
10 Paranormal tourism: Old beliefs and new markets

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The objectives of this chapter are to:

- Understand an emergence and characteristics of paranormal tourism;
- Capture paranormal tourism in the context of special interest tourism;
- Investigate paranormal tourists' onsite experiences in Southeast Asia;
- Explore facets of paranormal experiences in the aspect of tourists' behaviour, emotions, unusual senses, tourism contexts and relationship;
- Show that paranormal tourism is a new market niche that challenges epistemological views for future tourism research.

Keywords: Paranormal tourism, onsite experiences, tourists' experiences, paranormal experiences, niche tourism, Orchestra Model

Introduction

Paranormal activities around the world have achieved some prominence. Different destinations are involved and they contain diverse settings and stories. Activities of interest occur in the USA, Europe, Africa, Australia and especially Asia. The focus of this chapter is paranormal concerns and markets in Asia. The work presented specifically describes the market experiences in Indonesia though many similar themes exist across South East Asia and elsewhere. Paranormal phenomena have attracted tourists' attention

through media, social media reports and television programs. These media build paranormal beliefs that stimulate interest and build desire to travel to key sites. Fascination with the paranormal is not a new topic in terms of cultural and religious perspectives, but it is a novel theme for tourists' experiences. The roots of paranormal tourism can be captured by a Figure 10.1.

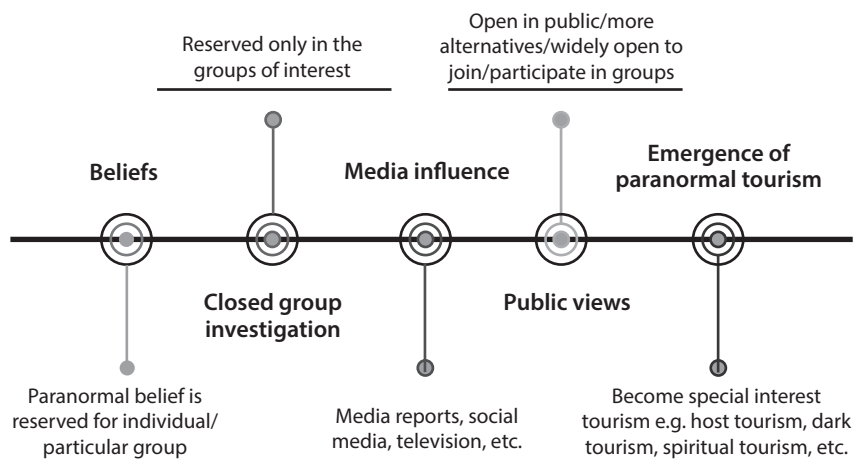


Figure 10.1: Emergence of paranormal tourism. *Source:* Pharino, Pearce and Pryce (2018)

Belief in the paranormal in Asia reflects a fundamental need to have a sense of control over one's everyday life (Irwin, 2000). Belief in the existence of ghosts or spirits is widespread in Asia, where ghosts can be characterised as malleable entities; they can be appeased through rituals or angered if provoked (The Atlantic, 2014). In Asian countries, although many define themselves as Buddhists or Muslims, people are still superstitious and use amulets for good luck. Curses, ghosts and witchcraft are in fact an accepted part of the faith, or at least serve as an adjunct belief system (Paraghoststory, 2016). The paranormal influences local ways of life in various ways such as a belief in luck, which explains why people carry lucky charms and engage in luck-related behaviour in everyday activities across many Asian cultures (Bangkok, 2019). These activities include a belief in special forces or spirits when buying a new house, getting married on the right day and appeasing spirits in building designs (Chou and Chang, 2012, p. 3; Bangkok, 2019).

In this chapter some background issues about the development of an interest in the paranormal are portrayed. Next, the definition of paranormal tourism is developed and conceptual confusions among related terms are considered. An understanding of on-site experiences is essential to investigating the meaning of paranormal tourism and the specific approach of using the orchestra model of experience is employed to Figure 10.2.



Figure 10.2: Thai spirit houses. Source: Author's elaboration

Paranormal tourism: the context of special interest tourism

Studies linked to some of the themes related to special interest tourism are shown in Table 10.1. For example, research has been done on dark tourism (Stone, 2012; Stone and Sharpley, 2008), ghost tourism (Holloway, 2010), religious tourism (Guelke and Olsen, 2004; Olsen and Timothy, 2005), pilgrimage tourism (Digance, 2006) and spiritual tourism (Heelas and Martin, 1998; Sharpley and Jepson, 2012). However, there is no empirical study related to paranormal tourism in the academic literature. Although paranormal tourism can be defined as niche tourism, several factors need to be investigated to understand more about the behaviour of potential tourists. The justification for the study of the topic and its role in fostering tourism are documented in Table 10.1.

It is apparent from Table 10.1 that paranormal tourism shares some similarities in tourism settings, contexts and some activities with other types of tourism. For example, paranormal tourism settings might be haunted houses, castles, cathedrals, places related to religion, spiritual sites or even something supernatural, such as the quest to find aliens.