

Blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction: serial killers in the context of dark tourism

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ABSTRACT

Serial killers fascinate people and books, films, TV series and other types of entertainment increasingly cater to this interest providing sensationalized media coverage. The theory suggests that the boundaries are blurred considerably between fact and fiction, even for the serial killers themselves. For many people, serial killers are both frightening and attractive enough to motivate them to go on tours and visit sites, museums and other attractions that are associated with them. This paper explores the motivation for consuming true and fictional crime including murders and serial killing with an emphasis on literature, films, TV series as well as tourism. A content analysis of the websites of walking tours, museums and other attractions connected to fictional and real serial killers was undertaken, as well as a questionnaire with a niche sample of respondents who commented on their experience and perceptions of serial killers within a dark tourism context. The results suggest that while tourists tend to prefer real serial killers to fictional ones, only a small number of tourists actually engage in this form of dark tourism. Their motivations tend to be more connected to education or entertainment rather than a morbid obsession with death or tragedy.

1. INTRODUCTION

Humans have always been fascinated by the darker aspects of life, including death. This is thought to be normative rather than aberrantly pathological (Carrabine, 2011). Crime, murder and torture were always part of human history and curiosity about them is as old as time. Halttunen (2001) noted that murder literature at the beginning of the nineteenth century already took an interest in violent death and the body in pain. Bookshops and libraries are well-stocked with thrillers, horrors and crime stories. On television and the internet there has been a proliferation of crime series, documentaries and true crime shows. This includes a fascination with serial killers, despite the fact that serial killing is a relatively rare occurrence (Call, 2019). As a result, the public is often disproportionately fearful of serial killers, especially because of sensationalized media accounts (Greer & Jewkes, 2005). This fascination leads to visiting places that have a connection to them. For many people, serial killers are both frightening and attractive enough to motivate them to visit sites, tours, museums and other attractions that focus on them. As visitors want to gain more insight into the psychology and background of serial killers, museums and exhibitions are popular, but visitors sometimes also want to experience the atmosphere and locations of associated places.

According to Hartmann's (2014) and Light's (2017) typologies of heritage tourism, attractions associated with murder and serial killing are a form of 'thanatourism' involving a specific desire for contact with death (especially violent death according to Seaton, 1996), within the wider context of dark tourism. It could be argued that attractions connected to murder lie at the darker end of Stone's (2006) dark tourism spectrum in terms of tourists' motivations. However, it is also important to remember Seaton's (2006) reference to a continuum of complex motivations for thanatourism, depending partly on the tourist's relationship to and empathy with the victim(s). Dann (2005) suggested that fascination with darkness had become somewhat ubiquitous, because of the amount of violence in the media, which influences the desire to visit dark attractions. It is also interesting to consider how far an interest in serial killers might border on a form of socially non-acceptable or 'deviant' dark behaviour (Biran & Poria, 2012).

Views about dark tourists' motivations differ quite considerably. Konstanje and George (2017) take a more pessimistic view of the human spirit than Sather-Wagstaff (2016), for example. Whereas the latter author argues that dark tourism helps to create empathy with victims and forge solidarity, the former authors suggest that the commoditization of other's pain re-confirms first world consumers' feelings of supremacy in a form of "social Darwinism" (ibid. p. 2). They also refer to "the intersection of curiosity and pleasure" (ibid. p. 11). Kostanje (2016) refers to "thana-capitalism" in which the suffering of others is the main commodity and where death becomes a form of cultural entertainment. This includes the reading of novels or watching films and television which are likened to a secular tourist pilgrimage. Other authors have referred to forms of "cinematic thanatourism" in which film artists recreate or imagine dark spaces of suffering and death in a form of "digital commercialization" and "mergers of representations and their simulacra" (Tzanelli, 2016, pp. 37-38).

Nevertheless, it is important to note that many tourists are not intrinsically driven by an interest in death with dark tourism attractions only forming part of their overall experience (Light, 2017). Indeed, tourists may visit dark tourism sites for leisure and recreational reasons only (Yan et al., 2016). 'Lighter' dark sites are often more popular because they provide a greater level of entertainment, fun and thrills in addition to education (Wyatt et al., 2021). For example, the interest in lighter forms of dark tourism such as ghost hunting have been noted in more than one study (Wyatt et al., 2021; Yu & Egger, 2022).

Despite the enduring media fascination, academic knowledge about serial killers is surprisingly limited (Hodgkinson et al., 2017). Light's (2017) review of dark tourism and thanatourism cites relatively few studies focusing on sites of individual or mass murder in a non-war context. There is also relatively little research on tourists' perspectives of dark tourism (Yu & Egger, 2022). This paper explores the motivation for consuming true and fictional crime including murders and serial killers with an emphasis on literature, films, TV series as well as tourism. A content analysis of the websites of walking tours and other attractions connected to fictional and real serial killers in 10 different cities was undertaken. In addition, a questionnaire was distributed to more than 100 people about their dark tourism activities to identify where serial killers feature in their preferences. Overall, the research analyses the motivations that attract people towards this dark leisure activity as well as identifying associated attractions and their characteristics. Within this analysis, special

attention is paid to the blurring of boundaries between fiction and fact.

2. SERIAL KILLERS IN LITERATURE, MEDIA AND TOURISM

Ziomek (2018) traces the depiction of murder as an aestheticized art form back to the early 19th Century, and Rarick (2009) gives the specific example of Süskind's 'Das Parfum' which blurs the boundaries between art, murder and aesthetic genius. Literature is full of murderous 'anti-heroes' like Camus's *Outsider* or Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov. Tourists can 'follow in the footsteps' of Raskolnikov on a walking tour of 'Dostoevsky's St Petersburg' or 'Walk Camus's Paris' and the places that inspired him to write *The Outsider*. Ziomek (2018) describes how villains, anti-heroes and serial killers have always been mysterious and intriguing. She traces the development of literary essays on murder as art through to the aestheticization of violence in films, often leading the reader or viewer to be seduced by the murderer. This could be because many novels focus on the perpetrator's narrative, rather than that of the victim(s). Detective protagonists are also popular, including Sherlock Holmes or Hercule Poirot. Agatha Christie's popular books and films like *Death on the Nile* have inspired companies to develop whole tours around them (Literary Tours in Egypt, 2020) and Zeynalova (2020) lists a number of locations and landscapes that are associated with Agatha Christie.

Serial murder has featured in numerous forms of entertainment for decades, including books, films, television programmes, comics, music and video games (Schechter, 2003). Films seem to be the greatest medium of serial killer-related entertainment, as hundreds of films have been made about both real and fictional serial killers (Cettl, 2003; Hickey, 2016). Call (2019) shows how the number of films made about serial murder has increased every decade. In recent years, there have been a number of literary serial killers whose actions have also made it onto the silver screen, like *American Psycho* Patrick Bateman or Tom Ripley from *The Talented Mr Ripley*. Despite the labelling of such films as 'entertainment', some studies have suggested that the viewing audience believes that the portrayal is an accurate representation of reality (Dowler & Zawilski, 2007). However, a number of films have also been made about real life serial killers like Ted Bundy, Jeffrey Dahmer, Ed Gein and John Wayne Gacy, not to mention Jack the Ripper, who has become nothing less than a cult figure. As stated by Phegley (2017, p. 102) "Serial killers rely on Jack the Ripper as an origin point to learn how to properly develop into a glorified villain".

It has also been argued that real life serial killers often use literary murderers as inspiration, for example, from Gothic literature and Romanticism. Authors also seek inspiration from real life serial killers and it is thought that Bram Stoker may have used Jack the Ripper as inspiration for *Dracula* (Warwick & Willis, 2007). Serial killers may copy the actions or personas of their fictional counterparts (Jenkins, 1994), for example, some serial killers have used Jekyll and Hyde as a way of describing themselves and their crimes (Warwick, 2006). However, they may also read the biographies of real serial killers, thus blurring the boundaries between fiction and fact (ibid.). For example, Hannibal Lecter (a fictional character from the film *Silence of the Lambs*) is one of the most popular references for serial killers (Jenkins, 1994). On the other hand, it has been suggested that many films about real-life serial killers have mythologized them using the style of Gothic literature, especially those associated with vampires (Picart & Greek, 2003).

Studies show that female serial killers also exist and that their profiles are diverse and their motives for killing can be multiple (e.g. power, money, revenge, excitement, fame) (Harrison et al., 2015). Although female serial killers have featured less in books and films, one prominent example is the 2003 film *Monster* about Aileen Wuornos. Nevertheless, Call's (2019) analysis of 50 films between 1980 and 2015 shows that the serial killers depicted were predominantly males (84.9%).

With chronicles from the past or through the lens of sensationalized media, it is often hard to distinguish between facts and myths. MacDonald (2013, p. 5) refers to the way in which serial killing is discursively produced within media-managed culture as "simultaneously hyperreal and aesthetic", suggesting that such murders appear to transgress reality and become 'quasi-fictional'. Details are sometimes magnified through the tales of folklore or through the need to sell more newspapers, movies and series, portraying some of the world's most notorious serial killers as movie-villains, instead of real-life people with real victims. For example, Countess Elizabeth Báthory, a Hungarian noblewoman is known for being the most prolific female murderer, but the number of her victims is debated. She was accused of torturing and murdering 600 girls and was imprisoned in her chambers until she died. The accusations against her may or may not have been politically motivated to put an end to her political dominance (Pallardy, 2021). Nevertheless, Cachtice Castle in Slovakia is promoted to dark tourists as a place where over 600 murders might have taken place, the legend suggesting that Elizabeth Báthory bathed in the blood of virgins to capture eternal youth (Dark Tourists, 2020).

Although there have been few academic debates about 'true crime', this is an area of increasing interest in the media. Markezic (2022) describes true crime as:

the most in-demand documentary genre in the world, with streaming services now turning the most popular of their kind into dramatic re-enactments with A-list cast. It's art imitating art imitating life. From Silicon Valley to our own backyard, the stories of the atrocities we commit against each other are simply gripping.

Arguably the most famous (or infamous) serial killer is Jack the Ripper. He (presumably a male) was an unidentified serial killer in Whitechapel, London in the 19th century. Andrew (2019) suggests that the unknown identity actually heightens the mystery and fascination. Jack the Ripper has almost become a brand around which a whole industry has developed, including books, films, even video games (Yardley, 2019). He was never caught, not because of the lack of suspects, but due to the lack of useful evidence (Gibson, 2014). The current Jack the Ripper tour in London is one of the most popular walking tours on TripAdvisor, however, such tours have been dated back as far as 1905 (Seaton & Dann, 2018).

Another example includes Ed Gein, who went from being a grave robber to a serial murderer. His mother was a strict, religious and controlling person, whom he adored. After her death, he wanted to become her, which led him to make clothing items and household objects out of women's skin, bones and other female parts. First, he exhumed corpses from local graveyards, but then he killed Mary Hogan and Bernice Worden. On his trial, he was found legally insane, and he was confined to a psychiatric institution, where he died in 1984 (Philbin & Philbin, 2009). Ed Gein's behaviour has inspired numerous books and films, including three of the most influential horror films ever made, which were *Psycho* (1960), *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*

(1974) and *Silence of the Lambs* (1991) (Jenkins, 2022). *Cult of Weird* (2022) offers an unofficial DIY (Do-It-Yourself) tour which includes the location where Ed Gein's house once stood in Wisconsin, as well as several other 'attractions' including cemeteries, his grave and some of the places where he committed his murders. However, the website notes that although some local people wish to share their connections to the Gein legend, they warn that "others seem frustrated with the inescapable reality that the tragedies their families suffered have made their quaint hometown the quintessential destination for dark tourists".

It is often difficult to differentiate between fact and fiction because of the proliferation of TV series and films in addition to the body of literary work on crime and murder. In fact, it has been suggested that true crime is appealing precisely because it mixes fact and fiction, which makes it entertaining and less gruesome to read about or watch from the comfort of one's own home (Yardley et al., 2016). Some authors have even suggested that serial killers even pattern themselves on fictional serial killers (Warwick, 2006; Phegley, 2017). Indeed, Phegley (2017, p. 104) states that "there is no clear division between fact and fiction for serial killers". This has worrying implications for the increasing consumption of both fictional and real depictions of serial killers in literature, media, film, TV and increasingly, tourism. In their systematic review of the serial killing literature, Hodgkinson et al. (2017) highlight what they call 'media-driven misconceptions' about true crime and the nature of serial killers. They criticize the sensationalist and voyeuristic nature of popular media depictions which can lead to unrealistic stereotypes and fail to recognize the socio-cultural contexts that can actually enable serial killers. The glorification and 'touristification' of serial-killing villains like Jack the Ripper is a case in point (Warwick & Willis, 2007).

Although it should be noted that observation of murder is not participation, the boundaries may be sometimes blurred between attraction and repulsion. Yardly (2019) suggests that witnessing true crime raises people's adrenalin. Markezic (2022, p. 1) states that "I think I speak for all who can't turn away from a true crime tale when I say: we're not bad, we're just drawn that way. Drawn to the drama and the humanity. The evil and the curiosity". Ziomek (2018) discusses the aestheticization of fictional serial killers in literature and film, which encourages readers or viewers to engage with or empathize with them (the Netflix series 'You' is a recent case in point). Cook (2017) notes that in literary serial killer fiction, a serial killer is often, paradoxically, depicted as an 'everyman' or average, ordinary human being. This makes it easier for the reader or audience to relate to them. Cettl (2003) also described how films made in the 1960s often portrayed serial killers as people who seemed outwardly normal and even had some sympathetic facets to their personalities. Tourists are sometimes motivated by true crime series and documentaries and they can take part in tours featuring real-life serial killers like H.H. Holmes in Chicago or a Charles Manson experience in Los Angeles. Some tours are so gruesome that they have been temporarily banned like the Jeffrey Dahmer Cream City Cannibal tour in Milwaukee. More recently, a Netflix series about Jeffrey Dahmer's crimes has also sparked controversy over a perceived lack of respect for the victims and their families (Peay, 2022).

3. ATTRACTIONS CONNECTED TO SERIAL KILLERS: RESEARCH METHODS AND FINDINGS

The primary research was both qualitative and quantitative. During the qualitative research, the authors examined ten cities in Europe and the United States of America. All of these cities were either the setting of famous crime novels or the crime scene of a notorious serial killer. These cities were chosen because they contained at least three walking tours connected to this topic and at least two other types of serial killer attractions. Only 'official' tourist attractions were examined where there was a clear indication that they are supposed to be visited by tourists and are at least semi-organized. The content analysis of the websites and the reviews were used to identify attractions related to real and/or fictional serial killers and to evaluate the reactions and opinions of visitors through their online critiques. The aim was to capture both the tourists' and the service providers' attitudes toward serial killer attractions.

The analysis of the written texts on the walking tours' web pages was used to examine the adjectives they use to describe their tours and their frequency. The word frequency analysis using Online-utility.org (2021) aimed to identify the patterns and occurrences of the words used by the service providers to identify which emotions they want to invoke through their website. This analysis also shows the differences and similarities in the ways that cities describe their tourist products, for example, using disturbing, stimulating or entertaining vocabulary.

The analysis of the reviews on the selected walking tours helped to determine the visitors' perception of attractions connected to serial killers and to highlight their positive and negative experiences. The number of reviews also indicates the relative popularity of walking tours in different cities.

Quantitative research was used to determine the way people think about serial killers in the context of dark tourism. The data for this study was collected from a self-administered online survey. A snowball sampling technique was used for the selection of respondents. In this case, an initial group of respondents who were known to be interested in the subject shared the survey among liked-minded contacts resulting in 113 respondents. The sample is relatively small because of the niche and socially controversial nature of dark tourism related to serial killers.

3.1 Content Analysis of Selected Attractions

This section analyses the content and reviews from some of the most popular sites and attractions in the world associated with fictional and real (or true) crime, murder and serial killing. Some detailed examples of these attractions are given in Appendix 1, while the text below examines the nature of the attractions and visitors' experiences of them.

3.1.1 Fictional Crime Locations

3.1.1.1 London, United Kingdom

In London, Jack the Ripper is the most famous serial killer who, despite being real, was turned into a mystical figure throughout the years. The lines between fact and fiction are blurry in the case of Highgate Cemetery too, which was the inspiration behind Christopher Lee's Dracula,

Here, history is intertwined with vampires and occultism (The Secret City, 2021). The city offers a variety of purely fictional serial killers, such as Sweeny Todd, the demon barber, or Moriarty, the mortal enemy of Sherlock Holmes. People can meet with the serial killer barber in the London Dungeon (The London Dungeon, 2021), watch the performance in the theatres (London Theatre Direct, 2021) or participate in one of the numerous Sweeney Todd themed escape rooms. While escape room enthusiasts have the opportunity to participate in a 3-4 hours long immersive game across the city, in Hidden City’s Moriarty’s Game, the participants can solve puzzles, and communicate with the well-known characters of Sherlock Holmes (Hidden City, 2021).

The most frequently used words on the websites were: haunted (8), experience (7), horror (4) and chilling (3). Compared to the true crime walk tours analysed later in the paper, these fictional characters do not seem to be as attractive to the reviewers on TripAdvisor. In these kinds of walking tours, the problem seems to be that there is not enough content or interest to attract consumers.

London, UK

Name	No. of Sites	Time	Price	Reviews	Webpage
Virtual Tour: Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde	8	120 minutes	€5/person	no data	https://booknordics.com/en/product/3444/virtual-tour-dr-jekyll-and-mr-hyde-self-guided-audio-tour-through-london
Sweeney Todd The Demon Barber of Fleet Street	no data	120 minutes	\$17/person	4.0 (6)	https://www.viator.com/tours/London/Sweeney-Todd-The-Demon-Barber-of-Fleet-Street/d737-121791P4
Sweeney Todd and Other Demons	no data	115 minutes	£10	no data	https://www.london-ghost-tour.com/sweeney-todd.htm

Table 1. London’s fictional dark literary tours. Source: Author (2022).

3.1.1.2 New Orleans, United States

New Orleans is not just known for its connection to Voodoo, but for being a symbolic place for vampires, in par with Transylvania. In the media, most, but not all vampires are serial killers since they have to kill to stay alive. Anne Rice, one of the most known vampire book writers grew up in the city and it was the location of her first Vampire Chronicles book *Interview with the Vampire* (Jang, 2016), creating an even more mythical, dark atmosphere for the city. The Hermann-Grima and Gallier Historic Houses (2021) are the inspirations for the home of Louis, Lestat and Claudia, and the movie set of the American Horror Story: Coven’s opening episode. In the Boutique du Vampyre (2021), visitors can find a wide variety of products that can seemingly satisfy the needs of any vampires from all over the world. Other attractions connected to fictional serial killers include the numerous other places from the Interview with the Vampire, the Tomb of Lestat from the book *The Vampire Lestat*, the “vampire bars”, and the movie sets of crime series, such as NCIS, The Originals. Numerous vampire tours are offered.

The tours used words like vampire (22), ghost (12), haunted (7), historic (7) and paranormal (4). The reviews were mostly positive and the visitors complimented the fun experience, the guide’s knowledge, and the respectfully spooky way they presented the stories, while the negative comments were about the fact that the stories are similar in all tours, and that there are too many people in one group. These tours are mostly visited by couples (both older and younger), friends who want to party, and in some cases, families.

New Orleans has attractions connected to both factual and fictional serial killers, and seemingly, the number of those that are about a real-life crime outweighs those that are fictional, but with supernatural elements mixed in the life of the city, sometimes it is not easy to tell what is fact and what is fiction.

New Orleans, USA

Name	No. of Sites	Time	Price	Reviews	Webpage
New Orleans Vampire Tour	7	90 minutes	\$30/person	5,0 (101)	https://hauntedhistorytours.com/our-tours/vampires-new-orleans/
Ghost and Vampire Walking Tour	5	90-120 minutes	\$25/person	5,0 (780)	https://www.frenchquarterphantoms.com/ghost-and-vampire-tour
4in1 Haunted Tour	7	120 minutes	\$28/person	4,5 (6047)	https://witchesbrewtours.com/haunted-ghost-tours-new-orleans/

Table 2. New Orleans’ fictional dark literary tours. Source: Author (2022).

3.1.1.3 Stockholm

Although Stockholm does not have a bloody history in terms of serial killers, the dark and cold Scandinavian winters provide the ideal background for crime stories. With the rise of ‘Nordic Noir’, the number of literary tourists in Nordic countries grew. Books, film adaptations and TV series turned both the capital of Sweden and many smaller cities and villages into perfect tourist destinations for fictional crime lovers, where the fans could walk in the footsteps of their favorite characters without the real threat of true crimes.

These locations are usually not turned into attractions that have closer connection to the crimes themselves, they are visited only because the characters visited them. For example, Mikael Blomkvist’s – Stieg Larsson’s journalist protagonist of the Millennium novels – apartment at Bellmansgatan 1. is a popular meeting point for fans (Visit Stockholm, 2021a). The Stockholm City Museum offers information about each location and they organize their own Millennium walking tour too (Visit Stockholm, 2021b).

The frequently used words of the tours are: mystery (10), murder (6), ghost (5), crime (4). Only one of the tours has reviews and the opinions are mixed. Their main issue was that the history of the place overshadows the theme of the tour and since these are fictional crimes, they do not even have a connection to the past.

Stockholm, Sweden

Name	No. of Sites	Time	Price	Reviews	Webpage
Millennium Books Tour	no data	120 minutes	SEK 400/person	4 stars (27)	https://toursofstockholm.com/tour/the-millennium-books-tour/
Stockholm Self-Guided Murder Mystery Tour	no data	90 minutes	\$44/person	no data	https://www.viator.com/tours/Stockholm/Murder-by-the-Royal-Palace-Self-guided-mystery-city-tour/d907-250720P1
Crime Scene Stockholm	no data	210 minutes	\$370/tour	no data	https://www.toursbylocals.com/Privatetourstockholmvjewcrime

Table 3. Stockholm’ fictional dark literary tours. Source: Author (2022).

3.1.1.4 Oslo

The capital of Norway is also famous among Nordic Noir lovers. Jo Nesbø’s detective, Harry Hole is from this city, and many tourists visit it just to spend time walking in the protagonist’s footsteps. The attractions themselves are not focusing on the fictional crimes (e.g. City Hall or Restaurant Shrøder), but the tours do. Only Sofies Gate 5 – Harry Hole’s apartment building – is listed as his, but it does not offer anything else (Gallagher, 2012) unlike Sherlock Holmes’ apartment in London. A purely fictional crime-oriented attraction is the yearly Krimfestivalen, a three-day-long event for fictional crime writers and their fans to meet and discuss their content (Krimfestivalen, 2022).

Since the end of the book series, the popularity is also diminishing and the tours one-by-one are closing their doors. However, Nordic Noir is still an important genre all over the world, so these tours change and focus on what is popular at that time. Nevertheless, since most of them do not offer these tours anymore, there is not much to say about the reviews. The most used words were: crime (13), detective (4), police (4), Snowman (3) (the latter is one of his most famous books in which the serial killer is called the Snowman.)

Oslo, Norway

Name	No. of Sites	Time	Price	Reviews	Webpage
Harry Hole Tour	No data	120 minutes	NOK 200 /person	5,0 stars (6)	https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g190479-d12295750-Reviews-Authentic_Oslo_Tours-Oslo_Eastern_Norway.html
Jo Nesbo’s Oslo	12	No data	NOK 150 /person	No data	https://www.thelocal.no/2012/0131/jo-nesbo-oslo/
Oslo Crime Walk	8	150 minutes	\$207/tour	5,0 stars (1)	https://www.toursbylocals.com/osloprivateHarryHolecrimewalk

Table 4. Oslo’ fictional dark literary tours. Source: Author (2022).

3.1.1.5 Edinburgh

In this city, it is difficult to differentiate between fact and fiction because they are closely interconnected. It is hard to find something strictly factual (without the embellishment of media) or strictly fictional (without connection to history). The city of Edinburgh had a dark history and now the real and fictional ghost stories are not easily separated. There are some fictional attractions, such as the Jekyll & Hyde bar, a gothic themed bar (Yelp, 2021a), or the locations associated with Ian Rankin’s Inspector Rebus books, e.g. Rebus’s place on Marchmont Street. The tours were popular once, but after Covid-19, the Rebus Tours are no longer welcoming guests. Other notable literary connections are Ambrose Parry’s *The Way of All Flesh* in the streets of the Old Town (The Book Trail, 2021) and the now-closed Sherlock Holmes themed Moriarty Bar (Yelp, 2021b).

The tours in Edinburgh mainly cover the bloody history of the city, but there are some more fictional-oriented tours where the legends and myths are more prominent. The frequently used words of these sites were: murder (4), gore (3), torture (2), ghoul (2), ghost (2), crime (2). The tours are mostly for each age group, the reviewers visited them alone, with their friends and even with little children, who also enjoyed the experience. The only negative comments were about the unreliability of organized tours or boredom.

Edinburgh, Scotland

Name	No. of Sites	Time	Price	Reviews	Webpage
Rebus Tours	No data	120 minutes	£7.50 /person	4 stars (117)	https://www.tripadvisor.co.nz/Attraction_Review-g186525-d672448-Reviews-Rebus_Tours-Edinburgh_Scotland.html
Thistle Knights Tours Day Tours	No data	No data	£10/person	4,5 stars (131)	https://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g186525-d2712663-Reviews-Thistle_Knights_Tours_Day_Tours-Edinburgh_Scotland.html
Ghost and Gore Walking Tour of Edinburgh	No data	80 minutes	\$16/person	5 (340)	https://www.viator.com/tours/Edinburgh/Ghost-and-Gore-Walking-Tour-of-Edinburgh/d739-3830WITCHERY1

Table 5. Edinburgh’ fictional dark literary tours. Source: Author (2022).

3.1.2 True Crime Locations

3.1.2.1 London, United Kingdom

The Jack the Ripper Museum offers an insight into the unsolved case of the Whitechapel murders, information about the lives of the victims, about the main suspects, and the details of the police investigation (Jack the Ripper Museum, 2021). The positive comments mention that it is worth visiting not just for the serial killer himself, but because it provides useful information about the living conditions of the victims. Yet, some visitors thought that the

museum did not present the era authentically and that a walking tour would give a better experience (Jack the Ripper Museum, 2021).

The City of London Police Museum has an exhibition about the investigation of the Ripper victims and the supposed letters of the murderer (City of London Police Museum, 2021), while the Ten Bells is a pub that some of the victims used to visit and now is one of the destinations of several tours (Ten Bells, 2021). Other attractions connected to this serial killer include the Royal London Hospital Museum, three cemeteries where the victims were buried, out of which, the City of London Cemetery has a memorial that can be visited and a mural to counteract the fame of Jack the Ripper by commemorating the Canonical Five victims (Flood, 2020).

Other attractions are the London Dungeon, a unique Dark Fun Factory attraction where history and murder meet with entertainment (The London Dungeon, 2021) and escape rooms connected to famous serial killers.

The most frequently used words connected to this topic were: Ripper (34), murder(s) (25), killer(s) (22), experience (16), blood (9), crime (7). Interestingly, there are differences compared to the tours in New Orleans, as these words are more crime-focused, but at the same time, none of the tours use more than one or two times the word “victim”. Most of the tours only have positive reviews: “bloody brilliant”, “must do”, “funny” and “informative”. The few negative ones are about the lack of new information and the fact that they could not hear anything due to the crowd in the city.

London, UK

Name	No. of Sites	Time	Price	Reviews	Webpage
Serial Killers: The Blood and Tears Walk	11	120 minutes	\$21/person	5.0 stars (113)	https://www.viator.com/tours/London/Blood-and-Tears-Walk-chilling-and-informative-two-hour-London-Horror-tour/d737-72652P2
Murder Mile Walks	15	120 minutes	\$15/person	5.0 stars (156)	https://www.murdermiletours.com/
Jack the Ripper Tour	11	120 minutes	\$16/person	4.9 stars (293)	https://www.jack-the-ripper-tour.com/

Table 6. London’s true dark literary tours. Source: Author (2022).

3.1.2.2 New Orleans, United States

Two types of attractions that have a connection to serial killers are museums and tours. The Museum of Death is *the* museum for everybody who is interested in true crime. The exhibited objects include, but are not limited to paintings by John Wayne Gacy, letters from Jeffrey Dahmer and Manson family photographs. The museum’s objective is to educate people about death and the mystique surrounding it. The reviews are varied from “the best experience of my life” to “waste of time”. Some of the reviewers objected to the “morbidness” of the place (Museum of Death, 2021).

Based on the information found on the websites and the reviews written about the tours, the price and the routes are similar (e.g. the LaLaurie Mansion in the French Quarters). The six most used words connected to dark tourism on these websites are ghost(s) (153), crime/criminal (35), haunted (33), thrillers (20), killers (20) and history (14). The words “engaging”, “passionate”, “knowledgeable” and “fun” were the most common for the 5-star reviews by the visitors and “drawn out”, “boring”, “too much recent history” and “similar to other tours” were characteristic for the negative reviews. This shows that while tours focus partly on the history of the place as well as on gruesome crimes, entertainment also plays a major role and seems to be an expected part of the visit. Based on these comments, the visitors are usually between twenty and thirty, mainly women, who visit the tours with friends or family.

New Orleans, USA

Name	No. of Sites	Time	Price	Reviews	Webpage
Killers and Thrillers Tour	7	90 minutes	\$37/person	4.8 stars (945)	https://ghostcitytours.com/ghost-tours/new-orleans-ghost-tours/killers-thrillers-tour/
Sinister Criminal Intentions	4	120 minutes	\$30/person	5.0 stars (421)	https://uniquenola.com/tours/sinister-criminal-intentions/
New Orleans True Crime Experience	4	120 minutes	\$30/person	4.85 stars (398)	https://www.airbnb.com/experiences/355409?set_bev_on_new_domain=1633552151_ODUwYmE4MjVhMzM2&locale=en

Table 7. New Orleans’ true dark literary tours. Source: Author (2022).

3.1.2.3 Los Angeles

The second Museum of Death can be found in Los Angeles. It is currently under reconstruction, but the museum itself holds similar items to the one in New Orleans (Museum of Death, 2021). Another famous (now almost world-famous due to the Netflix series about it) location is the Cecil Hotel – or as it is named now, the Stay on Main hotel. While it is mainly known because of the mysterious death of Elisa Lam, it also has a crime-filled reputation due to suicides, but also because it was the home for a longer period of time of two serial killers: Richard Ramirez, “The Night Stalker” and Jack Unterweger, Austria’s most famous murderer (Krueger, 2021).

A memorial is being constructed for more than 200 black women and girls who were victims of serial killers in South Los Angeles in the early 1980s, to remember them and to honor their memories (The Memorial, 2021).

The webpages use words like “notorious” (14), “ghost” (8), “murder(s)” (6), “mystery” (6), and “crime” (7) to describe the scope of the tours. The reviews state that these tours give a unique Los Angeles experience and that they are not to be missed by true crime lovers. The negative reviews were mostly related to the high prices. Due to the pandemic, many guided tours had to close their business. In Los Angeles, it is more noticeable than it was in the previously examined places, as even the most famous Manson-family tour, the Dearly Departed Tours had to permanently close (Dearly Departed Tours, 2021).

Los Angeles, USA

Name	No. of Sites	Time	Price	Reviews	Webpage
DTLA Murder Mystery Ghost Tour	Variable	180 minutes	\$45/person	4.0 stars (13)	https://www.thereallosangeles.com/tours/dtla-murder-mystery-ghost-tour/
Notorious Los Angeles	6	240 minutes	Variable	5.0 stars (6)	https://www.thereallosangeles.com/tours/dtla-murder-mystery-ghost-tour/
Haunted Hollywood Walking Tour	5+	120 minutes	\$35/person	5.0 stars (16)	https://www.exp1.com/los-angeles-tours/haunted-hollywood-walking-tour/

Table 8. Los Angeles’ true dark literary tours. Source: Author (2022).

3.1.2.4 Vienna

The Crime Museum of Vienna is an interesting attraction about the Viennese criminal history. It shows how criminal justice evolved throughout the years from the Middle Ages to the Habsburg-Hungarian Monarchy to current times and exhibits, for example the skull of Hugo Schenk (Austrian serial killer in the late 1800s). Most of the information is in German, but they are working on translating them into English (Wiener Kriminal Museum, 2021). It is informative and only worth visiting if somebody is interested in criminal history. The reviewers’ biggest problem seems to be that it is in German (Vienna Crime Museum, 2021), however, this research only covered those reviews that were written in English.

Other attractions connected to serial killers are escape rooms and city-trail games, the Jack the Ripper attraction in the Prater (Jack the Ripper, 2021) and the house of the infamous Hungarian countess, Elizabeth Báthory (Ungarisches Haus, 2021).

While Vienna has its own dark history, it is not as prominent as London and New Orleans (at least, for English-speaking visitors). However, those who commented on these tours, liked them very much for being informative and entertaining. The website’s six most commonly used words connected to dark tourism were: history (13), dark (10), secret (8), criminal (6), crime(s) (6), and mysterious (5).

Vienna, Austria

Name	No. of Sites	Time	Price	Reviews	Webpage
Vienna Criminal History Tour	8	120 minutes	\$23/person	4.9 stars (12)	https://www.getyourguide.com/vienna-l7/vienna-criminal-history-tour-in-german-t51444/
Terrible Crimes in Vienna	13	120 minutes	\$27/person	5.0 stars (2)	https://primetours.at/tours/terrible-crimes-in-vienna-macabre-exciting/
The Dark Side of Vienna	5	120 minutes	\$29/person	5.0 stars (6)	https://secretvienna.org/the-dark-side-of-vienna/

Table 9. Vienna’s true dark literary tours. Source: Author (2022).

3.1.2.5 Budapest

The capital of Hungary also has some interesting connections to serial killers, such as the infamous Elizabeth Báthory, who was mentioned earlier. The Murder Exhibition – a temporary exhibition that was first opened in Budapest in 2012 and was open for a few months each year for seven years – introduced the world’s most famous serial killers to the public with the help of modern technology and special effects. On TripAdvisor, only 55 visitors reviewed it, but many Hungarian blogs wrote about this topic. The positive comments praised it for the audio-visual experiences and the detailed content, while the negative ones conveyed their boredom and disappointment in the overall quality (Murder - The Exhibition, 2021).

Budapest has its own Police Museum. The exhibition portrays the Hungarian police work and the typical crimes – including information about at least five Hungarian serial killers. The exhibition presents cases that are interesting either by the nature of the case or by the degree of interest given by the media (Rendőrmúzeum, 2021). Most visitors find the exhibition interesting and diverse, but some thought that there are not enough recent cases (Police Museum, 2021).

The websites mostly used the following words: legends (24), history (19), mysteries (12), dark (11), vampires (7), bloody (6), and killers (6). According to the visitors’ feedback, the tours was "fun", and an "enjoyable way to experience Budapest", that they would "highly recommend", but some noted the lack of information about the tour, that it conveyed "common information", with "no details".

Budapest, Hungary

Name	No. of Sites	Time	Price	Reviews	Webpage
Mysteries and Legends of Budapest Tour	No data	105 minutes	\$21/person	5.0 star (2)	https://www.civitatis.com/en/budapest/mysteries-legends-tour/
Investigation About the First Hungarian Serial Killer (Hungarian)	No data	210 minutes	\$6/person	No data	https://stayhappening.com/e/nyomoz%C3%A1s-az-els%C5%91-magyar-sorozatgyilkos-ut%C3%A1n-s%C3%A9ta-E2IST5714A
Night-time Dark History and Vampire Tour	No data	105 minutes	\$21/person	4.8 (176)	https://www.mysteriumtours.com/budapest/bloody-tales-from-within-the-castle-walls/

Table 10. Budapest’s true dark literary tours. Source: Author (2022).

3.2 Summary of the Content Analysis

According to TripAdvisor reviews, dark literary fiction tourists are looking for detailed content in their walking tours, diversity of information, good guide knowledge and delivery, as well as reliability and excitement. In terms of frequently used words in reviews, it seems that tourists refer regularly to ‘ghosts’ and ‘haunting’, confirming Wyatt et al.’s (2021) suggestion that such experiences afford a lighter, entertaining and therefore more popular experience. In some cases (e.g. Scandinavia), it is not possible to connect easily fact and fiction in tours because the content is purely fictional. ‘Nordic noir’ tourism also illustrates the

temporary nature of literary dark tourism (i.e. it is only popular with tourists while the books or associated media are being consumed).

True crime attraction tourists were curious about the era in which crimes took place and were seeking authentic representation. They were also looking for detailed content, especially those who were particularly knowledgeable (e.g. in the case of Jack the Ripper). In the more gruesome and less mythologized sites (i.e. those associated with American serial killers), some visitors were distressed by the morbidity, whereas others were attracted to the entertaining parts of tours. It is perhaps surprising that the majority of consumers of this type of tourism were young women. On the other hand, many victims of serial killers are women and such visits may help them to protect themselves better in future.

These analysed places are niche attractions, but true crime enthusiasts and even those people who are mainly interested in history rather than the bloodier parts like to visit them. Some go to learn, to have a better knowledge of the darkest part of the human mind, some go for fun, while others visit because they believe in paranormal activities such as ghosts and hauntings. As the examined cities show, most cities that have more than one type of serial killer attraction can be found in the United States, which is not surprising, as the number of active serial killers at any time is the highest there and the American media like to sensationalize them. It is interesting to note, that out of the countries of the world, English-speaking countries have the highest number of serial killer attractions.

The US-UK orientation is even more pronounced in fictional serial killer-related tourism (no doubt due to the dominance of the English language and English translations), but it seems that fictional serial killers are not as popular as real ones. Only those, who have global notoriety have attractions and tours connected to their names. It seems that fictional crime tourism is more a form of literary/film tourism focused on crimes rather than a type of dark tourism.

Crime fiction tourism elsewhere is on the rise, especially in the Scandinavian countries, but the experiences are less connected to serial killers and more to individual murders or other types of crimes (e.g. organized crime, prostitution). Real serial killer attractions focus on the method and style of the murders, the locations and the history, while attractions connected to fictional serial killers tend to focus on the detectives who make sure the criminals get behind bars.

3.3 Quantitative Research

A questionnaire was distributed to a sample of dark tourists who specified an interest in and knowledge of serial killers. The demographics of the questionnaire sample are shown in the table below.

Gender	Male	53%
	Female	36%
	Non-binary	11%
Age	16-18	11%
	19-25	27%
	26 - 35	28%
	36-45	15%
	46+	19%
Marital status	Single	49%
	Married	24%
	In a relationship	26%
	Widowed	1%
Region	Europe	63%
	Americas	23%
	Asia	14%

Table 11. Profile of the sample. Source: Author (2022).

When asked about the reasons for visiting attractions connected to serial killers, respondents thought that people mainly want to learn about the serial killers themselves as they are interesting and fascinating, as well as to enjoy being frightened. The victims are seen as only marginally interesting in comparison. This is an accurate description of the previously examined attractions: they are mostly about the serial killers themselves, although detectives also feature prominently in fictional dark literary tourism. When asked about the ethics of sites related to serial killers, 44.2% of respondents felt that the places did not care enough about the victims. It was considered that the sites were more likely to popularize serial killers than to immortalize the innocent victims.

A question was asked about the impact of media on the portrayal of serial killers. 63% think that the media portrays serial killers as more appealing than they should be given the nature of their crimes. A further question compared the consumption of books, podcasts, and series relating to different types of crime (historical events, fictional and true crimes) which showed that most people (53.1%) like reading about history. Fewer people (34.5%) consume fictional crimes regularly (50.4%). Meanwhile, 35.4% read true crime often and 49.6% sometimes. This shows a preference for real historical events rather than fictional or true crime.

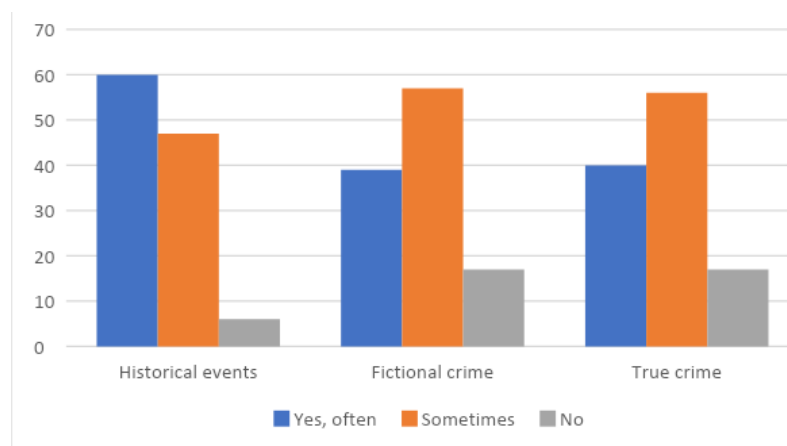


Figure 1. Preferences for Media Consumption of Fictional and True Crime. Source: Author (2022).

Only a third of respondents consider themselves to be especially knowledgeable about serial killers, which corresponds to the number who like to consume true crime. This interest and knowledge mainly stem from watching documentaries, an interest in psychology or a fascination with a specific serial killer. Over 80% of the respondents are nevertheless fascinated by serial killers, their psychology and thought processes as well as the reason for turning into a serial killer. A third of respondents are frightened by the sense of danger they create or how different they are from 'normal' people. For 32.7% they are shocking, while 21.2% think they are mysterious. For some people, they are interesting because they do not make sense (14.2%) because they were made famous by the media (4.4%) and 8.8% have some other reasons (e.g. they are attractive, their existence is so unreal, etc.).

The majority of the respondents knew about serial killers from the United States like Ted Bundy and Charles Manson, as well as Jack the Ripper. A third of the respondents (36%) were unsure about visiting such an attraction for ethical reasons. These respondents were mostly those who never or only sometimes consume true crime content. Slightly fewer (32%) would like to visit one, while 26% are absolutely not interested. When comparing the attitudes towards the possibility of visiting a serial killer attraction, it shows that younger respondents aged 18 and below had not yet had the opportunity, but are quite interested in doing so, while the 19-25 and older than 46 age groups are hesitant to do so. In contrast, it is the respondents between 36 and 45 who are most opposed to visitation. It is worth noting what type of attraction they would want to visit if there were a possibility for it. 9.7% had visited the Murder Exhibition in Budapest, while 32.7% would be interested in doing so in the future. The Museum of Death in Los Angeles was less visited than expected (4.5%), but 39.8% would like to see it. Even if most people know about Jack the Ripper, only 6.2% had visited the museum, but 41.6% would like to go there and see what it is about. Some had already visited the H.H. Holmes Haunted House in Chicago (53.1%). The one attraction that more than half (52.2%) of the respondents wish to visit and 6.2% had visited at least once is the National Museum of Crime and Punishment in Washington. Overall, it seems that the respondents would prefer to visit sites that have little connection to the specific serial killer and are entertaining (e.g. H.H. Holmes Haunted House), or sites that are mainly educational without being overly dramatic and bloody (e.g. National Museum of Crime and Punishment). This corresponds to some of the theoretical conclusions of other authors that dark tourism sites form part of leisure and recreation (Yan et al., 2016), are only one part of the tourist experience (Light, 2017) and that tourists prefer to be educated and entertained (Wyatt et al., 2021).

4. CONCLUSION

Interest in and fear of serial killers has been heightened in recent years because of the increasing number of films and series that focus on their crimes. However, the interest in murder, both fictional and real, can be traced back to the 19th century or even earlier. Murder and serial killing have often been aestheticized with the murderer depicted as an attractive or seductive anti-hero. Empathy with serial killers is often created through aestheticization as well as the depiction of such characters as ordinary people. This impression is intensified by the frequent use of first-person narration. Even real-life serial killers seem to achieve a mythologized and cult status. Jack the Ripper is a classic example, but so too is Ed Gein, Jeffrey Dahmer and others who have featured in popular films. Real-life serial killers appear to have influenced authors and film-makers, while books and films have, in turn, inspired serial killers.

Historical accounts of serial killers are sometimes exaggerated to the point where the truth is not always known. Still, this does not stop some dark tourists from seeking out experiences connected with such stories. Their motivations vary with equal measures of attraction and repulsion. As stated earlier in this article, it is natural for humans to be fascinated by death, but as suggested by Light (2017), it is not often an obsession, merely a passing interest within the overall tourist experience. Indeed, interest in fictional crime and murder may be described more as literary and film tourism than dark tourism.

Overall, it is important to note that this is a very small niche of dark tourism compared to the large number of consumers of serial killer literature, films and TV series. For this reason, the sample of questionnaire respondents was relatively limited too and one cannot generalize from these results as much as one might from a detailed social media analysis (e.g. Yu & Egger, 2022). Nevertheless, one might have expected the tourist interest to be greater, but this most likely connects to the distance created by the screen and the convenience of consuming fictional and true crime from one's own home. Although people want to be entertained, it seems that they do not want to be too closely connected to real tragedies and may not seek them out in real life. People are generally concerned about the ethics of tourism connected to serial killers and might only want to know about them out of fascination, fear or even self-protection. Although tourists seem more interested in real serial killers than fictional ones, only a minority of them are actually motivated and brave enough to confront the reality beyond the comfort of their own homes.

In terms of a future research agenda for dark tourism associated with literary or media-inspired serial killers, it would be interesting to design a study that delves deeper into tourist motivations for consumption and visitation. One of the limitations of our study is that the sample for the questionnaire was relatively small and the reviews of product websites were more focused on practical and service-related issues rather than more profound psychological issues. Such a study could perhaps re-visit Seaton's (1996) continuum of motivations for thanatourism and relationships between tourist and victims. It could include discussions of superiority (Konstanje & George, 2017) versus empathy (Sather-Wagstaff, 2016). Given the proliferation of violent media in recent years since Dann (2005) first noted its pervasive influence, it would be interesting to analyse further its effects on motivation and behaviour in both everyday leisure and tourism.

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