

Dark Tourism in Bulgaria - A Conceptual Guidebook

Dr. Vladimir Karadzhov

Chief Assistant Professor, PhD (Economic and Social Geography)

Department of Geography, Ecology and Environmental Protection

Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences, South-West University "Neofit Rilski" – Blagoevgrad

E-mail: karadzhov@swu.bg ORCID: 0000-0002-7514-5517

<https://doi.org/10.63711/ijdr.net20250102>

ABSTRACT

This article explores the phenomenon of dark tourism in Bulgaria, a niche tourism sector that focuses on sites associated with tragedy, death, and the macabre. The author proposes a general classification of dark tourism sites, offering a framework to understand this unique form of tourism. The study further introduces the first exemplar guide to dark tourism in Bulgaria, presenting a comprehensive list of site based on the author's extensive research. These include locations tied to Bulgaria's turbulent history, such as abandoned Communist-era structures, post-war labor camps, and sites of cultural mythology. Visualizations of key destinations enhance the analysis, showcasing their significance and potential for tourism development. A detailed literature review situates Bulgaria's dark tourism potential within global and regional contexts, identifying gaps and opportunities for sustainable growth. This study aims to stimulate further research and establish Bulgaria as a notable destination for dark tourism enthusiasts.

Keywords: Dark tourism, Thanatourism, Disaster, Cultural Heritage, Guidebook

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has always been about exploring the unknown, whether it be distant cultures, breathtaking landscapes, or historical landmarks. However, in recent years, a growing trend has emerged that draws travelers to places connected with tragedy, mystery, and the macabre. This phenomenon, known as dark tourism, caters to a curiosity for the unconventional and the deeply human stories tied to these sites. It offers a unique opportunity to reflect on history, human resilience, and sometimes, the darker aspects of society.

What is Dark Tourism?

Dark tourism refers to the practice of visiting places associated with death, tragedy, or the macabre. This form of tourism attracts people who are intrigued by the history, mystery, and emotional resonance of such locations. Popular examples globally include cemeteries, former concentration camps, sites of historical disasters, abandoned military bases, and locations tied to famous crimes or tragedies. The phenomenon is growing in popularity as tourists seek unique and unconventional experiences that go beyond traditional sightseeing.

Dark tourism consumers are often driven by a desire for adrenaline and strong emotions, particularly feelings of horror, fear, and excitement. These individuals possess a strong sense of curiosity and an adventurous spirit, often seeking to test their own limits. They are drawn to the unknown and the unconventional, looking for experiences that challenge their perspectives and leave a lasting impression.

Dark Tourism in Bulgaria

Bulgaria offers a rich variety of locations that could appeal to dark tourism enthusiasts. The country's turbulent history, spanning ancient times, the Ottoman period, and the Communist regime, has left behind

numerous sites with dark or mysterious associations. Some of these include the haunting Buzludzha Monument, the remnants of the Belene concentration camp, and abandoned military structures scattered across the country. Additionally, Bulgaria's natural landscape hosts eerie caves, underground tunnels, and abandoned industrial sites that further enrich its potential for dark tourism.

Aim and Tasks of the Article

The primary aim of this article is to explore the potential for dark tourism in Bulgaria by identifying and presenting notable sites that fit within this niche. Specific tasks include:

- Conducting a review of existing possibilities for dark tourism in Bulgaria.
- Identifying and describing significant locations that could attract tourists interested in dark tourism.
- Proposing the creation of a map highlighting dark tourism sites in Bulgaria.

This article aims to serve as a starting point for further research and to provide insights into how Bulgaria can capitalize on its untapped dark tourism potential.

Dark tourism not only offers unique and unconventional travel experiences but also provides an opportunity to reflect on history, human behavior, and the resilience of societies. By exploring Bulgaria's potential in this niche, tour operators can uncover new ways to attract adventurous travelers while preserving and promoting the stories tied to these hauntingly fascinating locations. This article sets the stage for understanding and developing dark tourism as a meaningful and sustainable part of Bulgaria's tourism landscape.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

The research methodology for this study combines qualitative and quantitative approaches to ensure a comprehensive understanding of dark tourism in Bulgaria. The methods employed are described below:

Data Selection and Analysis

The process of data selection was fundamental to identifying objects of interest that align with the concept of dark tourism. This step involved reviewing academic literature, historical documents, and existing studies on dark tourism to understand global and local trends. Potential dark tourism sites were identified through field research, media reports, and local accounts. Selection criteria, such as historical significance, emotional resonance, or association with tragedy, were applied to ensure the relevance of each site. This careful selection forms the foundation of the study, ensuring that the included sites genuinely reflect the diversity and richness of Bulgaria's dark tourism potential.

The collected data underwent thorough analysis to extract meaningful insights and patterns. Sites were grouped into categories based on shared characteristics, such as type (e.g., post-Communist structures, cemeteries, or natural landmarks) and thematic connections (e.g., mythology, political history, or disaster sites). The historical and cultural value of each site was assessed to understand its potential appeal to dark tourism audiences. Additionally, gaps in existing literature were identified, and lesser-known sites were explored to enrich the study's scope. The analysis not only highlighted the diversity of dark tourism in Bulgaria but also revealed untapped opportunities for development and promotion.

Data Visualization

To enhance understanding and accessibility, the research findings were visualized through a variety of mediums. Graphs and charts were created to present the General Classification of Dark Tourism Sites (Fig. 1), offering a clear overview of the categories and subcategories of sites. Photographs and illustrations were included to showcase key sites, emphasizing their unique features and potential appeal to tourists.

Maps were developed to highlight the geographical distribution of dark tourism sites, helping readers and potential tourists plan their visits. This visual approach not only aids comprehension but also engages readers by providing a vivid representation of Bulgaria's dark tourism landscape.

Conceptualization

The final stage of the methodology involved conceptualizing a Dark Tourism Guide for Bulgaria, which is visually represented in Figure 2. The guide showcases an exemplar list of dark tourism sites across the country, categorized by type and significance. It serves as a resource for potential tourists, researchers, and tourism stakeholders, offering a practical starting point for exploring Bulgaria's dark tourism potential. By combining conceptualization with practical insights, the guide bridges the gap between academic research and real-world application, positioning Bulgaria as a compelling destination for dark tourism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Dark tourism, as a niche sector within the broader tourism industry, has garnered significant academic and public interest over the past three decades. Defined by its focus on sites associated with death, tragedy, and the macabre, this phenomenon reflects a deep human curiosity about mortality and history. This section reviews key literature on dark tourism, addressing its definitions, typologies, psychological dimensions, and global trends. Furthermore, it highlights the potential for developing dark tourism in Bulgaria, a country rich in history and cultural heritage, while identifying opportunities for innovation and challenges in sustainable development.

Dark Tourism: Definition and Scope

Dark tourism, also known as thanatourism, refers to visiting sites associated with death, tragedy, or suffering. The term gained prominence with Foley and Lennon (2000), who highlighted the commercialization of death through tourism, linking it to modern media and collective memory. Stone (2006) expanded on this concept by introducing the "dark tourism spectrum," which categorizes sites by the degree of darkness, from lighter, entertainment-focused attractions to somber, educational locations. This phenomenon encompasses a wide range of sites, such as historical atrocity locations (e.g., Auschwitz), disaster zones (e.g., Chernobyl), and mythical or paranormal sites (e.g., Dracula's Castle) (Sharpley & Stone, 2009; Wight & Lennon, 2007). Hartmann (2014) argues that managing such sites often involves navigating ethical dilemmas, particularly regarding commodification and respect for affected communities.

Psychological Motivations and Emotional Engagement

Visitor motivations in dark tourism are diverse, often blending curiosity, education, and reflection. Sharpley and Stone (2009) emphasize that dark tourism enables individuals to confront mortality and explore collective memories. Dunkley, Morgan, and Westwood (2011) explored battlefield tourism, finding that motivations range from a desire to honor the past to an emotional connection with personal heritage. Cohen (2011) examined dark tourism as an educational tool, particularly at Holocaust memorials, where visitors often experience empathy and grief. Stone (2006) highlighted how emotional engagement contributes to transformative experiences, a perspective supported by Wight and Lennon (2007), who argue that the interplay between sensationalism and commemoration is a defining feature of dark tourism.

Global Trends in Dark Tourism Research

Research on dark tourism has grown significantly in recent decades, with Mora Forero, Nieto Mejia, and León-Gómez (2023) identifying a surge in publications exploring themes such as visitor motivations, site management, and ethical considerations. Hamidah and Hakim (2023) conducted a

systematic review using the PRISMA framework, highlighting the importance of expanding research beyond Western contexts to include underrepresented regions like Eastern Europe.

Assylkhanova et al. (2024) noted that dark tourism often intersects with postcolonial narratives, particularly in former colonies and regions affected by historical atrocities. The integration of technology, such as virtual and augmented reality, has been identified as a key opportunity to enhance accessibility and engagement (Light, 2017; Mora Forero et al., 2023).

Dark Tourism in Bulgaria

Bulgaria's rich and complex history offers a wealth of opportunities for dark tourism, yet these remain largely underdeveloped. Sites like the Buzludzha Monument and the Belene Labor Camp illustrate the country's Communist past, while natural and mythical locations such as Devil's Throat Cave and Perperikon showcase its cultural and folkloric heritage (Miles, 2002; Hartmann, 2014).

Key Sites

- **Buzludzha Monument:** This iconic structure symbolizes the rise and fall of Communism in Bulgaria, offering a compelling narrative for visitors (Sharpley & Stone, 2009).
- **Devil's Throat Cave:** Steeped in mythology, this site connects visitors with legends of Orpheus and the underworld (Dunkley et al., 2011).
- **Belene Labor Camp:** A poignant reminder of political oppression, providing opportunities for education and reflection (Foley & Lennon, 2000).
- **Perperikon:** Known for its connections to vampire folklore, this site appeals to both history enthusiasts and myth hunters (Stone, 2006).

Challenges and Opportunities

While dark tourism has significant potential in Bulgaria, challenges such as insufficient marketing and a lack of thematic narratives hinder its development. Mora Forero et al. (2023) suggest integrating digital tools and immersive storytelling to boost engagement, a sentiment echoed by Light (2017), who highlights the role of technology in making dark tourism accessible. Hartmann (2014) emphasizes the importance of ethical site management to balance commercialization with respect for historical narratives. Dunkley, Morgan, and Westwood (2011) also note the need for careful interpretation to ensure that sites serve as spaces for education rather than mere entertainment.

Future Directions. Dark tourism offers unique opportunities to address contemporary challenges in tourism, including:

- **Post-Pandemic Recovery:** Assylkhanova et al. (2024) identify dark tourism as a resilient niche capable of revitalizing the tourism sector.
- **Sustainability:** Pernecky and Jamal (2010) highlight the importance of integrating dark tourism into broader cultural and ecological frameworks.
- **Technological Integration:** Virtual tours and augmented reality can make sites more accessible while preserving their historical integrity (Light, 2017; Cohen, 2011).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of Bulgaria's potential as a dark tourism destination. By combining field research, literature review, and data visualization, this section presents the proposed General Classification of Dark Tourism Sites (Figure 1) and the Conceptual Dark

Tourism Guide for Bulgaria (Figure 2). The discussion integrates visual evidence, such as maps and images, to highlight specific locations and categories of dark tourism sites. These findings not only underscore the diversity of Bulgaria's dark tourism assets but also address opportunities and challenges in developing this niche within the country's tourism industry.

Figure 1 presents in detail the author's division of dark tourism as a tourism industry into sub-industries, their interrelationships and hierarchical sequence. This is a first attempt at a conceptual division of dark tourism into sub-industries and as such it will be developed and supplemented in the future, both by the author's research and by other authors investigating this topic.

General Classification of Dark Tourism Sites

The **General Classification of Dark Tourism Sites (Figure 1)** provides a holistic framework for organizing the diverse range of locations that fall under the definition of dark tourism. This classification reflects the multi-dimensional nature of dark tourism and showcases the historical, cultural, and environmental aspects that contribute to the appeal of these sites.

Below, each category and subcategory is explored in greater detail, with specific examples from Bulgaria and the broader dark tourism context.

- **Hazardous for Life**

This category encompasses sites that are dangerous due to natural or human-made conditions. These places attract visitors seeking adrenaline and the thrill of confronting danger.

- **Prisons, Camps, and Political Sites**

This category focuses on locations associated with political oppression, incarceration, and social injustice. These locations encapsulate significant historical narratives and provide opportunities for visitors to reflect on human rights and societal resilience.

- **Mythical and Folklore Sites**

Myth and folklore play a significant role in shaping dark tourism experiences, combining cultural heritage with the thrill of the supernatural.

- **Architectural Sites**

Architectural remnants from different historical periods reflect the social, economic, and political shifts in Bulgarian history. These sites combine historical narratives with physical exploration, making them attractive to adventurers and history enthusiasts.

- **Disaster Sites**

Disaster sites highlight the impact of natural and human-made calamities on communities and the environment. These locations serve as educational platforms for understanding disaster preparedness and environmental resilience.

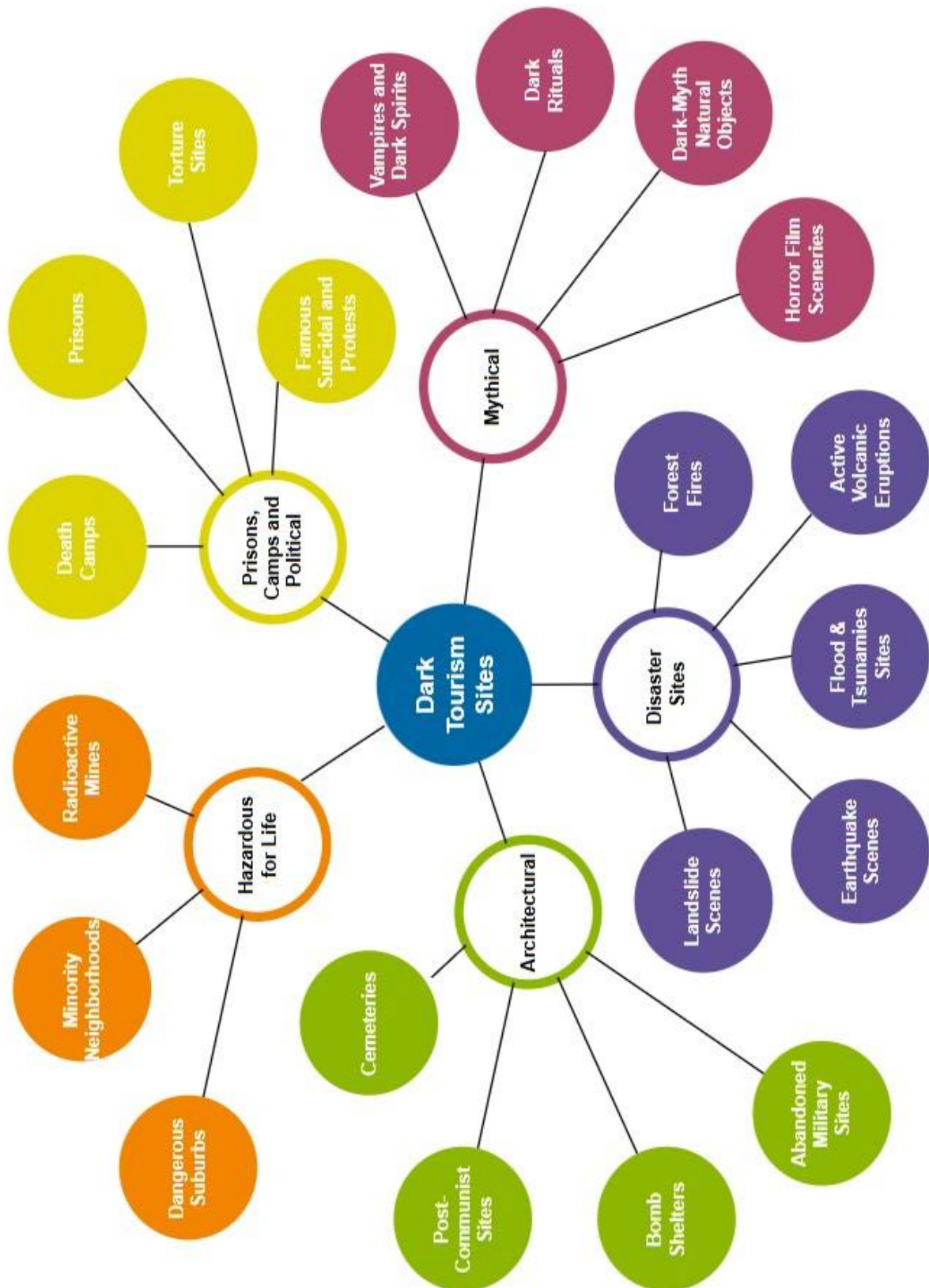


Fig. 1. General Classification of Dark Tourism Sites. Source: *The Author*

Exemplar Dark Tourism Sites in Bulgaria				
Architectural	Mythical	Hazardous	Prisons, Camps and Political	Disaster Sites
Buzludzha Communist Memorial	Film sceneries of "Devil's Throat" – The Devil's Throat Cave, Rhodope mountains and villages, Veliko Tarnovo, Arbanasi	Roma suburbs – "Fakulteta" and "Filipovtsi" in Sofia, "Stolipinovo" – in Plovdiv, "Komluka" in Sliven	Belene Labor Camp (associated with political prisoners)	Kozhuhva volcano with the memorial of the airplane crash of 1955
Sofia underground tunnels	The Devil's Throat Cave and the myth of Orpheus	Closed uranium ore mines in Southern Bulgaria, for ex. near Eleshnitsa village	Lovech Camp	Strazhitsa town and the earthquake of 1988
Abandoned military bunkers	Vampire's grave in Sozopol	Meden Rudnik Suburb in Burgas	The remains and memorials of tens of communist labour- foreigner- political- and other camps all over Bulgaria	Tsarevo and the flood of 2023
Secret nuclear bunkers	Tsarichina excavations – seeking alien contact	Roma suburbs in all major cities in Bulgaria	Prisons that allow visits	Major floods in recent years in Teteven, Miziya, Asparuhovo and Biser
Post-communist architecture in towns like Pernik, Radomir and Dimitrograd	Klyuch village and the UFO meetings	Refugee camp in the town of Harmanli, District of Haskovo	Stara Zagora Prison Museum	Landslides in Varna
Shahtyor building in Pernik		Refugee camp in Ovcha kupel quarter in Sofia,		Forest fires - Approximately 600 each year devastating about 10 000 hectares of land. (Source BTV)

Fig. 2. Conceptual Dark Tourism Guide for Bulgaria. Source: *The Author*

CONCEPTUAL DARK TOURISM GUIDE FOR BULGARIA

This part of the study presents the first attempt to create a conceptual guide to dark tourism in Bulgaria.

The Conceptual Dark Tourism Guide for Bulgaria (Figure 2) offers an in-depth overview of Bulgaria's most notable dark tourism sites, categorized into five thematic groups: Architectural, Mythical, Hazardous, Prisons, Camps, and Political, and Disaster Sites.

This guide serves as a practical tool for tourists, researchers, and stakeholders to explore and develop Bulgaria's untapped potential in this niche.

Architectural Sites for Dark Tourism in Bulgaria

Architectural dark tourism sites in Bulgaria reflect the country's complex socio-political history and post-industrial transformations. Key locations include:

- **Cemeteries:** Cemeteries provide a direct connection to history, culture, and mortality. They serve as spaces for remembrance and reflection: Bulgaria has numerous cemeteries of historical significance, including war memorial sites and culturally significant burial grounds. Cemeteries also act as artistic and historical archives, showcasing unique architectural styles and inscriptions.
- **Abandoned Military Bunkers:** Scattered across the country, these bunkers provide a chilling reminder of Bulgaria's strategic role during the Cold War.



Fig. 3. The Abandoned Monument House of the Bulgarian Communist Party. Source: Nikola Mihov, from the series *Forget Your Past*, 2008 – 2012

- **Secret Nuclear Bunkers:** These highly secretive locations, revealed only in recent years, highlight the country's preparations during the nuclear arms race (Figure 5).



Fig. 4. Sofia underground tunnels. Another forgotten city. Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

- **Buzludzha Communist Memorial:** An abandoned relic of Communist-era ideology, this monument has become a symbol of decay and the fleeting nature of political power (Figure 3).
- **Sofia Underground Tunnels:** A hidden network of tunnels beneath the capital city, once used for defense and secrecy, offering visitors a glimpse into Bulgaria's Cold War history (Figure 4).



Fig. 5. The secret nuclear bunkers in Bulgaria. Source: YouTube, Abandoned Crew Channel

- **Post-Communist Architecture in Towns like Pernik, Radomir, and Dimitrovgrad:** These industrial towns showcase a unique blend of urban planning influenced by Communist ideology.
- **Shahtyor Building in Pernik:** A decaying structure tied to Bulgaria's mining history, evoking themes of economic collapse and abandonment.

These sites combine interesting and frightening facts from the country's history with a hands-on physical experience. This makes them unique and preferred by adventurers and history enthusiasts.

Mythical Sites for Dark Tourism in Bulgaria

Mythical locations in Bulgaria blend folklore with natural and cultural landmarks, offering visitors a unique, immersive experience:

- **Dark-Myth Natural Objects:** For example The Bloody Wall – a steep rock formation in Kaliakra cape, where 40 virgin girls jumped of and took their lives away, in order to not be caught by the Ottoman Turks.
- **Film Sceneries of scary or thrilling movies, for ex. “Devil’s Throat”:** Locations in the Rhodope Mountains and villages, Veliko Tarnovo, and Arbanasi serve as the backdrop for the popular series “The Devil’s Throat,” intertwining cinematic appeal with local myths.



- **Devil’s Throat Cave and the Myth of Orpheus:** This natural wonder is steeped in legends, drawing visitors intrigued by its connection to the underworld.

- **Vampire’s Grave in Sozopol:** The discovery of a medieval “vampire” burial sparked global fascination, placing Sozopol on the map of dark tourism enthusiasts (Figure 6).

- **Tsarichina Excavations:** Known for speculative tales of alien contact, this site captivates visitors with its blend of mystery and conspiracy theories.

- **Klyuch Village and UFO Meetings:** Rumored sightings and local lore about extraterrestrial encounters add an otherworldly dimension to dark tourism in Bulgaria.

These sites combine terrifying myths and legends with universal human and philosophical values that are timeless. This connection between past and present, seen through the eyes of terrifying events from the past, makes them great sites for dark tourism.

Fig. 6. The vampire grave in Sozopol. Source: *Trip.Dir.bg*

Hazardous Sites for Dark Tourism in Bulgaria

Mythical locations in Bulgaria mix folklore with natural and cultural landmarks, offering visitors a unique, immersive experience:

- **Refugee camps** – For example – the refugee camp in Harmanli, district Haskovo (Figure 7). Refugee camps are dangerous places, especially for unfamiliar outside visitors. There are frequent clashes between residents, poor living conditions, and people involved in shady and illegal activities or people with dangerous pasts.
- **Roma Minority Suburbs** – In almost every town of Bulgaria there is a Roma suburb. These neighborhoods are typically dangerous places, where even police rarely enters to intervene. They better be avoided. (Fig. 8).
- **Radioactive Mines**: Uranium mines near Eleshnitsa in Bulgaria are stark reminders of the environmental and human risks associated with radioactive mining.

Visiting this type of sites is a real challenge for the average, adventurous tourist, and poses real dangers to his life and health. A good option during such visits is to use a local guide, a representative of the local community or minority, as a guide, who can serve as a mediator in possible communication or conflict situations.

In some cases, it is good for this guide to be armed, if he has the legal right to carry a weapon. In any case, any form of security and protection should be very discreet and unobtrusive, so as not to make the local inhabitants hostile towards the unknown tourist.



Fig. 7. Refugee Camp in the Town of Harmanli, District Haskovo. Source: *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*

The tourist himself should also look as everyday and ordinary as possible for the place, and not arouse suspicion, not appear to be an outsider or a typical tourist, etc.



Fig. 8. The roma suburb in the town of Troyan, district Lovech. *Source: News.bg*

Landmarks of this kind show today's generations the economic and political mistakes that people made while governing their countries in past eras. Their significance as frightening objects is complemented by the lessons they can teach future generations about avoiding mistakes.

Prisons, Camps, and Political Sites for Dark Tourism in Bulgaria

- **Death Camps:** Sites like the **Belene Labor Camp** exemplify the horrors of political imprisonment during the Communist regime (Figure 9).
- **Prisons:** Historical prisons and their museums, such as the Stara Zagora Prison Museum, provide insights into Bulgaria's penal history.
- **Torture Sites:** Locations tied to historical accounts of physical and psychological abuse under oppressive regimes.
- **Famous Suicidal and Protest Sites:** Squares or landmarks associated with political protests or tragic personal events in Bulgaria.

These type of sites serve as memorials to human vulnerability and resilience, making them exceptionally valuable sites for dark tourism visits.

These places serve as monuments to human vulnerability and resilience, making them extremely valuable places for dark tourism. Many historical lessons can be not only learned but also experienced emotionally when visiting places of this nature. These landmarks should be preserved and promoted so that they can have their impactful educational and moral effect on as large an audience as possible.

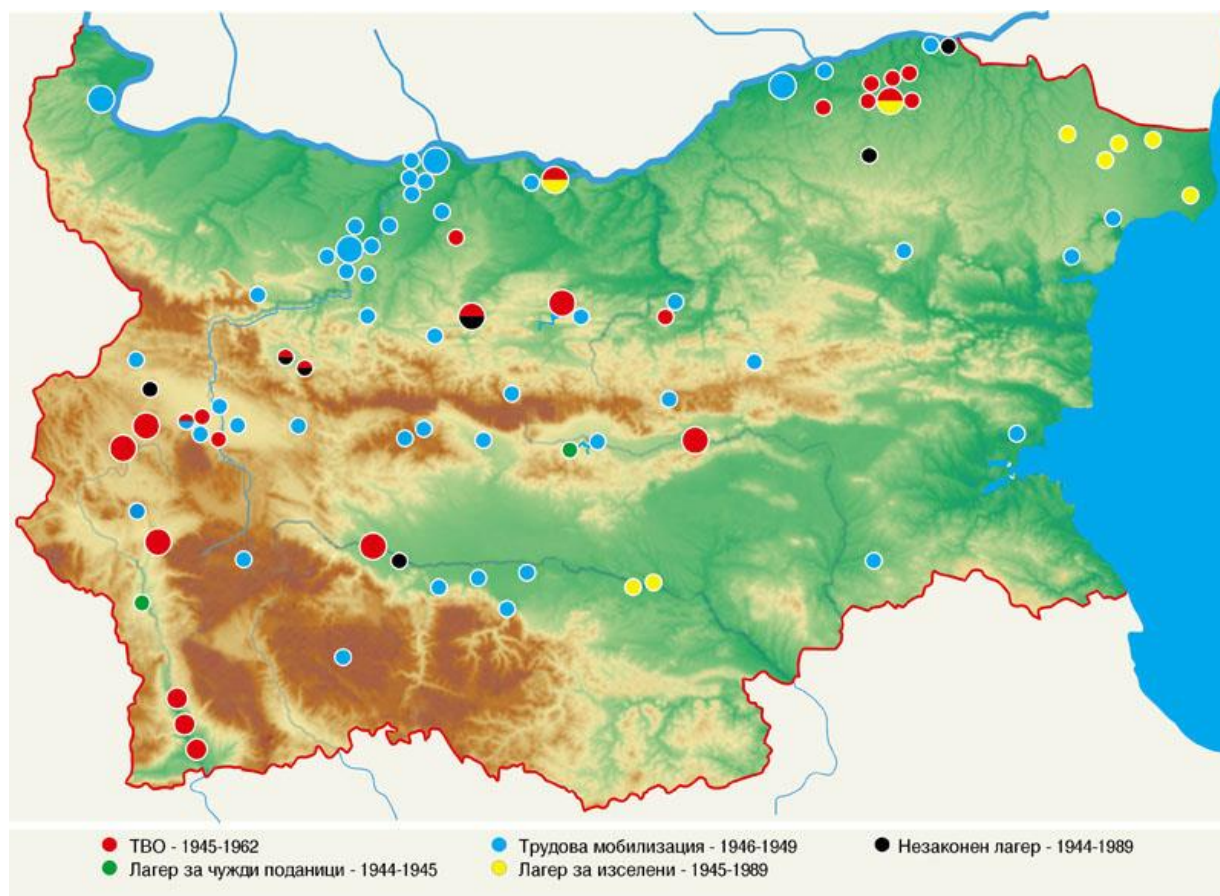


Fig. 9. A Map of the Concentration Camps in Bulgaria during the Period 1944–1989. Labor-Reformatory Dormitories (red), Labor Mobilization (blue), Illegal Camps (black), Camp for Foreign Nationals (green), Camp for Displaced Persons (yellow). Source: *Decommunization.org*

Disaster Sites for Dark Tourism in Bulgaria

Places that have experienced disasters are particularly striking to the dark tourist, due to the scale of their tragedies and the temporal proximity that makes them literally part of the everyday life of every modern person.

Although some disaster sites represent events that occurred in the distant past, such as the plane crash at the crater of the extinct volcano "Kozhuha", the majority of such sites have occurred very recently - places of forest fires, floods or explosions, such as the one on the train in the village of Hitrino.

- **Earthquake Scenes:** The aftermath of the 2012 earthquake in Pernik showcases the resilience of local communities and the devastating power of natural forces.
- **Flood Sites:** Areas affected by historical flooding, such as regions along the Iskar River, reveal the challenges of disaster management and recovery. More notable floods in the recent years in Bulgaria include the floods in the village of Biser and the town of Tsar Kaloyan.
- **Active Volcanic Eruptions:** While not directly applicable to Bulgaria, this subcategory remains relevant for dark tourism globally. In Bulgaria, there is only one volcano, which is not active for about 1 million years – "Kozhuha".

- **Memorial of the El Al Israel Airlines airplane crash** in the volcanic crater of “Kozhuha”, near the village of Rupite, Petrich municipality, district Blagoevgrad. This tragedy happened in 1955 and still attracts visitors and ancestors of the victims (Wikipedia, 2025a).
- **The site of the train explosion** in the Shumen village of Hitrino (Fig. 10), where part of a private freight train derailed, leaking propylene gas, which exploded and caught fire. Seven people died and 29 were injured. Many houses were destroyed. (Wikipedia, 2025b).



Fig. 10. The train explosion in the village of Hitrino (2016). Source: *Novini.bg*

These places are exceptionally impactful and bring emotions of sadness, despair, devastation and impasse - strong feelings that provoke users of dark tourism.

It is important to notice that disastrous dark tourism sites have their expiration dates, i.e. they are suitable for visiting only while they are devastated. Sooner or later they will be recovered, which is a good thing for the society and the local people, but they lose their meaning as a dark tourism object.

An interesting feature of these sites is that they can engage visitors not only as tourists, but also as volunteers, that are ready to help. This is especially valid for the flood or hurricane affected areas. Every year, hundreds of volunteers join efforts to help in flooded sites. Tourism industry can adapt and promote this dual form of contribution-plus-affection type of opportunities in order to achieve a double mission – people could learn valuable moral, ethical and ecological lessons and help others on the spot, while also experience dark and hard emotions of devastation and tragedy, typical for the tourists practicing dark tourism

CONCLUSION

With this first-of-its-kind in-depth review of dark tourism sites in the country, this article presented a model for Bulgaria's first dark tourism guidebook.

Its comprehensiveness is sufficient for a first step in the field of dark tourism in Bulgaria, but in the future it can and will be repeatedly expanded and updated. The sites presented in this study are among the best known to the general public, but there are countless smaller, local or forgotten similar sites.

Despite these current limitations, the goals achieved in this study will give a boost to dark tourism in several directions.

In the scientific direction, they will serve as a methodological basis for understanding this type of tourism, its shares, motivations and features.

In terms of marketing, the systematization of dark tourism sites by category and their presentation in a specific plan in this guide will facilitate the work of tour operator companies, which can more boldly start offering this type of tourist product to their clients. Thus, the industry will receive even better market conditions for growth.

And last but not least, the discussion of this new alternative type of tourism, which sites should be classified as it, which motivations drive consumer attitudes, what benefits it can have for society and the specific presentation of the sites and landmarks of dark tourism, will be a huge advertisement for this sector of the tourism industry in Bulgaria, and as a consequence - in neighboring countries and around the world. Many countries can adopt this campaign of discussing and promoting dark tourism in their markets and thus the dark tourism sector can develop even better globally.

In this way, this article marked the beginning of these processes in Bulgaria and the goals and tasks that were set at the beginning can be considered fulfilled.

In the future, new categories of dark tourism sites will appear, which will complement the first author's classification of dark tourism sites presented here. So the topic will have a future both in terms of scope and methodology.

Dark tourism in itself suggests that it will be a significant factor in the tourism industry, with its data on the tourism market. The sector is among the fastest growing in tourism. Its deep emotionality and psychological complexity give it great advantages over other types of tourism and guarantee it a trouble-free future of prosperity and growth.

All this can be of enormous benefit to humanity, especially if the lessons from the mistakes of the past are understood and remembered.

REFERENCES

- Assylkhanova, A., et al. (2024). A Critical Review of Dark Tourism Studies. *Hungarian Geographical Bulletin*, 73(4), 413–435. DOI: 10.15201/hungeobull.73.4.5
- Belene Concentration Camp: Remembering Bulgaria's Tragic Past. (2020). *Balkan Historical Review*, 8(3), 112-123.
- BTV Media Group. (2024). Bulgaria is at the top of the EU forest fire rankings for 2024. Retrieved from: <https://btvnovinite.bg/bulgaria/balgarija-e-na-chelni-mesta-v-klasacijata-po-gorski-pozhari-v-es-za-2024-g.html>
- Cohen, E. (2011). Educational dark tourism at an in populo site: The Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38(1), 193-209.
- Dark Tourism – An Overview of Motivations and Perspectives. (2017). *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 12(5), 409–420.
- Dark Tourism in Eastern Europe: Challenges and Opportunities. (2021). *Tourism Development Quarterly*, 15(2), 205-219.

- Decommunization.org. (n.d.) *Interactive Map of the Concentration Camps in Bulgaria during the Period 1944–1989*. <https://www.decommunization.org/Communism/Bulgaria/MapCamps.htm>
- Dunkley, R. A., Morgan, N., & Westwood, S. (2011). Visiting the trenches: Exploring visitor motivation at dark tourism sites. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 6(1), 37-52.
- Foley, M., & Lennon, J. (2000). *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*. London: Continuum.
- Foley, M., & Lennon, J. J. (1996). JFK and dark tourism: A fascination with assassination. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2(4), 198-211.
- Hamidah, S., & Hakim, I. N. (2023). Systematic Review of Trends in Dark Tourism Research. *Mozaik Humaniora*. DOI: 10.20473/mozaik.v23i2.42467
- Hartmann, R. (2014). Dark tourism, thanatourism, and dissonance in heritage tourism management: New directions in contemporary tourism research. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 9(2), 166-182.
- Haskovo.net. (2017). Haskovo does not allow the expansion of the refugee camp with vans. Retrieved from: <https://www.haskovo.net/news/429000/harmanli-ne-dava-razshiryavane-na-bezhanskiya-lager-s-furgoni>
- YouTube Channel “Abandoned Crew” (2024). The secrets of secret nuclear bunkers in Bulgaria. Retrieved from: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DyCb8SkuA1Q>
- Kennell, J. (2024). More Than a Feeling: Storytelling, Memory, and National Myths at Dark Events. *Event Management*. DOI: 10.3727/152599524X17067412396192
- Lennon, J. J., & Foley, M. (1999). Interpretation of the unimaginable: The US Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington, DC, and dark tourism. *Journal of Travel Research*, 38(1), 46-50.
- Light, D. (2017). Progress in dark tourism and thanatourism research: An uneasy relationship with heritage tourism. *Tourism Management*, 61, 275-301.
- Mihov, N. (2021). Buzludzha - Until Your Eyes Pop Out, *Vizh Magazine [Take a look! Magazine]*. Retrieved from: <https://vijmag.bg/en/article/buzludzha-eyes-pop>
- Miles, W. F. (2002). Auschwitz: Museum interpretation and darker tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(4), 1175-1178.
- Mora Forero, J. A., Nieto Mejia, A., & León-Gómez, A. (2023). A Bibliometric Analysis and Systematic Review of Dark Tourism: Trends, Impact, and Prospects. *Administrative Sciences*. DOI: 10.3390/admsci13110238
- News.bg (2019). The municipality in Troyan teaches gypsies to buy plots of land and build legally <https://news.bg/regions/obshtinata-v-troyan-uchi-tsigani-da-kupuvat-partseli-i-da-stroyat-zakonno.html>
- Novini.bg. (2016). A state of emergency has been declared in Hitrino. Retrieved at 02.04.2025 from: <https://novini.bg/article/2025030511572472176>
- Pernecky, T., & Jamal, T. (2010). (Hermeneutic) phenomenology in tourism studies. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 37(4), 1055-1075.
- Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. (2015). *Sofia underground. Another forgotten city*. Retrieved from: <https://www.svobodnaevropa.bg/a/32073249.html>
- Sharpley, R., & Stone, P. R. (2009). *The Darker Side of Travel: The Theory and Practice of Dark Tourism*. Bristol: Channel View Publications.
- Stone, P. R. (2006). A dark tourism spectrum: Towards a typology of death and macabre related tourist sites. *Tourism: An Interdisciplinary International Journal*, 54(2), 145-160.
- The Buzludzha Monument: A Symbol of Bulgaria’s Communist Past. (2019). *European Heritage Studies*, 5(1), 87-99.
- Trip Dir BG – The Vampire from Sozopol in the National Geographic Top 10. Retrieved at 02.04.2025 from: <https://trip.dir.bg/gallery/vampirat-ot-sozopol-v-top-10-na-NG-12602733?i=2>
- Wikipedia. (2025a). El Al Flight 402, Retrieved at 02.04.2025 from: https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%9F%D0%BE%D0%BB%D0%B5%D1%82_402_%D0%BD%D0%B0_%D0%95%D0%BB_%D0%90%D0%BB

Wikipedia (2025b). Train accident in the village of Hitrino, Retrieved at 04.04.2025 from:

https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D0%92%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%BA%D0%BE%D0%B2_%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%86%D0%B8%D0%B4%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82_%D0%B2_%D1%81%D0%B5%D0%BB%D0%BE_%D0%A5%D0%B8%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B8%D0%BD%D0%BE

Wight, C. A., & Lennon, J. J. (2007). The emergence of dark tourism: The attraction of death and disaster. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 9(1), 1-15.

How to cite this article: Karadzhov, V. (2025). Dark Tourism in Bulgaria – A Conceptual Guidebook. *International Journal of Digital Research*, E-ISSN: 3033-179X, Vol. 1(1): P.p. 10-26. <https://doi.org/10.63711/ijdr.net20250102>
