
Beyond Day of The Dead: Dark Tourism and Historical Narratives in Mexico

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the representation and commercialisation of underrepresented dark tourism sites in Mexico, focusing on Mitla (Oaxaca), the Tlatelolco Memorial (Mexico City), and the House of Sorrows (Guanajuato). Using ethnographic observation, narrative analysis, and semi-structured interviews, the research explores how these sites navigate the line between historical commemoration and market-driven narratives. The findings highlight key challenges, including the exclusion of local voices, the prioritisation of spectacle over education, and the marginalisation of deeper cultural and historical meanings. While these sites hold significant potential for fostering critical engagement with history, their current presentation often emphasises entertainment, limiting their educational impact. The study argues for a more inclusive and ethically responsible approach to dark tourism, advocating for greater integration of local perspectives, the development of interpretive resources, and strategies to enhance visitor engagement beyond sensationalism. By repositioning these sites as spaces of reflection and cultural preservation, this research contributes to broader discussions on how dark tourism can evolve to provide a more meaningful and balanced representation of the past.

ARTICLE DETAILS

Published On:
13 February 2025

KEYWORDS: Dark tourism, cultural memory, heritage interpretation, historical narratives, tourism ethics, local representation, Mexico.

Available on:
<https://ijmir.com/>

INTRODUCTION

Dark tourism, the phenomenon of visiting sites associated with death, suffering, or the macabre, has garnered significant academic attention over the past two decades due to its cultural, economic, historical, psychological, social, and political dimensions (Lennon & Foley, 2000; Sharpley & Stone, 2009). As an area of study, dark tourism explores the intersection of memory, commodification, and representation, raising questions about the ethical and cultural implications of how sites of tragedy are curated and experienced (Light, 2017; Stone, 2006). However, much of the existing research tends to overlook the voices of local communities, whose lived experiences and perspectives are often neglected in favour of commercially appealing narratives designed to attract domestic and international audiences (Poria, Butler, & Airey, 2006).

It could be argued that in Mexico, dark tourism is most closely associated with the internationally celebrated Day of the Dead (Sánchez-Aguirre, Alvarado-Sizzo & Moury-Fernandes, 2024), a tradition that combines indigenous and Catholic practices to honour the dead through rituals and symbolic offerings (Brandes, 2006). While this festival has indeed become a keystone of Mexico's cultural identity, Santino (2016) suggests that commodification of the event can diminish its spiritual and cultural depth. Meanwhile, its global popularity has overshadowed other significant narratives of death, particularly those rooted in indigenous and local histories.

This study investigates how dark tourism in Mexico can evolve to provide a broader and more inclusive representation of the nation's cultural and historical relationship with death. It focuses on underrepresented dark tourism sites, including Mitla- a Zapotec archaeological site in Oaxaca known as the "place of the dead" (Arfman, 2008; Shushan, 2017); the Tlatelolco Memorial in Mexico City- which commemorates the 1968 student massacre; and the *Casa de los Lamentos* (henceforth referred to as the English translation House of Sorrows) in Guanajuato- a historic mansion whose owner carried out a series of ritualistic murders in the late

19th century. These locations encapsulate diverse narratives of death, from indigenous beliefs about the afterlife, state violence and political repression, and personal tragedy linked to crime and mourning rituals. However, the exclusion of local voices from the representation and interpretation of these sites raises critical questions about authenticity, ethical tourism practices, and the preservation of cultural heritage (Lischer, 2019).

The study is guided by the research question: How can dark tourism in Mexico evolve to provide a broader and more inclusive representation of the nation's cultural and historical relationship with death, addressing the exclusion of local voices and the dominance of commodified narratives?

To answer this question, the research sets out the following objectives:

- (i) To analyse how underrepresented dark tourism sites are currently represented in the tourism industry and the extent to which local voices are excluded.
- (ii) To examine how the prominence and commercialisation of Day of the Dead overshadows other significant dark tourism narratives in Mexico.
- (iii) To explore the cultural and historical significance of underrepresented sites, emphasising the importance of incorporating local perspectives.
- (iv) To propose strategies for promoting a more inclusive and reflective approach to dark tourism in Mexico.

This research builds on Lennon & Foley's (2000) concept of dark tourism, which explores the conflict between commemoration and commodification at sites associated with death. Stone's (2006) dark tourism spectrum further categorises these sites based on their balance between education and entertainment, providing a framework for assessing how they are marketed and experienced. Cultural geography, particularly Light's (2017) work on place and memory, offers insight into how physical spaces shape collective understandings of mortality and history. Additionally, Connerton's (1989) thoughts on selective memory explain how societies prioritise certain historical narratives while marginalising others, often due to political and economic influences. In the context of Mexican dark tourism, these theories help reveal how underrepresented sites reflect complex histories of resilience and violence.

By examining how the three case study sites are marketed, experienced, and interpreted, this study will explore the potential for dark tourism to foster critical engagement with Mexico's multifaceted relationship with death (see Lomnitz, 2008). Furthermore, it highlights the need for ethical tourism practices that emphasise cultural preservation over commodification, ensuring that local perspectives are integrated into the narratives presented to visitors (Jurenienė & Radzevičius, 2022).

The study also offers practical implications for stakeholders, including policymakers, tour operators, and local communities, by proposing strategies for fostering a more inclusive and reflective approach to dark tourism. This involves focusing upon underrepresented voices, addressing the ethical challenges of commodification, and promoting a deeper engagement with the cultural and historical significance of dark tourism sites.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Analysing Dark Tourism through Key Concepts

As mentioned in the introduction, this study is guided by an integrated conceptual framework that combines the work of Lennon & Foley (2000), Stone (2006), Light (2017) and Connerton (1989).

Lennon & Foley (2000) conceptualise the relationship between commodification and commemoration as a key dynamic in dark tourism, highlighting the competing pressures of marketability and historical authenticity. Stone's (2006) 'dark tourism spectrum' builds on this by categorising sites along a continuum, ranging from educational to entertainment-focused experiences. Light (2017) expands on existing scholarship on place and memory to explore how physical spaces influence collective narratives of death and history, with an emphasis on the role of local perspectives in shaping these narratives. Similarly, Connerton (1989) examines how collective memory functions to prioritise certain narratives while neglecting others, often reflecting broader political and economic influences.

Representation of Dark Tourism in Mexico

Dark tourism in Mexico includes a diverse range of narratives that reflect the country's complex history, extending far beyond the globally recognised Day of the Dead. While this festival has become a symbol of Mexican cultural identity, other historically significant events and traditions—particularly those from pre-Hispanic and colonial periods—are often overlooked. For example, ancient rituals, such as the Aztec reverence for Mictlantecuhtli, the god of the underworld, serve to demonstrate a worldview where death was deeply intertwined with life and spiritual balance (Carrasco, 2010). Similarly, the colonial period offers examples of how death became a tool of power, from the mass burials during epidemics to the public executions of indigenous leaders resisting colonial oppression (Chuchiak, 2012). Historical episodes such as these provide a framework for exploring the cultural and political significance of death, distinct from the lens that is often applied to the Day of the Dead, yet they are somewhat overlooked.

Lesser-known sites such as Mitla, the Tlatelolco Memorial, and the House of Sorrows illustrate the potential for a more inclusive understanding of Mexican dark tourism. Mitla, historically regarded as a gateway to the afterlife in Zapotec cosmology, is more

renowned for its architectural grandeur rather than its spiritual and cultural significance. This reflects a broader trend in which pre-Hispanic sites are marketed for their visual appeal while their deeper meanings remain underexplored (Oesterreich, 2019). The Tlatelolco Memorial, commemorating the 1968 student massacre, stands as a critical site of political resistance and historical memory. However, limited integration into mainstream tourism circuits and the omission of survivor perspectives is reducing its potential as a space for critical engagement with Mexico's political history. Meanwhile, the House of Sorrows in Guanajuato, relies heavily on sensationalised 'horror' narratives rather than an in-depth reflection on the trauma and violence related to its past. Together, these sites demonstrate the need for dark tourism in Mexico to move beyond commercialised and aestheticized portrayals to a more critical and historically grounded engagement, one that includes local voices, acknowledges contested histories, and fosters deeper cultural and educational reflection on Mexico's relationship with death, memory, and identity.

By applying the conceptual tool of selective memory (Connerton, 1989), this study will explore how the dominant focus on Day of the Dead has tended to diminish the importance of these sites and their narratives. The failure to integrate local perspectives into these representations further exacerbates this imbalance.

The Role of Commodification

Commodification is a recurring theme in the study of dark tourism (Virgili, Delacour, Bornarel & Liarte, 2018), with the pressure to market sites as tourist attractions often leading to a dilution of their historical and cultural significance (Sharpley & Stone, 2009). In the context of Mexico, the commodification of Day of the Dead has transformed a deeply spiritual tradition into a globally recognised spectacle, which raises concerns about cultural appropriation and misrepresentation (Lavery & Finnegan, 2025).

At Mitla, tourism marketing focuses on its architectural features while neglecting its symbolic role as a gateway to the afterlife in Zapotec cosmology. This reflects Stone's (2006) observation that dark tourism sites often prioritise visually striking elements over intangible heritage. Similarly, the focus of the House of Sorrows on the macabre aspects of its past aligns with the commodification aspect as it reduces historical narratives to sensationalist spectacles. By contrast, the Tlatelolco Memorial's relative lack of commercialisation perhaps highlights a missed opportunity to engage broader audiences in a meaningful dialogue about Mexico's political history.

The framework of Commodification vs. Commemoration (Lennon & Foley, 2000) is suitable for analysing these dynamics, as it enables an understanding of how economic and political imperatives shape the representation of dark tourism sites, often at the expense of cultural authenticity and ethical engagement.

The Exclusion of Local Voices

The exclusion of local perspectives is a significant issue in the representation of dark tourism sites in Mexico. This not only undermines the authenticity of these narratives but also perpetuates inequities in how cultural heritage is represented and experienced (Lin, Zhang & Yhang, 2024). Place and memory play a crucial role in this context, highlighting the importance of involving local communities in shaping the narratives associated with these sites. Ensuring that these narratives reflect the lived experiences and cultural identities of those most connected to them can lead to a more inclusive and meaningful representation.

At Mitla, the absence of indigenous voices in interpretive materials limits visitors' understanding of its significance in Zapotec culture. Similarly, the Tlatelolco Memorial's portrayal often excludes the perspectives of survivors and activists, reducing its potential as a site of political resistance and reflection. The House of Sorrows, while engaging with themes of grief and violence, primarily frames its history through sensationalised horror stories, overshadowing deeper discussions on true crime, trauma, and the ethical implications of commodifying real-life tragedy.

The integration of local perspectives aligns with the idea of local inclusion, which promotes collaborative approaches to tourism development. Giving priority to these voices allows dark tourism sites to move beyond commodification and function as platforms for cultural preservation and education (Panayidou, Christou & Saveriades, 2024).

The Educational Potential of Dark Tourism

Dark tourism holds significant potential as an educational tool, fostering critical engagement with history and culture (Jang, Sakamoto & Funck, 2021). Stone's (2006) dark tourism spectrum stresses the need for sites to balance entertainment with opportunities for learning, particularly in contexts where historical narratives intersect with themes of violence and suffering. This educational potential is especially relevant in Mexico, where sites like Mitla, the Tlatelolco Memorial and the House of Sorrows offer significant opportunities for exploring indigenous cosmologies and political histories.

Nonetheless, realising this potential requires a shift in how these sites are represented and marketed (Cohen, 2011). Incorporating educational elements into the visitor experience—such as guided tours led by local experts or interpretive materials that focus upon cultural and historical context—can enhance their value as spaces of reflection and learning (Dresler, 2023). Strengthening the educational potential of dark tourism in this way ensures that these sites serve not only as attractions but also as platforms for deeper historical engagement and critical understanding.

Table 1. Summary of Literature Review

<i>Key Theme</i>	<i>Main Ideas</i>	<i>Key References</i>	<i>Theoretical Insights & Application</i>	<i>Example</i>
Conceptual Framework	Integrates the work of Lennon & Foley (2000), Stone (2006), Light (2017), and Connerton (1989) to analyse dark tourism through commodification vs. commemoration, selective memory, and place and memory.	Lennon & Foley (2000), Stone (2006), Light (2017), Connerton (1989)	Provides the theoretical foundation for understanding how dark tourism sites construct and present narratives of death, memory, and violence.	The theoretical framework allows for a structured analysis of how sites balance historical representation, economic imperatives, and visitor engagement.
Representation of Dark Tourism in Mexico	Mexico’s dark tourism extends beyond Day of the Dead, incorporating pre-Hispanic and colonial contexts. Sites such as Mitla, Tlatelolco, and the House of Sorrows highlight underrepresented histories.	Carrasco (1999), Chuchiak (2012), Allier Montaño (2018)	Selective Memory explains how dominant narratives are privileged while others are marginalised. Place and Memory underscores how spatial representation influences historical interpretations.	Mitla is framed in tourism primarily for its architecture, neglecting its indigenous significance; Tlatelolco Memorial lacks mainstream tourism recognition despite its political importance.
The Role of Commodification	Tourism often commercialises dark sites, reducing cultural authenticity. The focus on architectural grandeur at Mitla and the sensationalism of the House of Sorrows exemplify this situation.	Virgili et al. (2018), Sharpley & Stone (2009), Brandes (2006), Lennon & Foley (2000)	Commodification vs. Commemoration explains economic pressures shaping site narratives. Stone’s (2006) Dark Tourism Spectrum categorises sites by their balance between education and entertainment.	House of Sorrows sensationalises crime and the supernatural, overshadowing deeper historical narratives, illustrating commodification.
Exclusion of Local Voices	Local voices are often excluded from site narratives, impacting cultural representation. Examples include the lack of indigenous perspectives at Mitla and survivors’ voices at Tlatelolco.	Lin, Zhang & Yhang (2024), Light (2017), Panayidou et al. (2024)	Selective Memory highlights how political and economic interests determine which voices are included or excluded. Place and Memory argues for integrating local perspectives.	Mitla excludes indigenous voices in its interpretive materials; Tlatelolco Memorial overlooks survivor testimonies in shaping public memory.
Educational Potential of Dark Tourism	Dark tourism can be a tool for critical engagement and education. Enhancing visitor experiences with guided tours and historical context can transform these sites into meaningful learning spaces.	Jang et al. (2021), Stone (2006), Cohen (2011), Dresler (2023)	Stone’s (2006) Dark Tourism Spectrum differentiates between educational and entertainment-driven sites. Place and Memory explains how spatial narratives shape public engagement with history.	Tlatelolco Memorial remains underutilised as an educational resource, providing an opportunity for expanded historical engagement.

METHODOLOGY

Overview of Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, integrating ethnographic observation, narrative analysis, and semi-structured interviews to examine three underrepresented dark tourism sites: Mitla, the Tlatelolco Memorial, and the House of Sorrows. These sites were chosen for their cultural and historical significance.

Case Study Approach

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A case study approach is central to this study, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the unique characteristics and narratives associated with each site. Each case study focuses on the spatial, historical, and cultural dimensions of the site while considering how local voices are integrated—or excluded—in its representation.

Context Settings of the Case Studies

(i) Mitla: A Gateway to the Afterlife

Mitla, a Zapotec archaeological site in Oaxaca, was regarded as a gateway to the afterlife. Its name originates from the Nahuatl word *Mictlán*, meaning 'place of the dead' (Garduño-Monroy, Figueroa-Soto, Magaña-García, Ruiz-Figueroa, Gómez-Cortés, Jiménez-Haro & Hernández-Madriral, 2019). The site's intricate stone mosaics and ceremonial architecture embody its significance within Zapotec cosmology (Jones, 2010; Lidz & Dhaliwal, 2024). However, tourism narratives frequently emphasise its architectural grandeur, often overlooking its spiritual and cultural aspects.

Research for this case study took place in August, 2024.

8 semi-structured interviews were conducted with local guides, community members, and visitors to explore perceptions of Mitla's representation.

Ethnographic observations documented visitor engagement, focusing on interpretive materials, guided tours, and visitor behaviour.

Narrative analysis examined tourism materials (brochures, websites) to assess how Mitla is framed for tourists.

Place and Memory provided a lens for exploring how Mitla shapes collective narratives about death and spirituality.

(ii) Tlatelolco Memorial: Commemorating Political Violence

The Tlatelolco Memorial commemorates the 1968 student massacre, when government forces violently suppressed a peaceful protest, resulting in numerous deaths. Located at the *Plaza de las Tres Culturas* in Mexico City, the site symbolises Mexico's pre-Hispanic, colonial, and modern histories (Navarrete Torres, 2020). While it serves as a space for mourning and political reflection, its limited integration into mainstream tourism circuits raises concerns about its impact as a site of historical engagement (Allier Montaño, 2018; Carvajal-Loaiza, Valencia-Varon, Riascos-Guerrero & Arboleda-Ariza, 2024).

The research for this case study took place in January, 2025.

10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with cultural historians, local community members, and visitors to understand how narratives of the massacre are presented.

Ethnographic observations documented visitor engagement and reactions to the memorial's exhibits and design.

Narrative analysis examined tourism narratives and government materials to assess whether the site is framed as a space for critical engagement or passive remembrance.

Selective Memory (Connerton, 1989) was central to this analysis, highlighting how certain aspects of the massacre are emphasised while others are excluded.

(iii) The House of Sorrows: Narratives of Grief, Crime, and the Supernatural

The House of Sorrows, a historic mansion in Guanajuato, intertwines true crime tourism with supernatural storytelling. Once home to Tadeo Fulgencio Mejía, a wealthy landowner who allegedly engaged in ritualistic killings following his wife's murder, the site has since become a haunted attraction. Its exhibits feature preserved artifacts, recreated crime scenes, and ghost tours, drawing visitors with a blend of historical narrative and eerie spectacle (Ramírez, 2025). However, its presentation leans heavily on sensationalism, prioritizing scary storytelling over critical discussions on crime, trauma, and the ethical dilemmas of commercialising real-life violence.

The fieldwork for this case study took place in August, 2024.

6 semi-structured interviews were conducted with tour guides, curators, and visitors to explore how the site balances entertainment and historical reflection.

Ethnographic observations recorded visitor reactions, engagement with paranormal narratives, and interpretations of historical elements.

Narrative analysis examined marketing strategies and promotional materials, assessing the commodification of tragedy.

Commodification vs. Commemoration (Lennon & Foley, 2000) guides this analysis, focusing on the ethical dilemmas of turning sites of personal tragedy into tourist spectacles.

Data Collection Methods

(i) Ethnographic Observation

Conducted at all three sites to document visitor behaviour, interactions, and engagement with interpretive materials.

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Focus areas included how visitors navigate the space, the types of narratives encountered, and whether these narratives align with or diverge from the site's historical and cultural significance.

(ii) *Semi-Structured Interviews*

Conducted with local community members, site guides, curators, and visitors.

Questions focused on:

Inclusion of local voices in site narratives.

Balance between commodification and commemoration.

Authenticity and historical accuracy in visitor experiences.

(iii) *Narrative Analysis*

Analysed tourism materials (brochures, websites) to assess:

How dominant narratives are constructed.

Which perspectives are included or excluded.

Whether sites prioritise commodification over cultural preservation.

Analytical Framework

This study applies key conceptual tools to analyse how dark tourism sites construct and present narratives of death, memory, and violence.

(i) *Commodification vs. Commemoration*

Examines how each site balances commercial appeal and historical remembrance.

Aligns with social constructivist view that memory is shaped by economic and institutional forces.

(ii) *Selective Memory*

Investigates which historical narratives are prioritised and which are excluded.

Explains how dominant historical narratives are constructed and reinforced.

(iii) *Place and Memory*

Analyses how the physical and symbolic features of each site contribute to collective understandings of history, trauma, and culture.

(iv) *Local Inclusion*

Assesses whether local voices and perspectives are included in the site's interpretation, storytelling, and management.

(v) *Educational Potential*

Evaluates whether sites foster critical reflection and learning, considering historical accuracy, visitor engagement, and interactive exhibits.

Table 2. Methodology Summary

<i>Component</i>	<i>Description</i>
<i>Research Design</i>	Qualitative research design integrating ethnographic observation, narrative analysis, and semi-structured interviews.
<i>Case Study Approach</i>	In-depth exploration of three underrepresented dark tourism sites, analysing their spatial, historical, and cultural narratives.
<i>Mitla: A Gateway to the Afterlife</i>	Fieldwork: August 2024. Data Collection: 8 interviews with local guides, community members, and visitors; ethnographic observation and tourism material analysis. Conceptual Lens: Place and Memory (Light, 2017).
<i>Tlatelolco Memorial: Commemorating Political Violence</i>	Fieldwork: January 2025. Data Collection: 10 interviews with historians, community members, and visitors; ethnographic observation and tourism material analysis. Conceptual Lens: Selective Memory (Connerton, 1989).
<i>The House of Laments: Narratives of Grief, Crime, and the Supernatural</i>	Fieldwork: August 2024. Data Collection: 6 interviews with tour guides, curators, and visitors; ethnographic observation and marketing material analysis. Conceptual Lens: Commodification vs. Commemoration (Lennon & Foley, 2000).
<i>Ethnographic Observation</i>	Recorded visitor behaviour, engagement with narratives, and how they interacted with interpretive materials at each site.
<i>Semi-Structured Interviews</i>	Explored inclusion of local voices, balance between commodification and commemoration, and visitor perspectives on authenticity.
<i>Narrative Analysis</i>	Examined tourism materials (brochures, websites) to assess dominant narratives and perspectives included or excluded.

Analytical Framework

Used conceptual tools to analyse dark tourism narratives: Commodification vs. Commemoration, Selective Memory, Place and Memory, Local Inclusion, Educational Potential.

FINDINGS

This section presents the findings from the case studies. The data reveals the complexities of representation, commodification, and the exclusion of local voices in Mexico's dark tourism sites. Participant quotes are included to illustrate the themes identified in the analysis.

Findings from Mitla: A Gateway Misrepresented

Mitla, renowned as a spiritual site in Zapotec cosmology, is often marketed as an architectural attraction, neglecting its symbolic connection to the afterlife. Observations revealed that most visitors were drawn to the mosaics and structures but lacked an understanding of their cultural significance.

One visitor remarked: *"The guides talked a lot about how the stones fit perfectly, but I wanted to know more about what this place meant to the people who built it."* (Participant 3, August 4, 2024)

Interviews with local guides highlighted frustrations with the tourism narrative. A guide stated: *"We are told to focus on what tourists want to hear—about how old the site is or how unique the architecture is. But this place is about the connection between life and death, something our ancestors understood deeply."* (Participant 5, August 4, 2024).

Key findings include:

A disconnect between the cultural and spiritual essence of Mitla and its tourism-focused portrayal.

The absence of indigenous perspectives in interpretive materials, limiting visitors' ability to understand the deeper significance of the site.

Guides feeling constrained by expectations to prioritise commercial narratives over cultural authenticity.

Findings from the Tlatelolco Memorial: Silence in Commemoration

The Tlatelolco Memorial occupies a politically charged space in Mexican history, commemorating the 1968 student massacre. Observations showed that the site attracts both international and domestic tourists, yet it remains underexplored in broader tourism narratives. Many visitors approached the site with reverence, though a lack of detailed interpretive signage limited their engagement.

One local visitor noted:

"This is a place of pain and resistance, but there's not enough here to explain what really happened or why it's important today." (Participant 20, January 12, 2025)

Interviews with activists and historians revealed that the omission of survivor voices undermines the potential of the site as a space for political reflection.

A historian commented:

The stories of those who survived and fought for justice are rarely shared. Instead, the focus is on the numbers—how many died, how many protested—but not the human experience." (Participant 24, January 12, 2025).

Key findings include:

Limited interpretive resources at the site, leaving visitors to rely on external knowledge.

Survivor narratives and activist contributions are marginalised in the memorial's representation.

A need for collaborative efforts to integrate diverse voices into the site's narrative.

Findings from the House of Sorrows: Sensationalism Over Substance

The House of Sorrows presents artifacts and narratives surrounding crime, grief, and paranormal tourism. Observations indicated that the reliance of the museum on sensationalised storytelling and supernatural elements captivated visitors but often overshadowed the historical and psychological aspects of the site's past. Many visitors focused on the ghost stories and recreated crime scenes rather than engaging with the deeper implications of mourning, trauma, and justice.

One visitor remarked:

"It's fascinating to hear about the serial killer and his rituals, but I'd like to know more about the actual history behind these events." (Participant 9, August 23, 2024)

Museum staff acknowledged the challenge of balancing entertainment with historical depth. One guide explained:

"People come for the ghost stories, but we try to incorporate the real history—though it's hard to keep their attention when they expect a haunted house experience." (Participant 12, August 23, 2024).

Key Findings:

A heavy emphasis on sensationalism, particularly horror stories, reduces the potential for historical reflection.

Visitor engagement is primarily driven by curiosity about the paranormal, with limited focus on the historical and psychological impact of crime and mourning.

Staff recognise the need for a more balanced narrative but are constrained by commercial pressures and visitor expectations of a supernatural experience.

Common Themes Across the Sites

Several recurring themes emerged from the analysis of the three case studies, highlighting systemic issues in the representation and experience of dark tourism in Mexico:

(i) *Exclusion of Local Voices:*

Across all sites, the narratives presented to visitors often excluded the perspectives of those most closely connected to the history and culture of the locations. For instance, Mitla's interpretive materials lacked input from indigenous communities, and the Tlatelolco Memorial rarely featured survivor testimonies. Similarly, the House of Sorrows framed its history through horror stories and the supernatural, rather than exploring the broader social and psychological impacts of crime, grief, and violence.

(ii) *Commodification Over Commemoration:*

The drive to attract tourists often led to the prioritisation of marketable narratives, as seen in Mitla's emphasis on architectural aesthetics over indigenous interpretations and the focus of the House of Sorrow on hauntings and paranormal storytelling rather than the historical context of the crimes associated with the site.

(iii) *Limited Educational Engagement:*

While these sites have significant potential to foster critical engagement with history and culture, this potential was often unrealised due to inadequate interpretive resources and an overemphasis on entertainment-driven experiences. The House of Sorrows, for example, relies on horror-driven narratives, with limited discussion on the ethics of memorialising violent pasts.

Participant Insights on Improving Representation

Participants across the sites offered insights into how dark tourism practices could be improved. A local guide at Mitla suggested: *"If we had more control over what is shared, we could bring the stories of our ancestors to life. Tourists are curious—they would appreciate knowing the deeper meanings."* (Participant 1, August 4, 2024).

Similarly, an international tourist at the Tlatelolco Memorial spoke of the need for inclusivity:

"The voices of survivors and their families should be central. This isn't just history—it's a continuing struggle for justice in Mexico." (Participant 21, January 13, 2025).

A tour guide at the House of Sorrows reflected on the challenge of balancing history with entertainment:

"Visitors want the thrill of a haunted house, but we could do more to help them understand the real story behind the place." (Participant 10, August 23, 2024).

DISCUSSION

(i) *Commodification vs. Commemoration*

The balance between commodification and commemoration, as discussed by Lennon & Foley (2000), was evident across all three case studies. In the case of Mitla, its representation as an architectural attraction emphasises marketable narratives over its spiritual and cultural significance.

Similarly, the House of Sorrows frames its history through sensationalised horror stories and paranormal tourism, drawing visitors for entertainment rather than historical engagement.

The Tlatelolco Memorial, while less overtly commodified, highlights the challenges of balancing accessibility with its role as a space of political resistance and mourning. The limited interpretive resources at the site reduce its potential to engage visitors meaningfully, reflecting Connerton's (1989) discussion of selective memory, where dominant narratives give preference to certain aspects of history while neglecting others.

These findings draw attention to the importance of reimagining dark tourism sites as spaces that focus upon commemoration over commodification. Incorporating local perspectives and emphasising the cultural and historical significance of these sites can help achieve this balance.

(ii) *Place and Memory*

The focus of Place and Memory provides a useful framework for understanding how physical spaces shape collective narratives. At Mitla, the lack of indigenous voices in the site's interpretive materials limits visitors' understanding of its role as a gateway to the afterlife in Zapotec cosmology. This omission not only diminishes the cultural authenticity of the site but also perpetuates a narrow, market-driven narrative that stresses visual appeal over spiritual significance.

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The Tlatelolco Memorial exemplifies the contested nature of memory in dark tourism. While the site commemorates the 1968 student massacre, its failure to incorporate survivor testimonies and activist narratives reduces its potential as a space of political reflection. This aligns with Connerton's (1989) dialogue on selective memory, where political and economic agendas shape historical representations.

Meanwhile, the House of Sorrows reflects similar tensions between place and memory. While the site's storytelling focuses upon paranormal experiences and crime scene reenactments, it fails to contextualise the broader social and psychological implications of crime, grief, and justice. This exaggerated representation reduces its potential as a site for historical reflection on violence and trauma.

(iii) *Exclusion of Local Voices*

The exclusion of local voices emerged as a recurring theme across all three case studies, drawing attention to systemic issues in the representation of dark tourism sites. This exclusion undermines authenticity and limits the potential of these sites as platforms for cultural preservation and education.

At Mitla, the absence of indigenous perspectives in interpretive materials reflects broader trends in the commodification of cultural heritage. Local guides expressed frustration with the pressure to conform to market-driven narratives, which give priority to what tourists expect rather than what the site represents. This aligns with the concept of local inclusion, which advocates for collaborative tourism approaches that respect the perspectives of those most connected to these sites.

The Tlatelolco Memorial also highlights the marginalisation of local voices, particularly those of survivors and activists. The lack of representation for these groups in the memorial's narrative reduces its potential to foster critical engagement with Mexico's political history.

Similarly, at the House of Sorrows, the reliance on supernatural elements overshadows local historical narratives about crime, trauma, and mourning in Guanajuato. This missed opportunity reflects a wider trend in dark tourism where popular appeal often takes precedence over the perspectives of those directly connected to the site's past.

(iv) *Educational Potential*

Stone's (2006) dark tourism spectrum highlights the need to balance entertainment with education, a balance that was largely missing across all three case studies. Although these sites have significant educational potential, their current narratives prioritise entertainment and marketability over deeper critical engagement.

At the House of Sorrows, for example, the focus on the deeds of Tadeo Mejía and its connection with the supernatural detracts from the ability of the site to educate visitors about real historical events, such as crime, violence, and psychological trauma. Similarly, the lack of interpretive resources at the Tlatelolco Memorial limits its effectiveness as a site of political education. Mitla, while rich in cultural and spiritual significance, suffers from a narrative that puts first its architectural appeal over its role in Zapotec cosmology.

(v) *The Role of Selective Memory*

Selective memory is particularly relevant in analysing how certain narratives are amplified while others are diminished. At Mitla, the focus on architectural features reflects a selective memory that gives preference to visual appeal over cultural significance.

The Tlatelolco Memorial exemplifies how selective memory operates in political history. The emphasis on casualty numbers and the massacre's timeline, while crucial, tends to overshadow the lived experiences and ongoing struggles of survivors and activists. This exclusion reduces the potential of the memorial as a space for critical engagement and political reflection.

At the House of Sorrows, selective memory manifests in the preponderance of horror narratives over historical accuracy. The dominant focus on supernatural elements reduces opportunities to explore deeper discussions on crime, justice, and trauma. This finding accentuates the need for more inclusive narratives that reflect the diversity of perspectives associated with these sites.

Table 3. Summary of discussion

<i>Key Theme</i>	<i>Findings</i>	<i>Implications</i>
<i>Commodification vs. Commemoration</i>	Dark tourism sites give priority to marketable narratives over historical significance. Mitla emphasises architectural aesthetics over spiritual meaning, while the House of Sorrows focuses on sensationalised horror stories. The Tlatelolco Memorial struggles with accessibility while maintaining its role as a site of resistance.	Incorporating local perspectives and historical context can balance commodification and commemoration, making these sites more reflective and meaningful.
<i>Place and Memory</i>	Physical spaces shape collective memory. Mitla lacks indigenous perspectives, reducing its authenticity. The Tlatelolco Memorial fails to integrate survivor testimonies, limiting its role in political reflection. The House of Sorrows	Integrating broader narratives can provide a more inclusive representation of memory and identity, ensuring that

<i>Exclusion of Local Voices</i>	prioritises paranormal storytelling over historical discussions on crime and grief. Across all sites, local voices are excluded. Mitla marginalizes indigenous perspectives due to market-driven narratives. The Tlatelolco Memorial lacks representation of survivors and activists. The House of Sorrows' reliance on horror stories overshadows historical narratives about crime and mourning.	historical sites reflect diverse perspectives. Greater inclusion of local voices can enhance authenticity, improve cultural preservation, and provide richer educational experiences for visitors.
<i>Educational Potential</i>	Educational engagement is often overlooked in favour of entertainment. The House of Sorrows gives priority to paranormal elements over historical analysis. The Tlatelolco Memorial lacks interpretive resources for deeper political reflection. Mitla's cultural significance is overshadowed by its architectural appeal.	Introducing guided tours, interpretive materials, and collaboration with experts can enhance educational potential and foster deeper visitor engagement.
<i>Selective Memory</i>	Historical narratives are shaped by dominant forces. Mitla's focus on architecture sidelines its Zapotec spiritual role. The Tlatelolco Memorial emphasises casualty figures while minimising survivor experiences. The House of Sorrows amplifies horror narratives, reducing discussions on justice and trauma.	A more balanced approach to memory representation can challenge selective memory, ensuring historical narratives acknowledge diverse perspectives and lived experiences.

CONCLUSION

Addressing the Research Question and Objectives

This study set out to answer the research question: How can dark tourism in Mexico evolve to provide a broader and more inclusive representation of the nation's cultural and historical relationship with death, addressing the exclusion of local voices and the dominance of commodified narratives? The findings, grounded in the conceptual tools, demonstrate that the current practices in these particular Mexican dark tourism locations give emphasis to commodification over authenticity, marginalise local perspectives, and fail to fully leverage the educational potential of these sites.

The study found that underrepresented dark tourism sites like Mitla and the Tlatelolco Memorial are often misrepresented in tourism narratives, overlooking important cultural and historical dimensions. Similarly, the House of Sorrows gives preference to sensationalism over meaningful historical engagement. The findings show that commodification shapes these representations, often preferring marketable narratives over commemoration. By examining indigenous and local perspectives, the research stressed the need for more inclusive narratives to ensure that dark tourism serves as a platform for cultural preservation and education. To address these challenges, the study proposed strategies for inclusivity, advocating for the integration of local voices and the development of interpretive resources that foster critical engagement while maintaining authenticity within the tourism market.

Limitations of the Research

Several limitations of the study must be acknowledged:

- (i) **Case Study Selection:** The research focused on three specific sites, which, while significant, do not encompass the full diversity of dark tourism in Mexico. Future studies could expand the scope to include additional locations and regions.
- (ii) **Stakeholder Perspectives:** Although the research included interviews with local guides, visitors, and curators, it was not always possible to access the full range of stakeholders, such as policymakers or broader community groups, which could have enriched the analysis.
- (iii) **Visitor Focus:** The study primarily examined the representation and experience of dark tourism sites from the perspective of visitors and site representatives, potentially overlooking the broader socio-political contexts that influence these narratives.
- (iv) **Temporal Constraints:** The research was conducted within a limited timeframe, which restricted the depth of ethnographic observations, and the number of interviews conducted.

Suggestions for Future Research

To build on the findings of this study, future research could explore the following areas:

- (i) **Comparative Analysis of Dark Tourism Sites:** A broader comparative analysis across different regions of Mexico and other countries could shed light on common challenges and innovative practices in dark tourism representation.
- (ii) **Impact of Local Inclusion:** Further research could investigate the long-term impacts of integrating local voices and perspectives into dark tourism narratives, focusing on both visitor experience and community benefits.

- (iii) Ethical Practices in Dark Tourism: Expanding on the ethical implications of dark tourism, research could propose frameworks for balancing educational, commemorative, and commercial objectives.

Final Thoughts

This study contributes to the body of literature on dark tourism by addressing critical gaps in the representation and commodification of Mexican dark tourism sites. By emphasising the exclusion of local voices and the dominance of commodified narratives, it highlights the need for more inclusive, reflective, and ethical approaches to tourism development.

The findings underscore the transformative potential of dark tourism when approached as a platform for cultural preservation, education, and critical engagement. Ultimately, the study advocates for a reimagining of dark tourism in Mexico, where sites like Mitla, the Tlatelolco Memorial, and the House of Sorrows serve not only as attractions but also as spaces for honouring history, amplifying marginalised voices, and fostering deeper connections between visitors and the cultural narratives they encounter.

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