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Dark tourism: Growth potential of niche tourism in the Free State Province, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Dark tourism involves tourists visiting sites of death, disaster and depravity. Well known dark tourism sites include Chernobyl in the Ukraine, the 9/11 Memorial in New York, and the Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland. Battlefields of World War I and II are also excellent examples of dark tourism sites. Dark tourism has become a niche tourism sector with great potential for future tourism growth. In South Africa, the FSGLTA acting as the marketing arm of the Free State, targets to increase its tourism numbers and therefore are looking for means of growing the tourism arrivals towards the province. Dark tourism has been identified as one of their ways to grow tourism. The main objective of the paper is to reveal the niche tourism potential of the Free State by focusing on the South African War (1899–1902). The broader aim is to establish the typical profile of South African War enthusiasts.

KEYWORDS

Dark tourism; Anglo-Boer War; South African War; battlefields; Free State Province

1. Introduction

The number of tourists visiting South Africa exceeded ten million in 2016, indicating an increase of 12,8% compared to 2015. International tourists also recorded an 2,4% increase in visitation numbers during 2017, compared to 2016 (NDTRSA, 2018). In 2018 a total of 10 472 105 tourist arrivals was recorded which was a growth of 1.8% compared to 2017 (NDTRSA, 2018).

With this growth in mind, it is important for destinations to have a product offering which are unique and based on the needs of tourists. In this sense, dark tourism can be classified as a niche tourism mode, increasing in popularity world-wide (Sharpley & Stone, 2009:5; Chang, 2017:2; Proos & Hattingh, 2019:2). Dark tourism involves tourists visiting sites of death, disaster and depravity (Lennon & Foley, 2000:13; Moeller, 2005:10; Sharpley & Stone, 2009:5; Heidelberg, 2015:76; Lee, 2016:697; Chang, 2017:1; Dark Tourism – definition of dark tourism in English, 2017; Proos & Hattingh, 2019:2). According to Chang (2017:2), dark tourism encompasses many different aspects of activities and destinations, whilst tourists travelling to war sites, battlefields and cemeteries, is termed as battlefield tourism and is seen as a component of dark tourism (Moeller, 2005:6; Van der Merwe, 2014:123; Chang, 2017:1; Proos & Hattingh, 2019:2).

The relationship between tourism and death has become a mainstream research topic (Allman, 2017:vii). Since 2011, a recognisable growth in research on dark tourism is noticeable, and includes published research articles (Hartmann, 2014:166; Murphy & Murphy, 2015:8; Kerr & Price, 2016; Chang, 2017; Light, 2017:276; Boateng et al., 2018), and theses (Miles, 2012; Gaya, 2013; Deutsch, 2014; Mencfel, 2016:10). Chang (2017) states in his research that dark tourism is a wonderful tool for education, and that dark tourists have a desire to understand the history of conflicts. Gaya (2013:13) adds that education offers knowledge and understanding of devastating events.

Iliev (2020) agrees that interest in dark tourism are rising and that research about the topic fills a void in current research studies. He indicated that older studies focussed on motivations whilst newer studies, focusses more on experiences, as this paper proposes (Dobscha, 2016; Biran & Buda, 2018). Stone (2018) postulates that concentrating on personal and individual experiences of visiting dark sites are growing and that a need therefore exists to identify these needs. This paper is applicable with the newer research penchant and adds value to a specific niche tourism market in the study area, the Free State Province. With the developmental potential of dark tourism in the Free State in its early stages, the researchers are of the opinion that profile development are an important first step to add. In order to develop, it is important to know what tourists want and need.

The South African War (1899–1902) was fought across South Africa. The Free State Province, situated in the centre of South Africa, played a pivotal role during the war and thus has much to offer concerning dark tourism. Dark tourism sites in the province range from battlefields, cemeteries, concentration camps to museums. This investigation aims to investigate the niche tourism potential of the Free State Province by focusing on the South African War (1899–1902) as a dark tourism destination. The broader aim is to establish the typical profile of a South African War enthusiast. The investigation included all the Free State dark tourism attractions concerning the South African War (1899–1902).

1.1. Dark tourism

Tarlow (2005:48) states that dark tourism is ‘visitations to places where tragedies or historically noteworthy death has occurred and that continue to impact our lives’. According to Stone & Sharpley (2008:574), dark tourism is not a new phenomenon, as people have long been drawn purposefully or otherwise, towards sites, attractions or events linked in one way or another with death, suffering, violence or disaster. Early forms of death related tourism could be traced back to the Roman gladiatorial games, tours to hangings in England, or attendance at Medieval public executions (Stone & Sharpley, 2008:574; Deutsch, 2014:10; Allman, 2017:8).

Reed (2018:ii) stated that ‘dark tourism comes from the practice of Thanatourism (Death Tourism), and transitioned over time to follow the guideline of dark tourism’. The practice of death tourism shifted from Thanatourism to dark tourism, and many scholars use the terms dark tourism and Thanatourism interchangeably (Reed, 2018:21). Dark tourism has become widespread and diverse, and as previously mentioned, involves visitation to battlefields, murder and massacre sites, places where celebrities died, graveyards and internment sites, memorials, events and exhibitions featuring relics and reconstruction of death (Stone & Sharpley, 2008:577; Dunkley et al., 2011:860). Battlefield tourism probably constitutes ‘the largest single category of tourist attractions

in the world' (Smith, 1998:205; Stone & Sharpley, 2008:574). According to Dunkley et al. (2011:860), dark tourism is a practice which is on the increase whilst Chang (2017:2) alludes to the fact that dark tourism is able to provide economic meaning to old places, such as battlefields.

According to Deutsch (2014:19) it is challenging to state what exactly drives tourists to dark tourism sites. However, Ashworth & Hartmann (2005), in Miles (2012:30), alluded to three main motivational factors for visitation to dark tourism sites (pure curiosity, empathy, and horror). Gaya (2013:10) also alludes to motivational factors, which includes:

1. Pure curiosity in that tourists are drawn to the experience of the uncommon;
2. Novelty seeking;
3. Remembrance;
4. Education;
5. Empathy, whereby visitors can identify with the victims of atrocity and;
6. Horror.

Examples of international dark tourism attractions include, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Poland, National 9/11 Memorial & Museum, 'Ground Zero', New York, USA, Robben Island, South Africa, and The War Remnants Museum, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam (Mencfel, 2016:34 Dark Tourism: The Demand for new Experiences, 2017; Nhlabathi, 2017:2; Hohenhaus, 2018; Virgili et al., 2018:61). The television show, 'Dark Tourist', which can be viewed on Netflix, is a prime example of the growing interest in dark tourism worldwide (Eloff, 2018). Whilst there are a number of international high profile dark tourism sites, this investigation focuses on the South African War dark tourism attractions available in the Free State Province in South Africa. The following section alludes to niche tourism.

1.2. Niche tourism

Numerous definitions of niche tourism are found in literature. The National Department of Tourism, Republic of South Africa (2019:v), defines niche tourism as

a tourism product which is custom-made to meet the needs and demands of a particular group of tourists. It is any type of special interest driving tourism development, including agriculture, the culinary arts, culture, heritage, literature, film, architecture, adventure and sports.

defines a niche market as 'a market segment, usually with a well-defined product that can be tailored to meet the interest of the consumer' (George, 2019:245). According to Ali-Knight (2011:vi), 'locations with specific niche products are able to establish and position themselves, as niche tourism destinations'. Numerous forms of niche tourism have started to emerge, and niche tourism opposes the homogenous and undifferentiated mass tourism product. Some more examples of niche tourism markets range from battlefields-, beach-, beer-, sex- to dark tourism (George, 2019:245). According to Nhlabathi (2017:47), dark tourism has been identified as an emerging market niche and needed further investigation to understand this phenomenon.

Whilst numerous studies have been conducted on niche tourism (Acorn Consulting Partnership Ltd, 2008; Tassiopoulos & Haydam, 2008; Ali-Knight, 2011; Assistant

et al., 2015; Dinis & Krakover, 2016; Mxunyelwa & Tshetu, 2018), Ali-Knight's (2011) PhD established that niche tourism products offer destinations an opportunity to differentiate and reposition themselves to a more distinct, lucrative market. Niche tourism thus provides destinations with a unique opportunity to develop the regions' socio economic impacts. With niche tourism identified as an engine of growth, the following section alludes to the Free State Province as a tourist destination.

1.3. Free State Province as tourist destination

The Free State Province is situated in the heart of South Africa and shares an international border with Lesotho on the eastern border whilst wedged between the Vaal River in the north and the Orange River in the south. Bordering provinces include Northern Cape, Eastern Cape, North-West, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal, and the Gauteng Province (de Klerk & Proos, 2018:1036). The province offers open skies, farms, mountains, and widely dispersed towns (Free State Attractions, 2018). The capital city of the Free State Province is Bloemfontein, which is also the judicial capital of South Africa (Bloemfontein, 2018).

The Free State became a province of South Africa in 1910. The name derives from the Orange River which forms the southern border and it boasts numerous natural, historical and cultural attractions (South African Tourism, no date; Visser & Kotze, 2006:98; Free State Attractions, 2018). Natural attractions include the sandstone cliffs of Golden Gate in the eastern Free State Highlands, and the Vredefort Meteorite Dome (SAVenues.com, 2020). Historical attractions include the National Museum, Women's Memorial, Presidency, and the First and Fourth Raadsaal, all situated in Bloemfontein (South African Tourism, no date; Steyn, 1987:147; Free State Attractions, 2018). Other noteworthy attractions include the Nelson Mandela Statue situated on Naval hill and the Wesleyan Church, where the ANC were founded on 8 January 1912. Cultural attractions include the Basotho Cultural Village in the Golden Gate National Park (South African Tourism, no date).

The Free State Province is a popular weekend destination for tourists from mainly the Gauteng Province to Parys and Clarens. Parys and Clarens offer tourists the opportunity to engage in adventure activities such as rock climbing, mountain biking, and white-water rafting. The typical day and overnight tourist visit the Free State Province for the following reasons: Visiting Friends and Relatives (VFR); Shopping; Leisure; and Cultural occasions (South African Tourism, no date; Visser & Kotze, 2006; Maluleke, 2019).

Most tourists who visit the Free State Province, visit the province for reasons other than visiting heritage sites (NDTRSA, 2018), with VFR and shopping being the most popular reasons as indicated. International tourists have neglected the Free State Province as a destination so far (Visser & Hoogendoorn, 2012:72; Proos et al., 2017). This leaves an opportunity to develop tourism attractions based around heritage, which could potentially lead to drawing international and domestic tourists to the Free State Province through effective marketing of heritage attractions.

According to Visser & Kotze (2006:99), and Proos et al. (2017), Free State tourism products are unevenly distributed in the province. Thus, strategies should be developed to address the issue, and assist in ways to expand the tourism product-base in the Free State. One way to address this is by utilising the dark tourism attractions in the province

as a potential tourism attraction due to its geographical spread throughout the province (Visser & Kotze, 2006:99). The links to dark tourism in the province is due to the many battlefield sites criss-crossing the countryside. The majority of these battlefield sites reverts back to the South African War (1899–1902). The following section alludes to the South African War dark tourism attractions which are situated in the Free State Province.

1.4. South African War dark tourism attractions in the Free State Province

The South African War 1899–1902 (Anglo-Boer War), was fought between Great Britain and the two independent Boer republics of the Orange Free State (OVS) and the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek (ZAR), otherwise known as the Transvaal (Scholtz, 2000; van Zyl et al., 2012; Proos & Hattingh, 2019). According to Nothling (1998:2), Wessels (1991), and Pretorius (2017) the South African War had severe impacts on cultural and social change within South Africa. The casualties on the Boer side was 3 997, whilst on the British side 7 792 died on the South African battlefields respectively (Wessels, 1991:46).

The main reason for the outbreak of the war was British imperialism which, after gold was discovered in 1886 in the then Transvaal, reached its pinnacle. With Great Britain positioning troops along the borders of the Orange Free State and Transvaal during 1898–99, the two independent Boer republics sent an ultimatum to Great Britain, stating that Great Britain had to retract their troops along the borders of the Free State and Transvaal, or a war will ensue. Failing to comply with the ultimatum, the Boers declared the South African War on 11 October 1899. The war concluded on 31 May 1902, when a condition of surrender was signed at Melrose House in Pretoria. The Orange Free State and Transvaal surrendered to Great Britain and were thus colonised by Great Britain- thereby losing their independence (Reitz, 1929:23; Breytenbach, 1978:138; Pakenham, 1979:1; Wessels, 1991:2, 2011:28; van den Berg, 1998:11; Nothling, 1998:6; Pretorius, 1998:13; Kruger, 1999:3; Scholtz, 2000:20; van Zyl et al., 2012:17; Von der Heyde, 2013:21, 2017:13,111; Allen, 2015:198; Grobler, 2017:1, 2018:27).

The Free State Province was the scene of many battles and skirmishes during the South African War. Well-known battles in the province include Paardeberg, Sannaspos, Groenkop and Doornkraal. Bloemfontein, the Free State capital, was occupied by the British on 13 March 1900, and soon thereafter, the province was renamed the Orange River Colony. During the first month of the British occupation of Bloemfontein, nearly 2 000 British soldiers died of disease and were buried outside of town (Wessels, 1991:26; Pretorius, 1998:24; Grobler, 2017:49). This cemetery is currently the biggest war cemetery in the province.

Throughout the Free State Province, a number of dark tourism sites can be visited. Arguably, the most well-known attraction regarding dark tourism is the National Women's Memorial. This monument serves as a reminder of the suffering of women and children in the British concentration camps during the period. A total of 26 370 white women and children and at least 20 000 black women and children died in the British concentration camps during this war. This memorial was erected to commemorate these fallen women and children (Anglo Boer War Museum, 2020). Other dark tourism attractions ranges from memorials, battlefields, and graves of individuals, to sites of British concentration camps and cemeteries of women and children whom died in these particular camps. The following section alludes to the battlefields, museums, and graves that can be visited in the province.

Major South African War battlefields attractions in the Free State Province include Paardeberg battlefield: (17–27 February 1900); Poplar Grove: (7 March 1900); Driefontein: (10 March 1900); Sannaspos: (31 March 1900); Boshof: (5 April 1900); Biddulphsberg: (29 May 1900); Rooiwal: (7 June 1900); Surrender Hill: (28–30 July 1900); and Groenkop: (24–25 December 1901) (Von der Heyde, 2013; Hattingh, 2017; Grobler, 2018).

The Anglo-Boer War Museum and Women's Memorial, in Bloemfontein, commemorates the South African War and the museum is the only museum dedicated to this war in the world (Grobler, 2018). The following graves, concentration camps, and memorials can be viewed in the different towns in the Free State Province (refer to Table 1):

As indicated in Table 1 the Free State Province consists of a plethora of developed and underdeveloped dark tourism attractions. Figure 1 illustrates the location of the different South African War attractions in the Free State spread throughout the province, it provides a snapshot of the main attractions. The following section alludes to the methodology applicable to the investigation.

2. Materials and methods

This investigation adheres to the interpretivist paradigm, as it considers the human elements in the interpretation of the research results. To address the objectives of the research, the researcher(s) made use of self-administered questionnaires (Bryman et al., 2014:191). The questionnaires were distributed during a four-month period (October 2019 – January 2020) to visitors at the Anglo-Boer War Museum in Bloemfontein. This museum is the only museum in the world commemorating the South African War (1899–1902) and attracts tourists from the world over. This museum in Bloemfontein was selected as the place of distribution for the questionnaire as the other dark tourism attractions in the Free State are dispersed across the whole province. Due to the fact that the dark tourism sites are vastly dispersed in the study area, an accurate figure of dark tourists visiting these sites are very difficult to ascertain. There is no development of these sites nor caretakers at them whom are able to obtain the relevant visiting numbers. It was thus decided that the most accurate way of obtaining information from dark tourists interested in battlefield sites in the study area would be at the Anglo Boer War Museum where tourists interested in the topic would be readily available.

The questionnaire was structured to acquire the demographic profile, data on the South African War attractions, and recommendations of tourists visiting dark tourism sites. Data was captured, cleaned and recoded in Microsoft Excel. With the South African War being a niche market, a total of 53 questionnaires were collected.

2.1. Limitations

This number (53) thus has certain limitations and interpretation and inference from this research has been done with caution and with suggestions in mind. While the sampling for this study is low, more research will be needed in future, as research on this specific topic is still in its infancy stage and a first for the Free State Province. As there are no caretakers nor developed museums at any of these battlefields, an accurate number of visitors to these sites could not be ascertained. This research thus provides basic information about typical dark tourism tourists in the study area, their preferences for the particular

Table 1. Dark tourism sites in the Free State province.

Town/City	Dark tourist attraction
1. Bethulie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relocated mass grave site and memorials can be visited at the new concentration camp site (Grobler, 2018:231). Cairn built on the farm Oudefontein to commemorate two Cape Rebels).
2. Bethlehem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> War cemetery (Grobler, 2018:102); Memorial plaque attached to a rock in front of the Civic Centre commemorating the Battle of Bethlehem (Grobler, 2018:97).
3. Boshof	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> British Garden of Remembrance in Boshof.
4. Bothaville	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memorial commemorating Genl De Wets's escape at Doornkraal (Grobler, 2018:171); British Garden of Remembrance (Grobler, 2018:172).
5. Harrismith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memorials, and graves in the municipal cemetery (Grobler, 2018:232); Concentration camp.
6. Frankfort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Old town cemetery - contains a memorial gravestone for burghers who died in action at Moordpoortjie on 11 October 1900 (Grobler, 2018:168).
7. Bloemfontein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dam of Tears; President Brand Cemetery in Bloemfontein; Grave of General De Wet at Women's Memorial; The National Women's Monument; Emily Hobhouse grave; The Garden of Remembrance at the War Museum; Concentration camp site; Sannaspos (Grobler, 2018).
8. Brandfort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brandfort concentration camp (Grobler, 2018); Memorial in front of the Dutch Reformed Church (Grobler, 2018:232).
9. Heilbron	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memorial and graves at the concentration camp cemetery (Grobler, 2018:232).
10. Kroonstad	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The concentration camp cemetery graves, (Grobler, 2018:233); Kroonstad Garden of Remembrance (Grobler, 2018:171).
11. Springfontein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The concentration camp cemetery (Grobler, 2018:233).
12. Winburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Graves and memorial at the concentration camp cemetery (Grobler, 2018:233).
13. Vredefort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Vredefort Road concentration Camp, Graves from the concentration camp (Grobler, 2018:232).
14. Jagersfontein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grave of Commandant P.J Visser; grave of Private Fred G. Wallace; British monument commemorating 12 members of the 2nd Battalion Seaforth Highlanders and two members of Jagersfontein Town Guard killed in action (Nienaber & le Roux, 1982:23; Grobler, 2018:169).
15. Reitz	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Memorial to commemorate Pres Steyn's escape (Grobler, 2018:178).
16. Ficksburg	War Cemetery (Grobler, 2018:186).
17. Kestell	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boer and British Memorial on summit of Groenkop (Grobler, 2018:183). Battle of Groenkop (Von der Heyde, 2013:129)
18. Philippolis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emily Hobhouse Memorial (Grobler, 2018:221).
19. Paardeberg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Paardeberg Monument erected for burghers who died in the battle of Paardeberg (Nienaber & le Roux, 1982:27; Grobler, 2018:72).
20. Senekal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Battle of Biddhulpsberg (Von der Heyde, 2013:240)
21. Koppies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rooiwal (Von der Heyde, 2013:228)
22. Poplar Grove	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Battle of Poplar Grove (Von der Heyde, 2013:251)
23. Driefontein	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Driefontein (Von der Heyde, 2013:249)

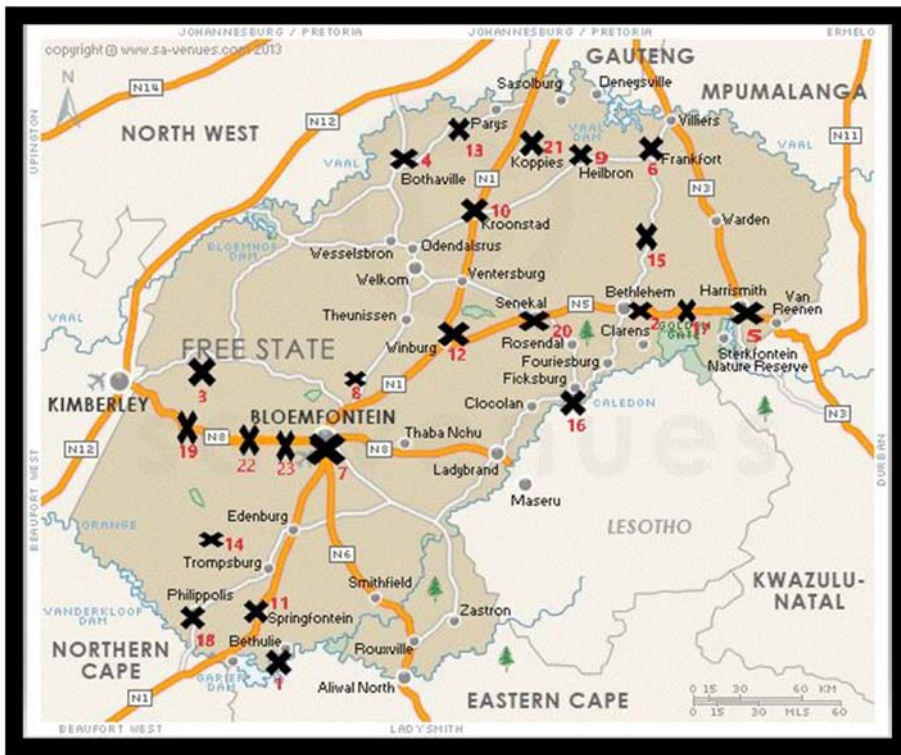


Figure 1. Location of the different South African War attractions in the Free State Province.

Source: Free State Hybrid Physical/Political Map, 2020.

destinations, and motivations for visiting these sites. Practically this provides basic information for tour operators and the destinations itself. Although the information may be basic, it forms the backbone of available information for those destinations that are trying to develop niche travel markets by tapping into the growing dark tourism niche tourism market i.e. Paardeberg. They can now better assess i.e. the needs, wants and profile of their niche market which didn't exist before (Sharma & Nayak, 2020).

3. Findings

This section of the paper presents the demographic profile of the respondents (refer to Table 2), a section on the South African War attractions, and recommendations towards the improvement of the South African War attractions/activities.

As illustrated in Table 2, 34 respondents were male and 18 female. 49 respondents were white, one Coloured, and one Indian. 13 respondents are between the age of 61–70, followed by 12 between 51–60, and 11 between 18–30. Twenty-eight respondents indicated that their annual income is between 0 and R500 000, whilst 12 respondents indicated their annual income between R501 000 and R700 000. 11 respondents earned R701 000 or more and 2 did not indicate their annual income.

The majority (13) of the respondents are in possession of a doctorate degree followed by master's degrees (12), bachelor's degree (10) and matric (6). South Africa was

Table 2. Demographic profile of respondents.

Variable	Respondents
Gender	
Male	34
Female	18
No response	1
Race	
Black	0
White	49
Colored	1
Indian	1
Asian	0
Other	0
No response	2
Age	
18–30	11
31–40	4
41–50	3
51–60	12
61–70	13
70 and older	10
Annual income	
0 – R300 000	14
R301 000 – R500 000	14
R501 000 – R 700 000	12
R701 000 or more	11
No response	2
Highest level of education	
Matric	6
Diploma	3
Bachelor's degree	10
Master's degree	12
Doctorate degree	13
Other	7
No response	1
Country of residence	
South Africa	46
Other	4
No response	3
Province of residence	
Free State	16
Gauteng	13
KwaZulu-Natal	1
Limpopo	1
North West	0
Eastern Cape	0
Western Cape	10
Northern Cape	2
Mpumalanga	2
No response	8

indicated as the country of residency by 46 of the respondents whilst 4 were from other countries ranging from the United States of America, England, and Australia. The Free State Province (16), Gauteng (13), and the Western Cape (10) is the most prominent provinces where visitors reside. The following section will allude to the findings from the section on South African War attractions.

The respondents could choose more than one attraction that they are most interested in visiting, and which attractions they have visited before. Overall, 40 of the respondents indicated that they were most interested in visiting museums, 31 battlefields, 31 monuments, 24 blockhouses, 23 concentration camps, 21 cemeteries/graves, 17 stand-alone

Table 3. South African War attractions visited.

Variable	Respondents
Attraction	
Battlefields	30
Blockhouses	32
Museums	49
Stand-alone memorials	31
Cemeteries/Graves	36
Battlefield re-enactments	11
Concentration camps	28
Monuments	45

memorials, and 11 battlefield re-enactments. Table 3 refers to the attractions which respondents have visited before.

Table 3 exemplifies that the majority (49) of the respondents have visited museums, followed by monuments (45), cemeteries/graves (36), blockhouses (32), stand-alone memorials (31), battlefields (30), concentration camps (28), and battlefield re-enactments (11). According to the respondents, the overall quality of the attractions they have visited are satisfactory (35), with nine respondents listing the overall quality as excellent.

Respondents were requested to indicate which province in South Africa they have visited South African war attractions in (illustrated in Table 4).

Table 4 clearly illustrates that the province that has been traversed the most concerning South African War attractions is the Free State Province (49), followed by the Northern Cape (36), KwaZulu Natal (31) Western Cape (31), and Gauteng (28). The provinces least visited is Mpumalanga (17), and Limpopo (16). The majority (39) of the respondents travel with friends when visiting South African War attractions, whilst only five make use of a tour guide to accompany them.

Written materials were indicated as the most popular way of obtaining information regarding attractions. The internet (27), friends/family (25), museums (23), and social media (15) followed written materials. The least popular method of obtaining information was radio (6) and television (6). Interestingly, 42 of the respondents do research before they visit attractions, and they obtain their information mostly from written materials (38), the internet (31), knowledgeable individuals (28), museums (23), and social media (11).

The most popular social media platform used to by respondents were Facebook (28), Instagram (11), and Twitter (8). Particular identified social media groups followed by respondents were the Anglo-Boer War (The South African War) – 1899–1902 group (17), the official: Anglo-Boer War Museum group (16), and the Boer War Colourised

Table 4. Province where South African War attractions have been visited.

Variable	Respondents
Province	
Free State	49
Gauteng	28
KwaZulu-Natal	31
Limpopo	16
North West	18
Eastern Cape	20
Western Cape	31
Northern Cape	36
Mpumalanga	17

Table 5. Motivations to visit South African War attractions.

Variable	Respondents
Motivation	
Morbid Curiosity	6
Empathy	19
Special interest	42
Acts of remembrance	16
Family pilgrimage	11
Iconic sites	16
Self-discovery	10
Risk seeking	0
Honouring the dead	15
Education	34

Photographs (13). Tourists travel to visit attractions for many reasons. Table 5 indicates what motivates South African War enthusiast to visit different attractions.

Table 5 clearly demonstrates that most (42) South African War enthusiast are motivated by special interest. Other motivations include education (34), empathy (19), acts of remembrance (16), iconic sites (16), and honouring the dead (15). According to the majority (40) of the respondent's the South African War and related battlefields are not marketed sufficiently.

Figure 2 shows the recommendations from respondents on how to improve the South African War attractions/activities. Most of the participants referred to 'social media', 'cleanliness', 'proper signage', 'government involvement', 'greater visibility', 'adequate marketing', and 'more conferences'.

It emanates from the above section that government involvement, adequate marketing through social media, the installation of proper up to date signage, and keeping the attractions clean is crucial for the South African War attractions. The following section will discuss the findings of the investigation.

**Figure 2.** Recommendations on improving the SA War attractions.

4. Discussion of findings

The following section provides a succinct discussion on the findings and its implications. According to Van der Merwe (2014:132), visitor numbers to battlefields in South Africa is in a decline. However, the respondents from this investigation indicated that battlefields are one of the main attractions they are most interested in visiting, followed by visits to museums. In the Free State Province, respondents are eager to visit South African War attractions, and indicated that the attractions they have visited are in a satisfactory/excellent condition. This is in stark contrast to a study done by Van der Merwe in 2014 (136) where he concluded that in KwaZulu-Natal heritage tourism is in a state of disarray and decline.

When referring to the motivations of South African War enthusiasts there is a clear resemblance as to what Foley & Lennon (1996:155), Sharpley & Stone (2009), Podoshen et al. (2015:265), Nhlabathi (2017:107), and Light (2017) specified in their research concerning motivation to travel to dark tourism sites. These similarities as to the motivation behind visiting South African War attractions are education, acts of remembrance, iconic sites, morbid curiosity, and honouring the dead. Thus, the South African War attractions can be classified as dark tourism sites. According to Chang (2017:1), dark tourism is a tool for education so that humanity learns from past atrocities.

Through insight as to what the typical South African War enthusiast resembles, focused marketing initiatives and entrepreneurial opportunities can be identified and suggested to assist the local product owners in the region. The typical profile of a South African War enthusiast is a white male between the ages of 18–30 and 50+ years. Their annual income ranges from R0 – R500 000 and they are well educated (typically in possession of a doctorate or master's degree). They generally reside in South Africa in either the Free State or Gauteng. These enthusiasts are interested in visiting museums, battlefields, monuments, cemeteries/graves, and concentration camps all related to the South African War. They mostly frequent the Free State, Northern Cape and KwaZulu-Natal provinces on their visits. They are accompanied by friends on their excursions and they do research before their trips by reviewing written literature, searching on the internet for information, inquiring from friends/family, museums, and social media. The typical South African War enthusiast is motivated by special interest in the war, empathy, acts of remembrance, and honouring the dead.

The typical South African War enthusiast shares similarities with the profile of battlefields tourists as highlighted by Miles (2012:139), and Van der Merwe (2014). These similarities are that battlefield tourists are white males who are retired (strong result for the 50–65-year-old category) and have a great deal of time to travel. They also are highly educated and have greater disposable income. However, this investigation revealed not just similarities between previous studies but also differences. Differences includes that the younger age group (18–30) are starting to show a bigger interest in battlefield tourism. According to Dr Arnold van Dyk, previous chairperson of the Friends of the War Museum and active ABW enthusiast, many younger people feel a need to 'link' with their past. For many, their ancestors participated in the war and they want to connect with the activities their ancestors participated in – be it visiting battlefields, concentration camps or monuments. Not only do they feel the need to 'link' but also to learn more about history, as the South African War are only dealt with in a small portion of the school curriculum. The need to 'belong' thus plays an important role.

Since South African War enthusiasts are a niche market, it presents an ideal opportunity to market the dark/niche tourism potential of the Free State Province. Friends accompany this particular niche market on their visit to dark tourist sites and it can provide the potential for entrepreneurs to earn an income as site guides for example. Accommodation establishments could potentially tailor their packages to be attractive and accommodating to this market by adding visits to sites as part of their packages. It is also suggested that more acts of remembrances can be arranged in the Free State Province as its popular amongst young adults (18–30). Wreath laying's, educational trips and battlefield re-enactments could further be arranged to ensure that more tourists are attracted to the region.

Social media platforms utilised by the enthusiasts are predominantly Facebook and Instagram. The ideal opportunity presents itself thus to utilise social media platforms to get younger South African War enthusiasts/dark tourists interested to the Free State Province to experience this niche tourism product on offer. It is suggested that new social media pages could be designed or the pages already in use can target the younger market through competitions (i.e. best selfie with most likes at an attraction during the month) whereby they could win interesting prizes sponsored by tourism product owners. Another suggestion would be to organise Instawalks to particular dark tourism sites. Usually, an Instawalk is when a group of people get together to explore a place or destination, while recording their experience with photos, using Instagram on their smartphones. The idea is to create a hashtag e.g. #bloeminstawalk to attract attention to that particular destination (Serafinelli, 2018; Chemaly, 2020).

Recommendations from the respondents also included more government involvement in the infrastructure development and marketing of the sites. According to Heidelberg (2015:84), local government has to plan for support systems that tourists needs to feel safe and comfortable in the area, whilst attending to the tourists needs. Further Heidelberg (2015:85) alludes to the fact that government must be involved in preservation by purchasing the land where the dark tourist attractions are situated in order to preserve these sites. The National Heritage Council South Africa is responsible for the preservation of South Africa's heritage (National Heritage Council, 2019). The organisation can thus be consulted, and made aware of the niche tourism opportunity presented by dark tourism to the Free State.

Similar to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, whom attends to Commonwealth cemeteries, a local preservation committee/commission could also be formed for the Free State Province, (Commonwealth War Grave Commission, 2020). Proos et al. (2017:145) stated that provincial governments should play an active role in tourism development. Local government thus needs to be involved in the preservation of heritage attractions since they can be incorporated in the tourism development of a province such as the Free State. The Free State Gambling, Liquor and Tourism Authority (FSGLTA) in their marketing material refers to the scenic beauty of the province and how it must be exploited. They also state that other unique attractions should be utilised such as heritage sites, cultural and historical experiences (Free State Tourism Authority, 2016:4; South African Tourism, 2020). They thus do indicate an interest in the historical sites to be utilised in tourism development for the province. Similarly, the Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality (Bloemfontein, Thaba

Nchu) refers to cultural and heritage attractions concerned with the South African War, such as Sannaspos battlefield, in their Integrated Development Plan (IDP) of 2018/19 (Mangaung Metropolitan Municipality, 2019:202). However, more attention should be paid to these attractions.

Other recommendations include sufficient marketing of the attractions – this correlates with the findings from Van der Merwe (2014:136). Sufficient marketing and greater visibility referred to include utilising social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) to attract the younger market interested in dark tourism (niche) sites. This correlates with Proos & Hattingh (2019:9) whom stated that social media (Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram) could be one of the best platforms to market a tourism offering. Respondents further alluded to proper signage, whilst cleanliness of attractions was also a big aspect as it was highlighted how important it is to keep attractions clean and well maintained.

5. Conclusion

It can be concluded that dark tourism related to South African War attractions is indeed a niche market within the Free State Province. However, the Free State Province also offers an abundance of attractions concerning the South African war that could potentially attract not just South African War enthusiasts, but other dark tourists from Europe, and Australia.

It is thus important to consider Chang (2017:2) whom alluded that dark tourism is able to provide economic meaning to old places, such as battlefields. This study has found that the dark tourism attractions are in a relatively satisfactory condition and thus with little attention given to the sites, it can become a dark tourism destination that can compete worldwide. Since the Free State Province is one of the provinces with the highest unemployment rate in South Africa, dark tourism can be used as a platform for employment creation and provide opportunities for further development of other dark tourism sites. The FSGLTA could use the data gathered from the investigation in order to assist them in their marketing campaign to attract this niche market of dark tourism. Social media must be exploited in the marketing campaigns as it could potentially attract the younger niche market to the province. Entrepreneurs and local residents in the area could also refer to the profile of the enthusiasts and tailor-made their products towards this niche market.

6. Direction for future research

Suggested future research could potentially include all dark tourism sites including Anglo Zulu, Voortrekker and the Frontier wars. A further field of study can also include relevant marketing and tourism development plans for niche tourism development in the province. It is foreseen that a dark tourism route can be developed from further research.

7. Declaration of interest statement

I hereby declare that this is my own work, and that it has not been submitted for publication anywhere else.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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