzbekistan Samarkand	Male	23	Friend	Single	No	Student
19	China	Male	30	Friends	Married	Baby	Working
20	Pakistan	Female	35	Husband and colleagues	Married	Two children 12 & 8	Working
21	Pakistan	Female	52	Colleagues	Divorced	One girl 22 years	Working

#### *4.2. Themes That Emerged from the Interviews*

##### *4.2.1. Number of Times visiting Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum*

For over 70% of respondents, this was the first time that they had visited the Mausoleum. The main reason they gave for visiting was because they were tourists and it was part of a cultural heritage visit that had been recommended by the tour agency, as it was the burial site of Amir Timur, the great military leader and ruler. The other six respondents had visited more than once for religious reasons, with one student who is 25 years of age, stating that he had visited between seven and eight times. Respondent 5, a male who is 30 years old, stated that he had visited twice for religious reasons, as, '...it is a must for Muslims to come and pray for the dead'.

##### *4.2.2. Feelings Expressed Before Entering the Mausoleum – Interest and Excitement*

The main feelings that were expressed by two-thirds (63%) of respondents before entering the Mausoleum were interest (37%) and excitement (28%). Respondent 4, who is a single male, aged 27, living in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, stated that, 'When I read or saw this place on television, I was interested in visiting it'. Respondent 19 from China, is a 30-year-old male who was married with a baby, stated, 'I felt excited before entering the mausoleum as the external design of this site is beautiful'.

##### *4.2.3. Feelings Expressed Inside the Mausoleum – Horror and Terror*

Almost 50% of respondents stated that they expressed negative feelings such as being horrified and terrified. Respondent 19, a 30-year-old male from China, stated that he was terrified because he was shocked that when he entered, there were between eight and 10 graves there. "We stayed for almost an hour as the guide gave a detailed description of the Timurid Empire during the time of Amir Timur. We didn't pray because our religion was not Muslim, but there were a lot of people who were praying. We took several photos for our memories." Respondent 18, a 23-year-old student who lives in Samarkand, admitted that, 'I didn't feel anything when I visited this time, but in my first visit, I was horrified. This time I stayed for about 20 minutes, and I took a couple of photos. Before taking photos, I prayed with one Muslim guy'.

Two respondents expressed positive emotions, such as Respondent 6, a 62-year-old man from France who was retired, stating that he had, 'a good feeling and was especially proud of visiting such a historical place, especially as I now know more about the life of Amir Timur'.

##### *4.2.4. Feelings Expressed After Leaving the Mausoleum*

Over 50% of the respondents used positive one-word answers to describe their feelings of relief and calmness after leaving the mausoleum. Overall, all of the impressions (except for one respondent) were positive, ranging from good to great (30%), with other comments including feelings of contentment, astonishment, excitement, and admiration. There was only one negative comment: that one respondent felt 'nothing' after the visit. Most respondents stated that they would come again for a return visit, with over 80% stating 'yes'. There were two maybes and two 'nos'.

## **5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

The majority of visitors who entered the Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, were not aware of the term 'dark resting places' to describe one of the categories that Stone (2006) used in his dark tourism spectrum. However, based on the negative feelings that the visitors expressed when they entered the mausoleum, such as shock, horror, and terror, the researchers felt that mausoleums should be included as a sub-category in Stone's (2006) spectrum of 'dark resting places.' For many visitors, they stated that they experienced a negative shock when they first entered because they saw many graves in the crypt, and perhaps needed some time to adjust to these feelings. Martini and Buda (2020) supported this finding that dark places

can have a strong impact on visitors, where the effect can often occur in unpredictable forms and with unexpected intensities related to death. In this case, almost half of the respondents stated that they expressed negative feelings such as being horrified and terrified. These negative feelings can also be related to an emotional state that has been termed “moral panic” (Cohen, 1972). That is, it is a widespread feeling of fear that is often based on false or exaggerated perceptions or information that exceeds the actual threat to a person’s safety. Sharma (2020) also referred to a cremation ground as, “a liminal, threshold place that may offer freedom and peace for some, but is likely to cause anxiety, constraint, or threat for others” (p. 8). These negative feelings soon dissipated after exiting the mausoleum.

For many of the international tourists, the visit to the Gur-e-Amir Mausoleum was their first time and was part of an organized group tour. They regarded this tour as a cultural heritage visit that had been organized by the tourist agency, with a tour guide accompanying the group to educate them about the history of the Timurid Empire and the burial site of Amir Timur, the great military leader who became the first ruler of the Timurid dynasty. However, for many of the local visitors who were of the Muslim faith visiting the Gur-e-Amir, this was not regarded as a cultural heritage visit, but as a religious experience to pray to Allah. It was observed that many of the local visitors were great admirers of Amir Timur and felt ‘in awe’ in his spiritual presence. This is because the legend of Amir Timur is still very strong in contemporary Samarkand, with his large portrait hanging at the entrance to the mausoleum. He is portrayed as a hero and a conquering warrior who brought great pride and many achievements to Uzbekistan. This can be seen by the large bronze statues that have been erected in Samarkand and Tashkent to memorialize his life.

This also suggests that another motivation for visiting a dark tourism site in a non-western country where Islam is the main religion, is a strong religious aspect. In this study, Respondent 19 noted that there were many people who were praying at the time he visited. Raine (2013) study of tourists who visit burial grounds and graveyards concluded that mourners and pilgrims had personal and spiritual connections to the different sites studied. Raine noted that pilgrims had a religious connection to the individual or served as a personal hero, in this case Amir Timur. Thus, the mausoleum is seen as a place of worship to pray to Allah and to have mercy on not only the deceased in the mausoleum, but for all deceased Muslims. Bowman and Pezzullo (2009) further concluded that in some cases, praying was not to mark the passing of the deceased but rather to heal the wounds of families, communities, societies, and/or nations because of the deceased's passing.

It is interesting to note the variety of emotions that were expressed over the entire visit to the mausoleum. Initially, before entering the mausoleum, positive feelings associated with interest and excitement were mainly expressed by two-thirds of the respondents. However, after entering the mausoleum, these feelings quickly changed to negative ones, such as shock, terror, and horror after seeing so many graves. Martini and Buda (2020) attributed these changes to feelings associated with the strong emotional and affective reactions that occur when viewing places of death for both local and foreign visitors. These feelings may also include pain, fear, empathy, and catharsis.

After leaving the mausoleum, feelings had changed again for over 50% of the respondents, who now described their feelings as relief and calmness. Overall, when discussing their overall impressions, all of the impressions (except for one respondent) were positive. This ranged on a scale from good to great, as well as feelings of contentment, astonishment, excitement, and admiration. Therefore, although dark tourism is regarded as a controversial field of study, it can still be seen from the responses of most visitors that, although feelings varied at times between positive and negative, overall it was still regarded as a positive experience for most of the respondents.

## 6. CONCLUSION

As a particular theme in tourism studies, dark tourism can be regarded as a powerful tool for exploring contemporary social life. Nowadays, dark tourism has evolved into a diversified and meaningful niche tourist

market that is attracting large numbers of tourists, because many have a morbid fascination with death, disaster, and past atrocities. A number of studies have been conducted on the motivations for visiting dark tourism places such as battlefields, dungeons, public hangings, murders committed, cemeteries, and prisons, but none have studied mausoleums. One dark tourism place that has been ignored in Stone (2006) typology is the mausoleum, which is a popular attraction to visit the graves of famous rulers in many Asian countries, in this case Amir Timur, who was born in Uzbekistan and became the first ruler of the Timurid dynasty.

Little research has been conducted on the effects or emotions that have been experienced by tourists at dark tourism sites. Research suggests that dark places can have a strong impact on visitors. This was the case in this study, where emotions varied from positive, to negative and back to positive after leaving the mausoleum. This supports studies that suggest that affect or feelings can often occur in unpredictable forms and with unexpected intensities related to death. As Martini and Buda (2020) concluded, dark places might deeply offend and unsettle some visitors, triggering feelings of shock and anger, but for others, wonder and excitement. In addition, Sharma (2020) also noted that burial sites might offer freedom and peace for some tourists; but for others, they might cause feelings of anxiety, constraints, or threats. In addition, for some of the local visitors of Islamic faith, the mausoleum provided them with a religious outlet to express their feelings through prayer and meditation. Further studies need to be encouraged to explore the importance of religious motivations for Muslim visitors who visit dark tourism places such as mausoleums. Hassani and Moghavvemi (2020) also concluded that little is known about Muslim tourists' leisure travel behaviour.

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**Institutional Review Board Statement:** The Ethical Committee of the Silk Road International University of Tourism, Uzbekistan has granted approval for this study on 14 May 2022 (Ref. No. SRUT-1).

**Transparency:** The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

**Data Availability Statement:** The corresponding author can provide the supporting data of this study upon a reasonable request.

**Competing Interests:** The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

**Authors' Contributions:** Supervised the study, wrote the literature review, methodology, results and conclusions, I.P.; conceptualized the study, assisted with the literature review and collected the data, M.V.; assisted with the data collection, B.O. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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