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From Nuclear Disaster to Film Tourism: The Impact of the Chernobyl Mini-Series on the Exclusion Zone

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Abstract

The research explores how a well-known historical location associated with disaster tourism became a destination of film tourism. Thanks to the HBO miniseries, the nuclear accident zone around Chernobyl registered a record number of tourists in 2019. The study includes a complex tourism analysis of Chernobyl. The examination of the demand and supply sides of local film tourism is followed by an analysis of elements such as the number of visitors and the supply of thematic routes. The study also analyses interviews with local travel companies and information on their social media platforms. The clear aim of the research is to find out how a successful film may affect the tourism of a location. Using the results of the research, the study discusses how a site previously associated with disaster tourism utilizes the opportunities of film tourism, as well as the opportunities provided by a possible change of profile.

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Introduction

"Pop culture is changing the tourism industry - the proof is in Chernobyl"; "Chernobyl is now an official tourist attraction"; "Disaster tourism in Chernobyl has been boosted by a new series on the site"; "Chernobyl to become official tourist attraction, Ukraine says". Since the summer of 2019, headlines like these have appeared on CNBC, Forbes, turizmus.com, CNN and many other media outlets. The industry is already familiar with the impact of film-related tourism, but this phenomenon has so far been

studied mostly in relation to feature films and motion pictures on fictional events. The series has created a specific trend under the banner of disaster tourism, to which film tourism itself can be organically linked. In defining disaster tourism, however, it is essential to define dark tourism, since these two concepts are often used synonymously, despite the fact that dark tourism is used as a generic term in the literature.

In the 21st century, postmodernism has created a whole new focus in tourism, with a clear emphasis on experience and uniqueness. The area of the Chernobyl disaster has also been a case in point, with a new and interesting fusion of tourism offerings that makes the destination distinctly unique. The film series presented in 2019 (and its impact) has further promoted the development of the area, considering the needs of post-modern tourists.

The Chernobyl disaster has also become a part of common knowledge, a well-known event in human history. In a rather morbid way, it was even associated with the Ukrainian nation itself in South Korean television network MBC's coverage of the opening ceremony of the 2021 Tokyo Olympics.

HBO's five-part miniseries Chernobyl has fundamentally changed the way we understand and perceive location and disaster tourism. The impact of the HBO series surprised even the producers, who had not expected such acclaim from viewers and the industry alike. The production on the 1986 tragedy topped the charts thanks to its historical authenticity, a script that took nearly two and a half years of painstaking research and an excellent cast. The research aims to examine the process of how a historical disaster site became a popular tourist destination, the impact of the series on the area, the changes in infrastructure and the film tourism attractions and products available in the area.

Key Terms in this Chapter

Exclusion Zone (/dictionary/exclusion-zone/103837): The Chernobyl Exclusion Zone is the 30-km radius around the power plant that was evacuated in the wake of the disaster. The zone remains in place today and is largely uninhabited. In total, about 116,000 people were evacuated from the exclusion zone.

Postmodern Tourist (/dictionary/postmodern-tourist/103835): The postmodern tourist is well-informed, does not accept the opinions of others or mass products, wants to organise his/her own travel programme and wants to actively participate in the activities. The tourist of the post-industrial society "participates."

Place Placement (/dictionary/place-placement/103838): A marketing communication tool where the focus is on location placement. Filmed location placement brings the image and name of a destination to potential visitors who could only be reached through a high-cost marketing campaign.

Postmodern Tourism (/dictionary/postmodern-tourism/103834): The individual is in the focus, mass tourism is rejected. The most important elements are the other motivations of visitors (studying, shopping). Heterogeneous demand is typical, visitors' consumption patterns are completely different. There are few return visits to familiar, established places.

Disaster Tourism (/dictionary/disaster-tourism/75968): A common point that emerges from the definition of dark tourism and disaster tourism is that potential destinations are places with a large number of deaths and/or tragedies resulting in severe natural disasters. The difference between the two concepts lies in their impact. Whereas dark tourism has no immediate impact, disaster tourism has an impact on people in the present day and age, even decades later.

Chernobyl (/dictionary/chernobyl/103836): Chernobyl is a name used for both the city and the nuclear power facility. The nuclear power plant was located approximately 14.5 kms from the city of Chernobyl. The city was evacuated about 30 hours after the nuclear explosion and remains within the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone. Before the disaster, it was home to an estimated 14,000 people.

Dark Tourism (/dictionary/dark-tourism/60239): All travel related to death, disasters or gruesome events, visiting places associated with natural disasters, tragedies, battles, where the focus is on satisfying individual curiosity.

Film Tourism (/dictionary/film-tourism/103827): The cultural tourism sector includes trips where the primary motivation of the traveller is to visit a film location. However, it also includes film business trips, visits to film theme parks and film studios.

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