

## Prison Tourism

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Prisons, jails, correctional and remand facilities, court houses and other sites of penal confinement are places of popular leisure interest to tourists. A tour or day visit to an infamous or decommissioned prison can provide tourists with knowledge and experiences of penal and justice codes of the past, or the convict history of a destination. As such, prison tourism typically involves heritage-related leisure visits to prison museums/attractions or former sites of incarceration. The sites have been conserved, marketed and packaged to deliver tourist experiences. Former decommissioned prisons are often converted into museums or popular heritage attractions. Notable examples of prison tourist attractions are Alcatraz in the United States and Robben Island in South Africa (Strange and Kempa, 2003). These attractions have become popular tourist experiences. Some prison attractions, such as Alcatraz and Australian convict sites, are designated with UNESCO World Heritage Site status because of their heritage significance.

Prison attractions typically include original or restored cells, prison memorabilia, historical photos, interpretation of prison life and its administration, stories of prison escapes, and examples of prisoners' work or art (see Table 1). Some prison attractions involve tours that include aspects of the experience associated with suffering and death, for example, of capital punishment and solitary confinement/torture. Given the macabre nature of the prison history experience and aspects of punishment, prison tourism is sometimes referred to as 'dark tourism'. This means the tourist experience is related to places where death, atrocity or suffering has occurred.

Key stakeholders in prison tourism are tourists, prison attraction managers, museum staff, planners, curators, archaeologists, prison rehabilitation programmes, government departments, ex-offenders and other interest groups. Prisons play an important role in society and in the experience of the destination's heritage, for example, the convict foundations of the Australian nation (Dewar and Fredericksen, 2003). Popular prison attractions visited by tourists to Australia include Fremantle Prison in Western Australia, Port Arthur in Tasmania and Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney. In addition to these notable prisons, in smaller towns, the local gaol can often also serve as an important heritage site. As such, tourist interest in

prisons and incarceration is also a form of heritage tourism because of the prison's connection to the history of a destination and wider region. Historians and curators thus play a role in interpreting the prison's history as an experience for tourists. Retelling the history of a prison linked to the heritage landscape of a place has commercial potential. It can be a source of economic development through tourism, adding to the paid-for tourist attraction offerings within a destination. Prison tourism is thus typically commercial in nature. In addition to charging attraction entrance fees, prison attractions usually sell themed souvenirs in their museum shop. The prison attraction experience is usually promoted through attractive brochures and websites (Ross, 2012).

The construction of prison buildings to effectively segregate offenders from the outside public can cause problems for its conversion to a tourism experience. Prisons have cells, perimeter walls, security checks for visitors, internal security fences, locked sections, among other security measures. Ultimately, this building construction serves as a unique feature for tourism (Dewar and Fredericksen, 2003). Fabric of the prison may require preservation if the prison has been decommissioned for a long time before it is suitable for development as a tourist attraction. Some prison attractions provide highly engaging exhibits for visitors. Others are more passive, leaving the visitor to interpret the environment in their own way. Moreover, there are problems in deciding whose heritage to retell for tourist visitors from within the prison's historical population and what timeline of elements of prison life. Prison attraction interpretation can provide political interpretations of the past or become part of an activist's agenda. There needs to be careful and ethical consideration of how valuable existing authentic but perhaps austere material is to the interpretation of prison life for tourists, e.g. prison graffiti, capital punishment, prison conditions. Furthermore, there are concerns that prison museums perpetuate social distance between prisoners and attraction visitors. This means prisoners remain negatively perceived among visitors, without the museum information questioning the reasons why prisoners end up in prison in the first place (Walby and Piche, 2015).

Scholars attest that the packaging of prison history for tourists can often lead to trivialisation and commercialisation of the past. It typically involves blurring commodification, education, and leisure entertainment for tourists. Equally, prisons with the most notorious or cruel histories are often the easiest to market (Strange and Kempa, 2003). Understanding tourist demand and responses to interpretive material are important in this regard. Previous tourism research has seen growing knowledge of the demand for prison tourism, and in a broader sense, tourists' fascination with visiting sites of death, such as Nazi concentration camps (Liyanage, Coca-Stefaniak and Powell, 2015). As such, prison attractions raise critical and ethical questions about the popular value and potential voyeurism of punishment and forced human incarceration as a tourism product. Prison tourism development can be fuelled by the need to generate revenue from the tourist dollar amid dwindling heritage budgets. Arguably, public fascination with being able to enter a prison can offer more emotive and profound experiences for tourists because of their popular value, and influence understandings of contemporary penalty (Barton and Brown, 2015).

The historical decommissioning of former prisons has seen the need to find new uses for obsolete prison buildings. The prison museum, such as those discussed above, is one notable common use. Decommissioned prisons have also been converted into accommodation and restaurants. One example is the boutique luxury hotel, Malmaison Oxford, U.K., which is

located in a former prison. Recently, there is increasing evidence of tourism also in working prisons. Within the Western developed world, high incarceration and reoffending rates have prompted a number of initiatives in working prisons focusing on prisoner rehabilitation. Initiatives such as The Clink restaurants in the U.K., InGalera restaurant in Italy and the Gate to Plate festival event in New Zealand have led to fine dining in restaurants in working prisons becoming popular consumer experiences (McIntosh, Gebbels and Harkison, 2020).

Fine dining in a working prison involves all the elements that any award-winning restaurant would offer, minus the alcohol and the use of plastic cutlery for security reasons. In addition to offering excellent dining, these restaurants help rehabilitate prisoners before their release through provision of hospitality training and work experience. These hospitality training initiatives are known to reduce recidivism and can lead to employment in the hospitality industry (Harkison and McIntosh, 2019). Whilst not usually defined as prison tourism, this form of socially conscious hospitality has grown in popularity and means the tourist dollar is going towards positive social change. The appeal of dining in a working prison is type of gastronomy experience that may also help differentiate the tourism product in destinations.

Whether historical or working places of incarceration, prisons remain sites that continue to hold popular fascination and appeal. They also remain important sites of education and serve as important sites of heritage identity. They thus hold economic, political and cultural significance for a destination. Defunct prison buildings could have been replaced by more modern developments. The fact that they remain as sites for tourist interest and remembrance signifies their importance to a place and its identity, even if their 'dark' identity questions its political, social and cultural past. The ways in which prisons and other sites of incarceration are marketed to tourists, and shape tourists' experiences through visitation, are interesting areas for further investigation. It may be particularly interesting to examine how prison tourism can engender critical reflections of society through its dark nature. A visit to a prison opens the closed world of incarceration up to the outside public world. As such, it has the potential to shape and challenge existing stereotypes, stigma and dominant discourses and ideologies about imprisonment and punishment. The extent to which this tourist experience can be used for positive social change and prisoner social reintegration poses an important avenue for future research.

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