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TRAZENDO LUZ ÀS TREVAS: EXPERIÊNCIA DE TURISMO SOMBRIO (CLARO) EM DESTINOS TURÍSTICOS BRASILEIROS

LLEVANDO LUZ LA OSCURIDAD: EXPERIENCIA DE TURISMO OSCURO (CLARO) EN DESTINOS TURÍSTICOS BRASILEÑOS



BRINGING LIGHT TO DARKNESS: DARK (LIGHT) TOURISM EXPERIENCE IN BRAZILIAN TOURIST DESTINATIONS

Abstract

Dark tourism has emerged as a growing field in Brazil, with research focusing primarily on the supply side. This article analyzes the experiences of participants on dark tourism tours in São Paulo and Recife, based on user-generated content. This descriptive, qualitative study collected data from 178 online comments on Google Local Guides, Tripadvisor, and Facebook. Following Bardin's (2011) methodology, the content was analyzed and classified according to Pine and Gilmore's (1999) experience economy framework. The results indicate that the tours do not evoke fear in either city but rather offer entertainment and learning opportunities. Within the experience economy framework, entertainment and education are prominent while escapism and aesthetics are less so due to the tours' participatory and non-immersive nature. The study concludes that further research is needed to explore visitor motivations and demand.

Keywords: dark tourism, experience economy, user-generated content, tourist demand

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Resumo

O turismo sombrio tem se consolidado como um campo emergente no Brasil, com investigações mais centradas na oferta do que na demanda. Este artigo analisa as experiências dos participantes de roteiros *dark* em São Paulo e Recife, com base em conteúdo gerado por usuários. A pesquisa é descritiva e qualitativa, com dados coletados em 178 comentários online no Google Local Guides, Tripadvisor e Facebook, analisados conforme a metodologia de Bardin (2011) e classificados segundo a economia da experiência de Pine e Gilmore (1999). Os resultados mostram que, em ambas as cidades, os passeios não causam medo, mas proporcionam divertimento e aprendizado. Na economia da experiência, destacam-se as categorias de entretenimento e educação, enquanto as dimensões escapista e estética não se sobressaem, devido ao caráter participativo e não imersivo dos roteiros. Conclui-se que há necessidade de aprofundar os estudos voltados à demanda e às motivações desses visitantes.

Palavras-chave: turismo sombrio, economia da experiência, conteúdo gerado por usuário, demanda turística

Resumen

El turismo oscuro se ha consolidado como un campo emergente en Brasil, con investigaciones más centradas en la oferta que en la demanda. Este artículo analiza las experiencias de los participantes en recorridos *dark* en São Paulo y Recife a partir de contenido generado por usuarios. La investigación es descriptiva y cualitativa, con datos recolectados en 178 comentarios en Google Local Guides, Tripadvisor y Facebook, analizados según la metodología de Bardin (2011) y categorizados conforme a la economía de la experiencia de Pine y Gilmore (1999). Los resultados revelan que, en ambas ciudades, los recorridos no provocan miedo, sino que ofrecen entretenimiento y aprendizaje. En la economía de la experiencia, se destacan las categorías de entretenimiento y educación, mientras que las dimensiones escapista y estética no sobresalen debido al carácter participativo y no inmersivo de los itinerarios. Se concluye que es necesario profundizar los estudios enfocados en la demanda y en sus motivaciones.

Palabras clave: turismo oscuro, economía de la experiencia, contenido generado por usuarios, demanda turística

1. Introduction

Dark tourism can be conceptualized as the practice of visiting places associated with death, pain, and suffering (Lennon & Foley, 2000). For many years, death has been used as a tool for entertainment, education, and culture around the world. Places permeated with the supernatural, such as the Pyramids in Egypt and the Père-Lachaise Cemetery in Paris, have been occupied by tourists for decades (Dale & Robinson, 2011). However, researchers often argue that dark tourism is an emerging or, at the very least, a recent phenomenon. This is due to the innovative ways in which these practices are carried out, offering new

ways to experience the city (Körössi et al., 2018) and manifestations of postmodernism (Wu & Cheng, 2018).

In Brazil, government and private initiatives have emerged to promote the “dark tourism” industry. These attractions receive a considerable number of visitors and include the Museum of Madness (MG), the Holocaust Museum (PR), the Holocaust Memorial (RJ), Consolação Cemetery (SP) and tours organized by the company SP Haunted Tour (SP) and Recife Mal-Assombrado (PE). These attractions are linked to this segment because they offer experiences related to death, suffering and violence.

Stone (2006) explains the characteristics of this segment. In this study, Stone developed the dark tourism spectrum, which features sites ranging from the “darkest” to the “lightest”. The darkest end of the spectrum is associated with locations where major tragedies occurred more recently, creating a sense of authenticity for the destination. These darker sites lack formal infrastructure, and their primary focus is visitor education. Conversely, the lightest sites are related to death and suffering, but they are not necessarily linked to tragic events. They primarily feature interpretations of macabre historical and cultural memories that are commercialized in locations with well-developed tourist infrastructure.

In an effort to understand the nuances of this new typology, the number of studies in the Brazilian context has grown over the years (Brambilla, et al., 2021). However, research has focused on developing destinations with dark tourism due to stories, legends, and historical and cultural heritage (Costa & Silva, 2023; Nascimento & Oliveira, 2021; Nascimento & Pereira, 2022; Silva et al., 2022). Nevertheless, little has been said about visitors’ experiences in spaces associated with death (Pinheiro & Chemin, 2022).

According to the literature review by Rajasekaram et al. (2022), a gap in understanding was identified between the lightest and darkest dimensions of dark tourism. In other words, research related to the darker side of dark tourism receives more focus and attention than research related to the lighter side. Light (2017) states that tourists’ experiences at natural disaster sites differ from their experiences at sites of man-made tragedies. Therefore, the authors suggest that future research should focus on measuring the dark tourism experience at the lighter sites on the spectrum proposed by Stone (2006).

Notably, few studies have explored the tourist experience of dark tourism within the Brazilian context. For example, Pinheiro and Chemin (2022) investigated visitors’ experiences at the Museu da Loucura (Museum of Madness) in Barbacena, Minas Gerais, and Furtado et al. (2024, p. 469) also studied this topic. The latter group expanded upon this research by identifying the perceptions of users of the TripAdvisor platform regarding their dark tourism experiences at Brazilian attractions, specifically the Museu da Loucura (Museum of Madness), the Museu do Holocausto (Holocaust Museum), and the Cemitério da Consolação (Consolação Cemetery).

These Brazilian studies use the analysis of user-generated content (UGC) data from online review platforms as their methodological basis. UGC provides insight into qualitative and quantitative information about tourism supply and is a valuable data source for researchers (Pereira & Limberger, 2020). Emotions and experiences related to a visit or trip can

be coded within online reviews (Fu et al., 2022). Regarding dark tourism, the emotional intensity of experiences at dark attractions is essential for understanding this market (Lozano & Malerba, 2017; Yan et al., 2016).

However, no studies have focused on the attractions Recife Mal-Assombrado and Cata-maran Mal-Assombrado in Recife, Pernambuco, nor SP Haunted in São Paulo. Thus, this study builds on existing methodological foundations in the literature and extends scientific evidence to other contexts and experiences within the light spectrum proposed by Stone (2006). In this way, the present paper contributes to a deeper and broader understanding of this phenomenon in Brazil. This article aims to analyze the experiences of dark tourism participants in São Paulo and Recife through user-generated content.

1. Literature Review

2.1 Reflections on Dark Tourism

In my experience engaging with her [Death] is both compelling and fascinating, and never dull, but she is complex and sometimes wonderfully unpredictable.
(Black, 2018)

In her book *All That Remains*, Sue Black (2018), a British anatomist and forensic anthropologist, presents a meticulous and critical analysis of death. She reveals not only its biological aspects but also its symbolic, cultural, and human dimensions. Addressing the subject with scientific rigor and ethical depth, Black breaks away from oversimplified views and invites readers to face death as a complex, meaningful phenomenon.

Throughout history, people have ascribed different cultural meanings to death. Sometimes it is associated with the sacred; at other times, it is feared or celebrated. People have constructed rituals, narratives, and imaginations that reveal both the fear of death and the attempt to comprehend it. Dark tourism is situated precisely within this intertwining of mystery, the search for answers, curiosity, and symbolism. According to Foley and Lennon (1996), the first authors to use the term, dark tourism is one of the practices of the postmodern world in which tourists seek new emotions and unique experiences at tourist destinations.

Dark tourism is considered to be a type of tourism that “generates emotions through the stimulation of macabre aesthetics and the presence of death” (Podoshen et al., 2015, p. 332). Davchev (2017) reinforces this idea, stating that dark tourism is a new form of alternative tourism and is related to visiting places connected to death, disasters or accidents, poverty, and mourning. The term is based on the conceptual foundations of heritage tourism and thanatopia or the subjective contemplation of death in public spaces (Light, 2017). Dark tourism is also rooted in cultural tourism because visitors are invited to reflect on different cultures, beliefs, and rituals by visiting sites with historical and cultural significance related to death. Dark tourists may reflect on how death is perceived and experienced in different parts of the world (Sharma & Rickly, 2018; Stone, 2013).

Upon analyzing the subject in depth, Stone (2006) proposed the following seven categories for this segmentation:

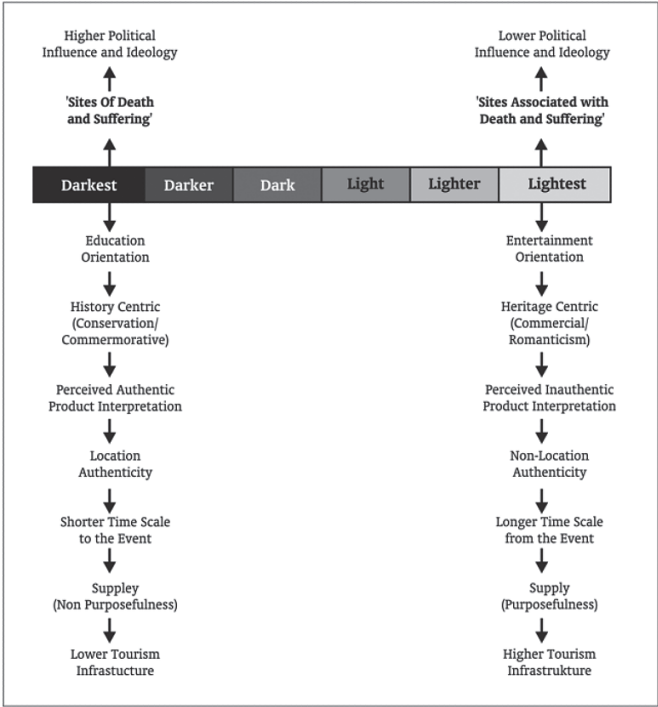
- a) *Genocide camps*: concentration camps and other genocide sites.
- b) *Places of conflict*: battlefields and other war-related sites.
- c) *Shrines*: formal or informal constructions where people place flowers, candles, and other objects near places where death and suffering are current or recent.
- d) *Resting places*: cemeteries and graves.
- e) *Dungeons*: old or functioning prisons and courts.
- f) *Exhibitions*: products with a thanatological theme, but with a commercial, educational and entertainment emphasis.
- g) *Fun factories*: attractions and tours that represent real or fictionalized death with a focus on entertainment and commercial ethics.

Another important contribution was the identification of the phases that this segment can undergo according to its intensity. According to Stone's (2006) spectrum of dark tourism shown in figure 1 below, the darkest sites are places where major tragedies occurred and became tourist attractions without adequate infrastructure. These sites primarily focus on educating visitors. Conversely, the lightest places are *related to* death and suffering and aim to entertain. These places market macabre historical and cultural memories to visitors with adequate tourist infrastructures.

Examples of dark attractions include the Nazi concentration camp in Auschwitz, Poland; Japan's "dark heritage," consisting of memorial areas for atrocities, torture, shame, and war (Han, 2016); and the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. Examples of light attractions include dark entertainment venues such as the London Dungeon in the United Kingdom (Virgili et al., 2018) and the Consolação Cemetery in São Paulo, Brazil (Furtado et al., 2024).

As Stone (2006) proposed, the spectrum of dark tourism helps characterize tourist destinations by offering insight into how experiences are constructed and the elements that distinguish one initiative from another. However, as dark tourism attractions become more internationalized through processes such as "Disneyization" and "McDonaldization," managers must ensure that commercial and entertainment objectives do not overshadow the significance of death and human suffering (Dale & Robinson, 2011). Xavier and Marques Junior (2025) raise another critical aspect when they question the ethics of tourism practices in sites of major environmental disasters. Affected communities may feel invaded and disturbed during moments of vulnerability, thereby intensifying the chaos through the presence of visitors.

Figure 1. Spectrum of dark tourism

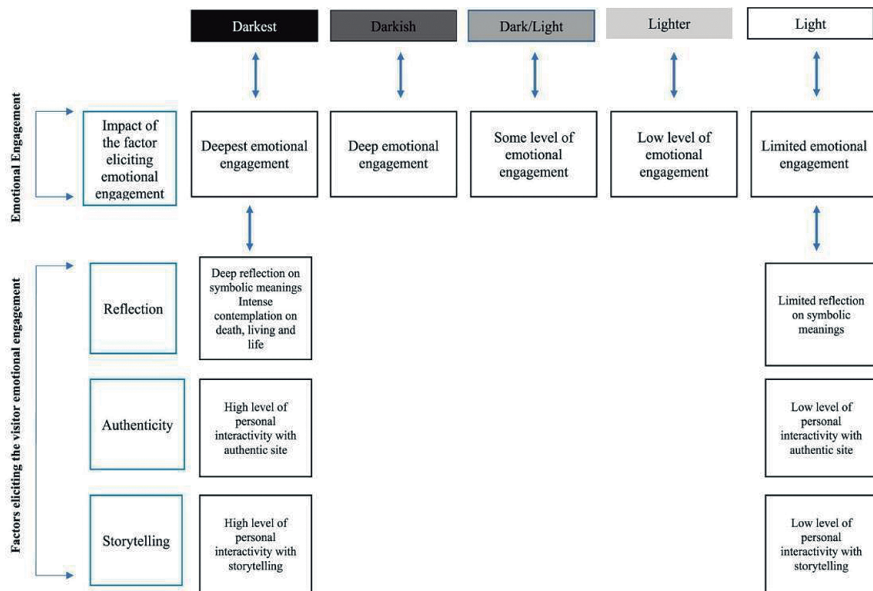


Note. Figure taken from Stone (2006, p. 151).

In terms of the tourist experience, in-person experiences in this segment involve emotional (oriented toward leisure and entertainment) and cognitive factors (focused on education and moral instruction, especially at historical sites) factors (Yan et al., 2016). Lewis et al. (2022) state that people who seek out macabre places are curious and base their travel choices on personal beliefs. Sharpley (2009) adds that tourists seek stories to share after the trip, thereby creating social status. However, Iliev (2021) argues that the main motivation is not death itself, but rather the desire to learn about cultural heritage and discover more about a place. Advertisements for dark tourism elicit contradictory emotions, both positive and negative. For destinations that use their historical heritage as an attraction, it is vital to understand tourists' emotions in order to generate positive outcomes (Weidmann et al., 2023).

In this context, Rajasekaram et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of understanding the experiences of visitors to attractions at the lighter end of Stone's (2006) proposed spectrum. In this regard, Sigala and Steriopoulos (2021), drawing on Stone (2006), propose a new typology of dark tourism based on Stone's (2006) work. This typology addresses visitors' levels of emotional involvement, in order to better understand the different experiences across sites ranging from the darkest to the lightest. Accordingly, emotions shift from being more intense and profound in settings of tragedy and suffering, to being more subdued in attractions or itineraries centered on stories and legends involving the cultural and historical heritage of the locations, as depicted in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Extent of the dark tourism spectrum based on visitors' emotional involvement



Note. Figure taken from Sigala and Steriopoulos (2021, p. 426).

This typology reveals an advancement in visitor-perspective studies. Taking a multidisciplinary and experience-focused approach, the study provides practical evidence of the profound reflection and intense feelings evoked by positive and negative emotions experienced at dark sites. These emotions allow visitors to derive individual meanings and values from their dark tourism experience (Sigala & Steriopoulos, 2021).

In Brazil, few studies have examined the dark tourism industry. These studies have primarily focused on cemetery tourism (Moraes et al., 2018) and the motivations, perceptions, and proposals for implementing this industry in Brazilian cities (Brambilla et al., 2021; Silva, 2018; Souto et al., 2016). The main attractions in this category include the Consolação Cemetery (SP), the Museum of Madness (MG), the Holocaust Museum (PR), the Holocaust Memorial (RJ), the Haunted Tour of São Paulo (SP), and the Mal-Assombrado of Recife (PE). These are popular destinations that have been receiving growing attention from researchers and tourists.

Regarding the Brazilian attractions mentioned above, this study highlights the SP Haunted Tour in São Paulo and the Recife Mal-Assombrado in Recife, which are both haunted tours. Both tours fall under the “dark fun factory” category, in which legends and dark stories associated with a particular space are explored through theatrical and sound elements to entertain and inform visitors.

Furthermore, authors such as Pereira and Limberger (2020) and Pinheiro and Chemin (2022) applied Pine and Gilmore's (1999) theory of the experience economy, also known

as the 4Es, to analyze visitation experiences in two dark tourism spaces. Pinheiro and Chemin (2022) examined visits to the Museum of Madness in Barbacena, Minas Gerais, Brazil, through user-generated content on TripAdvisor and Google Local Guides. They identified the dimensions of personal transformation, heritage preservation, electronic word-of-mouth, and temporality. They concluded that the experience is memorable. In turn, Pereira and Lindenberg (2020) studied the motivations, experiences, and benefits of visiting the Recoleta Cemetery in Buenos Aires, Argentina. They found that visitors are motivated by leisure, knowledge, and socialization, and that visits serve as contemplative moments that promote reflection on life.

2.2 The Experience Economy

Historically, the economy has demonstrated an ability to adapt to social contexts by incorporating new consumer demands and needs into its production process. Against the backdrop of constant change, the Experience Economy theoretical approach has emerged, shifting the focus from the delivery of tangible goods and services to the management of emotions.

According to scholars of this subject (Pine & Gilmore, 1999), experience is a decisive factor in purchasing decisions, satisfaction, customer loyalty, and business success. From this perspective, companies must pay attention to this reality to avoid losing ground to their competitors. This compels companies to transform conventional products into memorable events and personalized experiences. Coelho (2007) endorses this perspective, arguing that people do not simply buy objects, but rather seek the emotional involvement and meaning they provide.

However, for this connection to occur, Pine and Gilmore (1999) propose the logic of experience staging for this connection to occur. In this logic, both the provider and the consumer act as participants in a “theatrical play,” assuming roles in the commercial exchange process. In this dynamic, the consumption environment serves as the stage, and the process must be designed to provoke sensations that enchant the “audience,” thereby transforming the commercial act into a sensory spectacle.

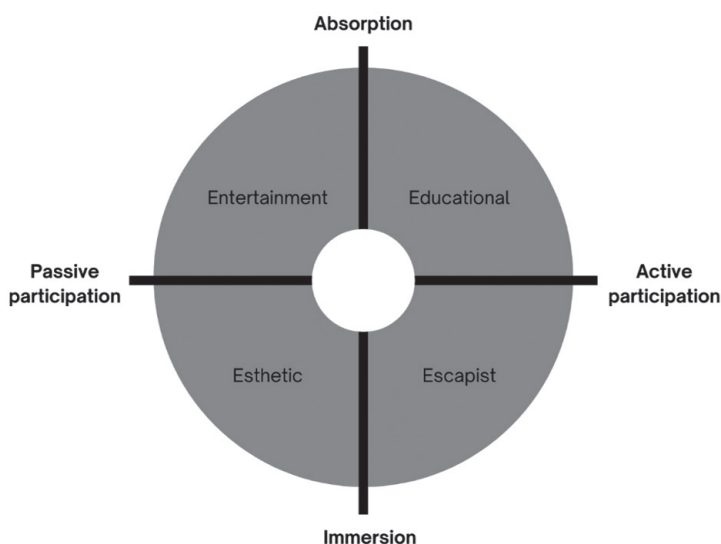
The Experience Economy Theory is divided into four dimensions (also referred to as the “4Es”) that add value to the experience: Entertainment, Escapist, Educational, and Esthetic.

- *Entertainment*: Individuals participate passively in events, solely for the purpose of observation, without immersion. Watching a performance, listening to music, or reading can be considered entertainment experiences.
- *Escapist*: These involve greater participation and immersion of individuals in the experience, in which they are invited to interact actively in ways capable of affecting their real performance, such as visiting theme parks.
- *Educational*: This requires the active participation of individuals, from which they can extract knowledge applicable to their lives and may engage the mind (intellectually) or the body (physical training). Guided tours of a tourist destination are examples of this dimension.

- *Esthetic*: Individuals tend to be immersed in the visited environment but have little effect upon it — for example, observing breathtaking landscapes or appreciating works of art fall within this dimension.

The dimensions are interconnected by horizontal and vertical axes. The horizontal axis indicates the level of individual participation, and the vertical axis indicates the type of relationship people had with the experience. This shows whether there was adherence in terms of participation and customer immersion. It also reveals the importance of organizations promoting innovation and connections between these dimensions in order to attract and retain their audience. The figure below illustrates how the dimensions behave.

Figure 3. The four frames of an experiment



Note. Figure adapted from Pine and Gilmore (1999, p.30).

This theory has significant potential and will be applied to this research on lighter forms of dark tourism. It has already been used in other contexts and has made meaningful contributions to discussions on the subject.

2.3 User-Generated Content (UGC)

User-Generated Content (UGC) refers to informal online communication in which users produce and consume content (Mayer et al., 2017). Notably, UGC is characterized by content produced not by paid professionals or companies, but by users who have experienced a service and share comments about it (Arrigara & Levina, 2008).

Naab and Sehl (2017) view user-generated content (UGC) as a relatively new phenomenon compared to traditional mass media content production. Furthermore, although UGC is a

recent phenomenon, it has already had a significant impact on the field of communication. The authors propose three criteria to ensure that the content studied is truly UGC: 1) it must demonstrate a degree of personal contribution, 2) it must be published on the Internet, and 3) it must be created outside the scope of a profession or professional routine. These criteria reinforce the idea that UGC must be primarily and spontaneously published by the user in a non-professional manner to express something personal.

This content is highly valued due to its importance in promoting destinations and tourist attractions. The decision-making process of tourists when choosing a destination or tourist service has largely been affected by the search for user opinions and comments on social media or specific sites, such as Tripadvisor (Gretzel & Yoo, 2008).

User-generated comments and opinions are an integral part of the tourist experience, from before the trip, to during, to after. However, these reviews are often dispersed across various domains, making them more difficult to capture and analyze (Buhalis, 2020). Nevertheless, users place a great deal of trust in informal online reviews from travelers, distributed on review sites such as Tripadvisor and Yelp (Kladou & Mavragani, 2015). This online word-of-mouth (eWOM) influences the decisions of other tourists and reveals important characteristics of visitors' perceptions (Buhalis, 2020).

User-generated content (UGC) provides valuable qualitative and quantitative information about tourism offerings and is an important data source for researchers (Pereira & Limberger, 2020). Emotions and experiences of a visit or trip can be encoded in online evaluations (Fu et al., 2022). Regarding dark tourism, the emotional intensity of experiences at dark attractions is essential for understanding this market segment (Lozano & Malerba, 2017; Yan et al., 2016).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Context

The city of São Paulo, the capital of the state of the same name, is located in the south-east region of Brazil and is home to the country's largest urban agglomeration (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2022). Recife, the capital of the northeastern state of Pernambuco, has the fifth largest urban agglomeration in Brazil (IBGE, 2022). Both cities have a rich colonial past due to the exploitation of sugarcane and coffee through enslaved labor. These histories have inspired many legends and dark stories, influencing the development of the country's first and best-known commercial dark tours: Recife Mal-Assombrado and Catamaran Mal-Assombrado in Recife, Pernambuco, and SP Haunted in São Paulo.

The SP Haunted Tour, held in São Paulo, the capital city, deals with São Paulo's legends and urban tragedies. The tour aims to provide content related to afflictions of the human mind, the metropolis, and social problems. Created by a journalist and an actor, the tour began in 2010 after the play *Haunted Bus: São Paulo in Another Dimension* was screened.

The tours are guided by the ghost *Ângelo*, a ghostly character who brings the legends to life in a theatrical and playful way. The tours are offered at 7 pm and 10 pm and feature two different routes that pass through various attractions in central São Paulo, such as the Consolação Cemetery, the Municipal Theater and the Sé Cathedral. According to company data, around 14,000 people have participated in the tours since they began operating (SP Haunted Tour, 2017).

Figure 4. Character *Ângelo* from the SP Haunted Tour



Note. Figure taken from SP Haunted Tour (2017).

The Recife Mal-Assombrado (Haunted Recife) tour takes place in Recife, the capital of Pernambuco. It is inspired by the legends compiled by sociologist Gilberto Freyre. According to Körössy et al. (2018), this tour is a new form of urban tourism, as the haunted legends and stories have been transformed into a theatrical experience that offers a fresh perspective on Recife.

The “Lendas do Recife” project, part of the “Recifense Praticante” program run by the city’s Department of Tourism, originated this itinerary in 2006. City hall developed the itineraries based on legends and stories from the book *Assombrações do Recife Velho* by Gilberto Freyre, as well as works by Roberto Beltrão, Carneiro Vilela, and others. The project also received guidance from the authors of the website Recife Mal-Assombrado. The project aimed to disseminate haunted legends in the state and encourage narratives inspired by this theme (Körössy et al., 2018).

Figure 5. Recife Mal-Assombrado tour



Note. Figure taken from Recife Mal-Assombrado (2025).

Due to the high demand for haunted tours in the city, promoted by the public administration, the travel agency Via Dourada Turismo became interested in selling the tours regularly in 2015. They hired a team of actors and, with technical advice from the Tourism Department, began developing haunted tourist products. The themed, theatrical city tour, “Recife Mal-Assombrado,” presents the city through tales of mysteries and hauntings, offering a historical and cultural tour. There are two types of tours: the “Haunted Walk,” which lasts 1.5 hours in Recife or Olinda, and the “Haunted Bus,” which lasts four hours and visits sites related to the legends, always at night.

Another tour inspired by Gilberto Freyre’s literary work is the Haunted Catamaran, offered by the company *Catamaran Tours Empreendimentos Turísticos*. This tour takes place on the calm waters of the Capibaribe River and explores the legends and stories of old Recife. It is one of several tours offered by Catamaran Tours.

Figure 6. Haunted Catamaran - Recife-PE



Note. Figure taken from Catamaran Tours (n. d.).

Figure 7. Haunted Catamaran - Recife-PE



Note. Figure taken from Catamaran Tours (n. d.).

3.2 Approach, Data Collection and Analysis

This article is descriptive in nature and takes a qualitative approach. According to Santos and Parra Filho (2012), descriptive research is characterized by spontaneity, naturalness and a high degree of generalization. The aim of this research was not to intervene in the attitudes and opinions of dark tourism participants in Brazil, but rather to describe the phenomenon and generate insights and generalizations.

A bibliographic search was conducted using the terms “dark tourism” and “experience” in the Web of Science, Google Scholar, and Tourism Publications databases. Field research was conducted through the collection of user-generated content (UGC) on Tripadvisor, Facebook and Google Local Guides, for the attractions Recife Mal-Assombrado (PE), Cata-maran Mal-Assombrado (PE) and SP Haunted Tour (SP), from 2015 to 2023. This period was chosen because all available reviews on the platforms date back to 2015. During the 2020 period of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was noted that there were few reviews due to the worldwide suspension of tourism services. The data are in Brazilian Portuguese due to the location of the research.

This data collection technique was chosen due to its low cost and ease of access (Couper, 2000). According to Dickinger (2011), consumer comments about their experiences with products and services are a reliable source for research. However, the tours are not systematized, which makes them difficult for visitors to access, as some of them only take place during certain seasons.

To capture the largest number of comments on the selected scripts, we chose to search the three digital platforms with the highest user ratings. We chose *Facebook* because it is one of the social networks with the most followers and allows ideas and discussions to be shared (Cardoso & Lamy, 2011). Tripadvisor has more than 859 million reviews of over 8,6 million travel services (Tripadvisor, s. f.), making it a reliable research source. Google Local Guides, on the other hand, is an interactive digital mapping platform that displays user ratings and reviews (Mazumdar et al., 2018).

The inclusion criterion for the reviews was an evaluation by someone who described their experience. Notably, there were no duplicate reviews, and all evaluations found across the three platforms were counted with no exclusions. Web data mining, also known as scraping, was used to extract comments from the platforms. Webharvy software, which is freely available online, was necessary for this process. Haddaway et al. (2015) recommend using this platform to effectively and clearly extract and organize data in real time.

After selecting all 178 comments, the data were organized in an Excel spreadsheet to create summaries and corpora for analysis using the Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Textes et de Questionnaires (Iramuteq) software. Iramuteq uses a combination of tools to provide a better understanding of the results and draw inferences from qualitative data. Given the complexity of the facts to be used, this method is a good option because the researchers can create their categories of analysis and verify the relationship between the studied facts (Camargo & Justo, 2013). Finally, the collected data was analyzed by the frequency of important elements and content categorization (Bardin,

2011) using a categorical analysis based on the four dimensions of the experience economy proposed by Pine and Gilmore (1999).

Table 1. Number of comments per platform under study

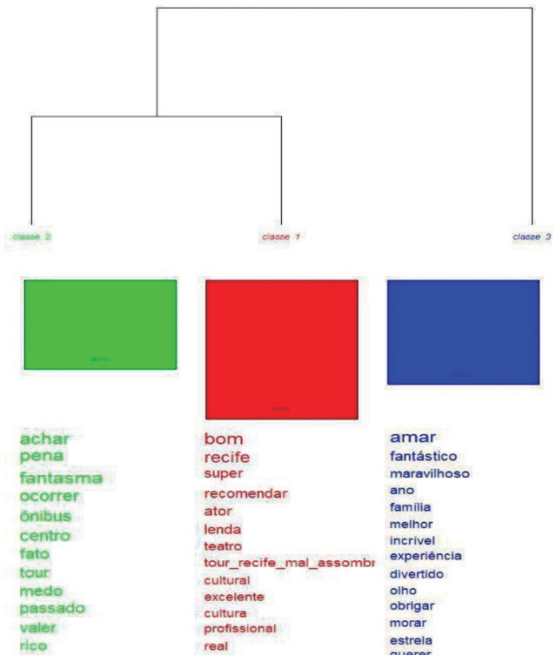
	<i>Tripadvisor</i>	<i>Google Local Guides</i>	<i>Facebook</i>
Recife Mal-Assombrado (PE)	11	-	37
Catamaran Mal-Assombrado (PE)	9	10	-
SP Haunted Tour (SP)	21	20	70
Total	41	30	107
Total comments evaluated			178

Note. Survey data (2024).

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Data Analysis Using Iramuteq Software

Figure 8. Dendrogram resulting from the Descending Hierarchical Classification (DHC)



Note. Survey data (2024).

The general corpus, consisting of 178 study abstracts for content processing, was inserted and separated into text segments (TS), utilizing 75% of the corpus. According to Camargo

and Justo (2013), this percentage indicates that the corpus is representative of the studied phenomenon, as the minimum value is 75%. However, to improve retention and organization of the information and classes, the number of terminal classes in phase 1 was changed in descending order from 10 to 4. This change enabled greater retention (95.56%) of the data. The data presented in Figures 8 and 9 are in Brazilian Portuguese because they were originally written in this language by each tour participant.

After this initial assessment, the Descending Hierarchical Classification (DHC) was carried out. The data was classified into 3 specific classes: Class 1 (26.7%), Class 2 (41.09%) and Class 3 (32.21%), as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Classification of Classes into Flows and Dimensions

<i>Class</i>	<i>Flow</i>	<i>Dimension</i>
Class 1	Stream 1: gathers the main comments from visitors about the SP Haunted tour in São Paulo (SP).	Dimension - Haunted São Paulo
Class 2	Flow 2: set of evaluations of the comments on the Recife Mal-Assombrado and Catamarã (PE) tours	Dimension - Recife Mal-Assombrado
Class 3	Flow 3: The service and infrastructure evaluations of both tours	Dimension - Service and infrastructure of haunted tours

Note. Prepared by the authors (2024).

The *São Paulo Haunted Dimension* showcases SP Haunted in São Paulo, highlighting the city's historical and cultural aspects with a humorous approach that does not focus heavily on fear. As some participants said: "It's not a horror activity. Don't go expecting to be scared, it won't happen..." (Robertoestevamrn, 2022).

The tour guide plays a unique role on this tour. He takes on the persona of a theatrical character, with characteristic gestures, clothing, and speeches. This approach presents a new challenge for the guide, who, in addition to his traditional responsibilities, must master theatrical techniques to lead the group. Visitors appreciate this approach, highlighting the guide's professionalism and resourcefulness. They attribute the success of the experience to the theatrical representation, in this case, Phantom Angelo.

It should also be noted that the tour includes social critiques of the city's socio-economic context. As the tour takes place at night through the historic center, it reveals scenes of social inequality characteristic of Brazil, such as homelessness, deserted places, and insecurity. This demonstrates the tour's intention to intertwine the past and the future by providing participants with knowledge.

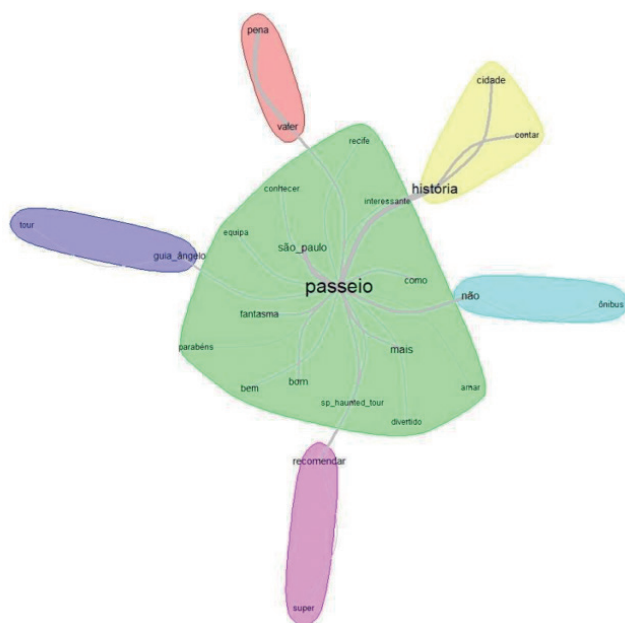
Recife Mal-Assombrado Dimension - Participants' comments reveal a similarity to SP Haunted, stating that the Haunted Recife and Haunted Catamaran tours are more than just fear reenactments. According to these comments, it's a journey that unlocks the secrets of the past and transforms the perception of Recife for both tourists and locals: "Much more cultural than scary!" (Andréa Paula, 2015); "A wealth of information and culture" (Guilherme P, 2015).

Another notable aspect of this tour is its connection to cultural elements. According to one participant: “A very entertaining walk through the horror stories of the Recife imagination” (Federico Dantas, 2022); “Excellent for learning a bit more about our culture” (Eduardo Falcão, 2019). The tour is based on the literature of Gilberto Freyre, a renowned regional writer, who sought to highlight and celebrate culture in his writing.

Service and Infrastructure Dimension of Itineraries: This dimension highlights aspects of service and infrastructure. The comments show a high level of satisfaction: “The guides and agency service are impeccable” (Rosana_Rochinha, 2018); “The night tour with the actors on board was sensational” (Google Local Guides, no. 59); “Sensational! Everything from the organization, the staff, the tour, the information, and how it’s presented” (Lincoln Eduardo Mendo, 2017).

In light of the reports, it is evident that the participants had a positive experience with both tours. This demonstrates an orientation toward entertainment centered on cultural heritage with organized tourist infrastructure, which is characteristic of light tourism. These aspects demonstrate institutions’ and companies’ ability to diversify their tourist offerings based on cultural and historical elements, approaching dark tourism with a fresh perspective, which corroborates Davchev’s (2017) idea that it is a new form of alternative tourism. In general, the three analyzed itineraries highlight the words “fun,” “history,” and “city,” reinforcing Stone’s (2006) statement and the public’s perception of dark tourism itineraries. These itineraries expose leisure activities based on legends and haunted stories in the two cities, as shown in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Similarity analysis



Note. Survey data (2024).

In summary, the co-occurrence analysis carried out with Iramuteq software consolidates the points already elucidated on this topic by visually mapping the lexical cohesion of the comments under study. Many participants, primarily from São Paulo, noted the absence of visits to historical and tourist sites related to the tales and legends in the itinerary, which they viewed as a negative aspect. Below is an example of one participant's perception:

For those who like stories about the afterlife, the tour is very satisfying! Don't go thinking you'll be going into the so-called haunted establishments, because that's not the case. Don't blame the agency or the guides: they're great! The point is that the places are privately owned, and the agencies depend on permits that are never allowed! (How about we send some requests to the city's tourism office asking for more attention to be paid to these routes? After all, they are history!). (Viviane C, 2017)

Another perceived implication is the lack of support from public bodies in promoting these types of tours, since the companies are private, and it is difficult to open tourist attractions that would complement the itinerary. As Stone (2006) puts it, there is an organized tourist infrastructure for the development of these routes. It is necessary to encourage new forms of heritage tourism, whether tangible or intangible, to diversify a region's tourist segments (Light, 2017).

4.2 Classification of Comments Based on the Economy of Experience Approach

To better discuss the findings of this research and demonstrate its main findings, they will be presented based on Pine and Gilmore's (1999) theory of the experience economy, with a focus on dark tourism.

The entertainment dimension was highlighted the most in the analysis of online comments. Since the tourist routes in Recife and São Paulo tell stories and legends, the tours are classified as leisure activities with explicit entertainment aspects, whether through the guides or the actors' portraying hauntings and ghosts. These characteristics are evident in the following excerpts: "I took the tour recently during the July vacation. I highly recommend it! The group was fun, and the actors were sharp, 'scary,' and 'funny!' I want to go back and do the group's other tours!" (Cathy V, 2016); "It's not a heavy horror experience, the ghost Angelo is very funny, and the tour is super cultural!" (Adriana Abdul Ghani, 2024).

These comments confirm the participants' perception of the experience as fun, according to the addressed entertainment dimension. Another important characteristic to mention is fear. Despite the haunted name, many participants say it's not a scary tour, but rather an opportunity to learn about the culture and have fun, as reported below:

It's not a scary tour. I bought it thinking it would scare me, but that's not the point, it's more cultural and historical, it's a lot of fun and the ghost guide Ângelo is impressive, and it was really cool. I had fun, it's worth the investment. (Pati Pei, 2018)

Evidently, fun tours evoke emotions in participants (Yan et al., 2016). When participants are tourists, these emotions may influence their social status after the trip (Sharpley, 2009).

These characteristics are not found in other categories of dark tourism, which are directly linked to tragic events involving death and suffering. These events generate feelings of reflection and provide space to contemplate the past (Stone, 2006).

From an escapist perspective, it was evident that the scripts' defining feature is not immersion in the experience, which allows individuals to actively participate. Since they are theatrical shows with scenes of hauntings and legends performed by actors, participants watch and absorb the content passively. Therefore, it can be said that this dimension was not present in the analyzed experiences. Additionally, it should be noted that the scripts are humorous and entertaining, as exemplified by Stone (2006). This detracts from the immersion in dark themes of a more emotional and melancholic nature.

The online comments analyzed demonstrate a strong educational dimension. In Recife, dark tourism tours are mainly inspired by the legends and stories in Gilberto Freyre's book *Assombrações do Recife Velho* and other literary works by local writers, such as Carneiro Vilela and Roberto Beltrão (Körössy et al., 2018). Here's what one participant said about learning based on legends: "I took this tour inspired by Gilberto Freyre's work *Assombrações do Recife Antigo* (Hauntings of Old Recife). It was very good — a humorous way of learning a bit about the city" (Tripadvisor, no. 53). Another excerpt: "I took the Recife Mal-Assombrado tour, which was a great history and culture lesson. I'll do it again many times because there's so much to discover!" (Tripadvisor, no. 6).

The results corroborate Iliev (2021) by showing that interest in cultural and historical heritage, rather than death, is a motivating element of the experience. In São Paulo, there is a strong appreciation for the city's history and heritage, as well as for social criticism. This can be seen in the comments below:

A very interesting tour. The approach is about the dark side of São Paulo, not only the tragedies that have marked the city, but also the current social situation, which is no less bleak than the street population. The guide, Ângelo, is an attraction in his own right (Tripadvisor, no. 79).

Last Saturday night, we took a night tour of the haunted center of São Paulo, with the fantastic guide Ângelo, the Ghost, who told us scary and terrible stories, urban legends and unexplained facts that haunt the center of Latin America's largest city, architectural landmarks and their stories, legends and rumors (...) supernatural entities and ghosts were the cast of this night, not to mention the fact that we could observe the illumination of these historic landmarks. Congratulations to the organizers of the event, to the SP Haunted Tour, a different and unusual tour, my tip for friends, come on it's very cool and educational the history lesson and the reflections raised on the legendary events and true facts of the city, and the artist Ângelo is sensational!!! May Sampa have more events like these, the city deserves to be experienced and appreciated by the population!!! (Saulo Barboza, 2018)

This category of tour is not the only one in which the character of learning is evident; it is also a strong feature of other types of dark tourism (Pereira & Limberger, 2020; Yan, et al., 2016). In darker tours and sites, learning is linked to reflection and memory (Stone, 2013). In tours organized for entertainment and commercial purposes, this knowledge

comes from historical and cultural heritage based on legends and true facts humorously interpreted through theater (Stone, 2006). Although Weidmann et al. (2023) discussed the contradictory emotions experienced in dark tourism, the analyzed data shows positive results regarding fun and learning.

The main characteristic of the aesthetic dimension is immersion in a visited environment for its own sake—the experience of being in a place and contemplating it with little to no participation. Although some comments were made about appreciating the attractions on the itinerary, this was irrelevant since other elements were to be experienced during the haunted tour. Therefore, it can be concluded that no traces of the aesthetic dimension were found in the analysis.

As pointed out by Rajasekaram et al. (2022), this study complements the understanding of dark tourism itineraries within the light spectrum. It also introduces significant elements anchored in the economy of experience that corroborate the findings of Sigala and Steriopoulos (2021) regarding limited emotional engagement and low interaction with authentic sites. This is because the itineraries incorporate a theatrical element to explore the macabre legends of these places. It is important to note that São Paulo has a strong social criticism characteristic, suggesting greater reflection on contemporary aspects. This contrasts with one of the characteristics of the authors' study.

5. Conclusion

Haunted tours are one of the niches of dark tourism that have gained prominence in Brazil because they offer a way to diversify tourist destinations. The following itineraries were analyzed for this study: Recife Mal-Assombrado (PE), Catamaran Mal-Assombrado (PE), and the SP Haunted Tour (SP). These tours are well-known in Brazil.

The results show that the tours in both São Paulo and Recife do not provoke fear, but rather fun and learning. Participants are delighted by the abundance of information and the opportunity to learn about local history and culture. In São Paulo, it's worth noting that the tour guide plays a unique role, adopting the persona of a theatrical character with distinctive gestures, attire, and speech. This approach presents a new challenge for the guide, who, in addition to his traditional responsibilities, must also master theatrical techniques to lead the group.

One notable challenge is the lack of support from government institutions to encourage tours with this theme. Promoting companies are private entities that find it difficult to gain access to tourist attractions for their itineraries. Additionally, most attractions are open in the morning, but the tours take place in the evening.

The relationship with the experience economy approach revealed that participants fall into the entertainment and education categories. This can be explained by the relationship between executing each attraction and the scripting process. Both are based on the cultural and historical elements of each location and are presented to customers in a playful way. The escapist and aesthetic dimensions did not stand out in this analysis due to these itineraries' participatory nature, which is less immersive. This study is innovative in that it

examines the demand for haunted tourist routes in Recife and São Paulo. Previous studies have examined spaces such as cemeteries and museums associated with death in Brazil that have characteristics on the darker spectrum.

This research acknowledges the limitations of using online, user-generated data due to the infrequent and non-systematic nature of the tours. The methodological approach also restricts knowledge of the sociodemographic profile of the audience and prevents analysis of participants' impressions who do not use online review channels. The geographical scope is limited to Recife, Pernambuco, and São Paulo, Brazil, which makes it impossible to generalize the data to other contexts that may present distinct dynamics.

In light of this, it is necessary to employ empirical investigative methods, including the application of structured questionnaires and in-depth interviews with participants immediately following their experience. The aim is to capture motivations and perceptions more accurately by combining these methods with observational techniques. Further research focusing on other dark tourism attractions in Brazil, such as cemeteries, disaster sites, and places of tragedy, is suggested. Additionally, there is a need to examine the public management perspective on this segment by investigating the challenges and opportunities of implementing such itineraries. Finally, comparative studies between "Eelight spectrum" (entertainment-oriented) and "dark spectrum" (sites of major tragedies or cemeteries) itineraries are recommended to better understand the nuances of Brazilian tourist demand for experiences connected to death and the dark aspects of human history.

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