

## TOURISM TO HAUNTED PLACES

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- controversial touris,
- dark tourism,
- alternative travel,
- haunted places,
- supernatural phenomena

### Abstract:

Introduction: Tourism to haunted places is a young and recondite branch of tourism. It can be however, an interesting alternative for people looking for new experiences. It combines traveling with visiting locations, where supernatural and paranormal activities occurred, still occur or are likely to occur. The reality of their actual occurrence is doubtful, as it is mainly based on accounts of bystanders, urban legends and folk tales.

The aim of the work: For this work, the author formulated a question, which is also a research problem: does the tourism to haunted places have a future as a new alternative variety of traveling and what age group is it addressed to. To answer the question, the following hypothesis has been made.

The material and the methodology: A survey was conducted on a group of 150 people. An internet survey was a research technique and a questionnaire was a research tool. The aim of the survey was to investigate the level of interest in this type of tourism, motives for its practice and age and social cross-section of its respondents.

Results and conclusions: 150 people took part in the survey. The age of respondents ranged between 18 and 29 years. The main reasons for tourism to haunted places were: curiosity, looking for risk and emotions, interest. The results of the research confirm the hypothesis made by the author. Tourism to haunted places may be a chance to become a popular and attractive form of tourism.

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## INTRODUCTION

The word *tourism* is derived from French. ‘tour’ means a trip or a journey, which always ends in a place where it started. The World Tourism Organization perceives tourism as a social phenomenon, in which people travel to different places for no longer than a year for leisure, cognitive, business, entertainment, therapeutic, or other personal reasons, without settling.

Tourism to haunted places is a niche and little-known kind of tourism, which has been becoming more and more popular. Its specificity lies in the combination of traditional traveling with exploring new places, known for the presence of peculiarities of different character. These peculiarities are generally closely related to the events and history of the people who once lived there. Such places include facilities and sites, where the manifestations of the paranormal activities occur, may occur or occurred in the past, that is to say, that cannot be explained scientifically.

It is worth mentioning here, that these activities are not equivalent – paranormal peculiarities are not transcendent to the laws of nature, they are merely an anomaly, which cannot be explained by science; while the manifestations of the supernatural are attributed to the religious sphere. The reality of these phenomena is doubtful, as it is mainly based on accounts of bystanders, urban legends and folk tales.

Exploring haunted places involves visiting such facilities or areas for an indefinite number of days for observation, research or satisfaction of one's curiosity. This kind of tourism has research and cognitive nature. What motives drive travelers? The problem of the existence of life after death has always fascinated people. Perhaps, expeditions to such facilities are an attempt to answer this age-old question.

Tourists visit not only places, where extraordinary phenomena have occurred, but they also visit places, in which the phenomena are likely to occur. Therefore famous battle fields, places of genocide, murder and torture, cemeteries, abandoned prisons are points of interest. Interest in the death itself as a motif of the travel has developed another, but related, form of tourism – thanatourism.

Most of the visitors to unusual places are enthusiasts, but there are also many people who explore such locations for less prosaic purposes. They are, for example, writers collecting sources for their novels, or media people (TV, cinema), who prepare their new movies about unusual phenomena.

Movies with a theme of haunted places are extremely popular all over the world. All the places and facilities that have supernatural history become main characters in movies, which makes the sites more and more popular as tourist attractions.

Due to reenactment and special effects of today's technology, interest in visiting and exploring haunted castles or dark houses is increasing, and the media's role in shaping contemporary reality is unmistakable.

Expeditions to places shrouded in bad legend were eagerly organized in the distant past, always in a closed environment with interests. The Romantic era was particularly rich in escapades, driven by the works of poets and writers who generously drew on folk mythology, filling their stories with ghosts, phantoms and strzygas (vampire-like demons from Slavic mythology). These types of expeditions, however, are poorly documented, we generally learn about them from memoirs, diaries or letters.

Little has been written about visiting mysterious haunted places in contemporary places either. We now observe enormous popularity of travel literature promoting all forms of travel and exploration, but this form of tourism is almost completely overlooked. This mainly concerns Polish publications. There are only a few publications describing haunted castles, houses or ruins, which were published in small amounts [Zych, 2013]. So far, there is not a typical guidebook available that would give thrill seekers reliable information on this subject.

In Poland, there are many places which can be visited by amateurs of haunted places tourism. Due to Poland's long and rich history, there are plenty of castles, fortresses and palaces in our country, not to mention a whole host of abandoned houses and manors. Many of them have their own legend of unusual phenomena, which are closely related to the past and to the people who once lived there.

One of the most famous is the castle in Niedzica on Lake Czorsztyn [Kundera, 2016: 37]. This monument is extremely attractive to tourists, thanks to the romantic legend of the White Lady regularly walking about the courtyard, who has made the castle an obligatory location for dark tourists.

Another well-known facility is Chęciny Royal Castle in Świętokrzyskie Voivodeship. It is purported that the ghost of Queen Bona Sforza walking around the site with a torch can be seen there at night.



Photo 1. The castle in Niedzica  
Source: [www.niedzica.pl](http://www.niedzica.pl) [accessed:01.05.2017]



Photo 2. Chęciny Royal Castle  
Source: [www.zamek.checiny.pl/](http://www.zamek.checiny.pl/), [accessed:01.05.2017].

Another reputable site on the map of haunted places is Grodziec castle in the Sudetes. The Red Ghoul that haunts the castle is the oldest ghost in Poland and a great tourist attraction. In Subcarpathian Voivodeship four more ghosts can be encountered in Łańcut Castle: Stanisława Stadnicki's (the devil of Łańcut), Franciszek Lubomirski's, Elżbieta Lubomirska's and Izabela Potocka's. The abandoned mental assylum in Owińsk may not be a spectacular building, but it is the scenery of hauntings related to the mass murder of prisoners by the Germans in 1939.

There are plenty of haunted places around the world, such as the historic Someries Castle in Bedfordshire, England [Kidger, 2011: 23] or other facilities such as the famous

Luton Museum close to London, Stanley Hotel in Stanley, Colorado, USA, a haunted house in Amityville, USA or the famous Winchester house - also in the USA.

A variation of tourism related to the subject is "Dark Tourism" - defined and described in 1996 by Foley and Lennon [Foley, 1996: 198]. It involves visiting areas where mass murder took place. There are death camps (Auschwitz-Birkenau, Red Death Fields in Cambodia), catastrophic sites, an example of such a tourist attraction is the Ukrainian city of Pripjat, formerly occupied by Chernobyl nuclear reactor workers, major floods, earthquakes, terrorist attacks (the Zone Zero in New York), battle fields (Flodden and Culloden in Scotland, Waterloo). The work of the authors mentioned above: *Dark Tourism: The Act of Death and Disaster*, lists many objects that are tourist attractions for people practicing thanatourism [Lennon, Foley, 2000: 168].

In recent years ghost towns have also become the destination of the tours [Stasiak, 2015: 55]. These are the towns or cities, which were abandoned by residents for various reasons. These could be natural and man-made disasters, wartime or economic causes. An example of such a "tourist attraction" is the Ukrainian city of Pripjat - inhabited primarily by workers of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor. In 2000 the first travel agencies, which offered tours of the so-called Chernobyl Tour emerged. The place of the catastrophe became so popular that even a movie entitled *Chernobyl. The Reactor of Fear* directed by Bradley Parker [www.filmweb.pl] was made there. The movie's release has given rise to another wave of interest. Areas where a tragedy happened no longer discourage tourists, it is quite the opposite, [Stasiak, 2015: 60] today, death and violence have become ubiquitous and have become "tourist attractions" themselves. Tourists looking for thrill and excitement and those who want to pay homage to the deceased visit the places of extermination in large numbers. Examples are the Death Field and the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Cambodia (Former Red Hundred Camp) [Tana, 2006: 86] and Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum. Regardless of the motives of the visitors, due to interest, more and more museums of memory are associated with various tragedies, as well as venues for reconstructing events or presenting events related to the event (The Titanic Museum).

In recent years there has been a growing interest in visiting cemeteries. [Długożima, Dymitryszyn, Winiarska, 2013: 84]. The old cemeteries, nestled among beautiful trees resembling parks, are particularly popular. Visitors not only admire the ancient gravestones or places where famous people were buried, but they also like to rest in the adjoining gardens. Both cemeteries and temples today tend to think about death and what happens after it. Then and now, cemeteries are thought provoking, encouraging people to ponder over death and what comes afterwards.

There is a tendency to treat cemeteries as gardens for both the living and the dead [Długożima 2011: 271] and to perceive their influence on tourists in therapeutic [Rhoads, 1995: 188] and recreational terms [Rugg, 2006: 213]. The graveyards without losing their symbolism and holiness, are becoming an interesting tourist attraction.

Another group of facilities that are eagerly visited by uncanny visitors are unusual buildings and artifacts of art, whose origins are dated back to the BC times or early Middle Ages. Their common feature is the unresolved mystery of the way they came into being, taking into consideration the technical capabilities of their builders and tools available at that time. The purposes for which they were erected also remain uncertain and are unexplainable to this day. Despite many plausible hypotheses, none of them has been deemed totally convincing. The buildings in question include pre-Columbian architecture and art (South and Central America), ancient Celtic megalithic structures (Stonehenge and other menhirs and dolmens found in Europe), gigantic geoglyphs on the Nazca plateau in Peru, moai statues on Easter Island or the mysterious city of Nan Madol in Micronesia [Bonnett, 2015: 63].

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

In the research designed for this scientific description, the diagnostic survey method was used. An internet survey was a research technique and a questionnaire containing seventeen close-ended questions was a research tool. 150 people took part in the survey. The survey was conducted among the users of a social network website - Facebook. The respondents came from different backgrounds and different regions of Poland. Most surveyed people were students, the age range was mostly between 18 and 29, with a small group of respondents aged 29 and over.

## RESULTS

Most of the people who participated in the survey were women, about 67%, and men accounted for 33% (Chart 1). The fact that more women have joined the survey proves that they are more interested in the subject of supernatural phenomena than men.

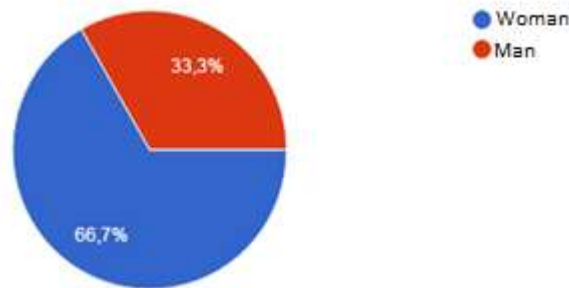


Chart1,,Gender''.

Source - Based on author's own research.

The highest age group was between 18 and 24 years old (Chart 2) - more than half of the respondents. It is during this period of life that people are looking for new experiences, the element of adventure is decisive for them. The respondents between 25 and 29 were 33.3% of respondents, and 12% were over 29.

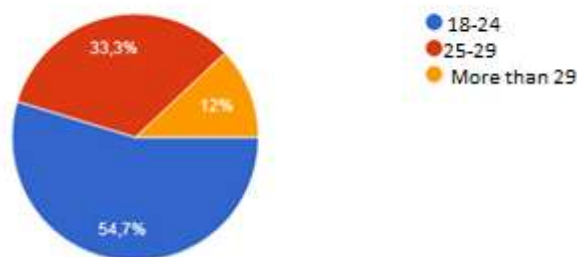


Chart 2,,What is your age group?''

Source - Based on author's own research.

The survey also showed that education is of no importance when it comes to attracting the attention of the tourists. The low percentage of junior high schoolers was probably due to a small number of people in this age group (Chart 3).

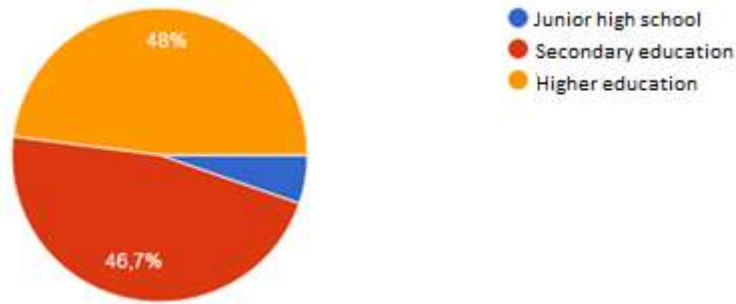


Chart 3. „What is your education level?”  
Source - Based on author’s own research.

Another question was about the current occupation of the respondents. Most of the respondents were working people - 46.7%, but their predominance over students was not too high (students - 38.7%), the remaining participants were students and the unemployed.

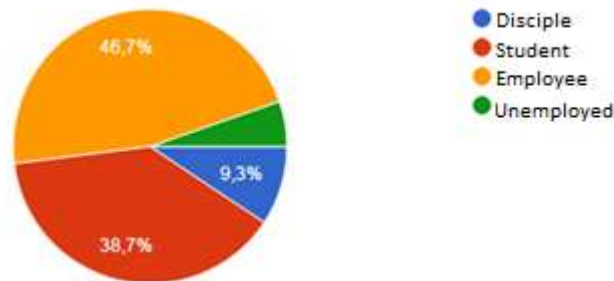


Chart 4. „ Current occupation”  
Source - Based on author’s own research.

When it comes to the belief in paranormal phenomena, the opinions were very divided, 33% of the respondents (Chart 5) believe strongly, and 30% are uncertain, they are the ones who answered "rather yes". Similarly, a group of people who are not convinced that anything outside the real world, has responded similarly belatedly, these people have indicated "rather no" - 20%. The group that has strongly denied the existence of paranormal phenomena amounts to 15%. Opinions are varied, but generally, most participants believe in supernatural phenomena (more or less) and this influences their decision to visit places where the phenomena are present.

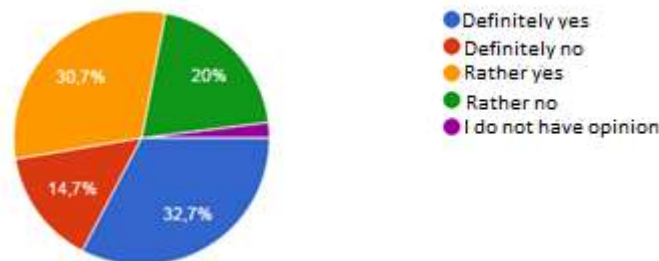


Chart 5. „Do you believe in paranormal and supernatural phenomena?”  
Source - Based on author’s own research.

Regarding the previous question, the next referred to the experience of supernatural phenomena (Chart 6). 32% of respondents answered yes, while 43% strongly denied, the other group was not sure what they saw and what they experienced.

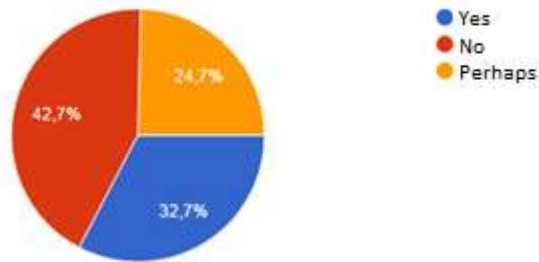


Chart 6. „Have you ever experienced the supernatural phenomena directly??”  
Source - Based on author’s own research.

The next question related to visits to the haunted places. Most of the respondents did not have such experiences yet - 60.7%, but the remained respondents have experienced it. The difference in percentage was not toolarge (Chart 7 )

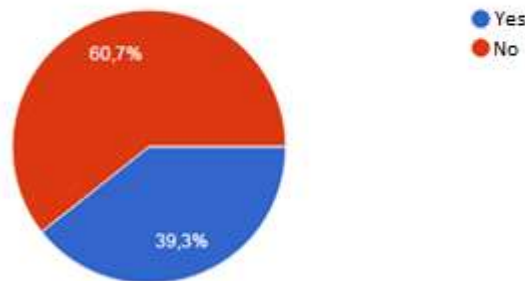


Chart 7.,, Do you visit sites known for peculiarities??”  
Source - Based on author’s own research.

The next point of the survey concerned the choice of places to visit. The answers indicated that most often these were abandoned homes (Chart 8). Why? They are relatively large, practically in every inhabited area you can find abandoned buildings with associated history of haunting. They are generally easy to access, no cost is generally required for sightseeing, there is no time limit for staying. Approximately 44% of the respondents are devotees of the forts, less interested in mental asylums. Respondents were allowed to choose between two or three responses, thus increasing the percentage of responses for each item.

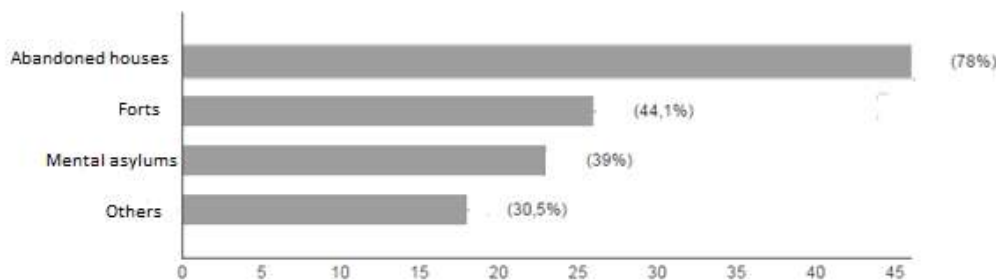


Chart 8. „What locations do you choose??”  
Source - Based on author’s own research.

The next question has allowed us to get an idea of since when the surveyed people have been engaged in tourism to haunted places. The largest percentage of respondents - 32.2% have been doing it for 1 to 3 years, also a large group - 27.1% have been penetrating haunted

places for 4-7 years. The same number of respondents less than one year. The smallest percentage - 13.6% have been practising this type of tourism for more than 7 years. These results indicate a strong upward trend in interest in exploring unusual places.

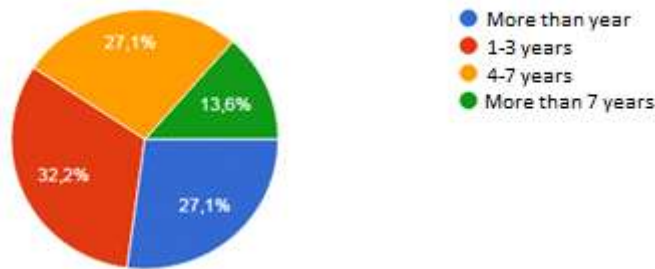


Chart 9. „How long have you been traveling to haunted places?”  
Source - Based on author’s own research.

The answer to the next question has showed that curiosity was the main reason for traveling to haunted places. 68% of the participants chose the same reason (chart 10). Emotions and risks were the second leading cause, with 49% of respondents showing interest. These are the three main determinants of the popularity of this branch of tourism. Respondents were allowed to choose two or three reasons, and the percentage of responses increased.

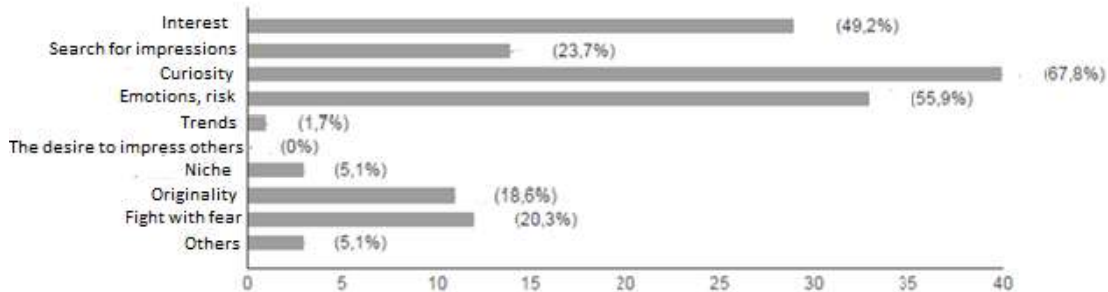


Chart 10. „What is the main reason for traveling to haunted places?”  
Source - Based on author’s own research.

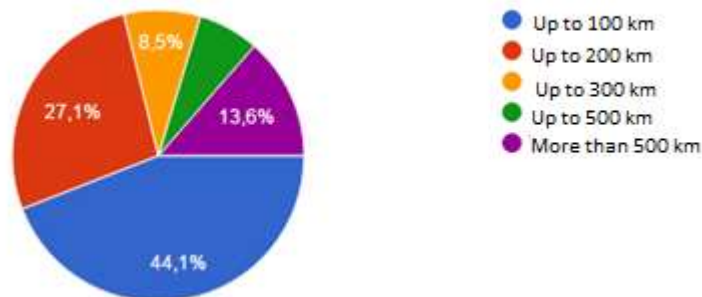


Chart 11. „What is the average distance to your destination?”  
Source - Based on author’s own research.



The vast majority of respondents - 44.10% prefer objects that are not more than 100 kilometers from their home and less than 14% (Chart 11) are willing to cover 500 kilometers or more to their destination. These are not long distances, which may be due to the lack of information on the occurrence of haunted and mysterious places in the country or continent.

The next question was about the preferences about the area of sightseeing. Most of the respondents prefer to do tourism in Poland (Chart 12). The reason for this is undoubtedly lower cost and numerous facilities having a history of haunting. Most of these facilities are interesting monuments worth exploring not only because of the supernatural phenomena.

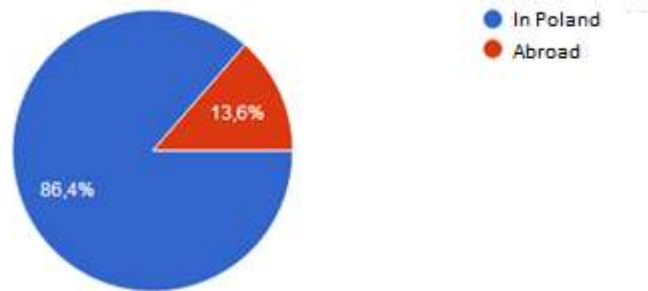


Chart 12. „Do you go more often to places in Poland or abroad?”

Source - Based on author's own research.

When asked about the best time to explore the season, most respondents indicated spring and summer (Chart 13). The result is understandable because good weather is more conducive to travel, sightseeing and observation. Respondents were allowed to choose two or three answers.

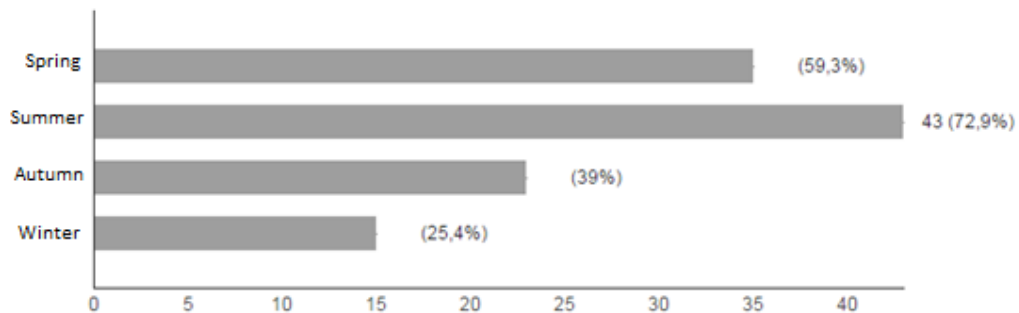


Chart 13. „What seasons do you prefer when travelling to haunted places?”

Source - Based on author's own research.

Another point of the survey was the time spent in a haunted place. The results indicated that most tourists do not spend too much time waiting for supernatural phenomena to occur. More than 80% (Chart 14) declared a stay of 1 to 3 days, which is a sufficient time to visit a single facility. The rest of the respondents spent more than 5 days in the vicinity of a haunted house.



Chart 14. „How long does such travels last?”  
Source - Based on author’s own research.

The next question was about the emotional sphere. Respondents chose primarily curiosity and excitement, which are the main feelings accompanying traveling to haunted places, only 35.6% admitted that they felt fear (Chart 15).

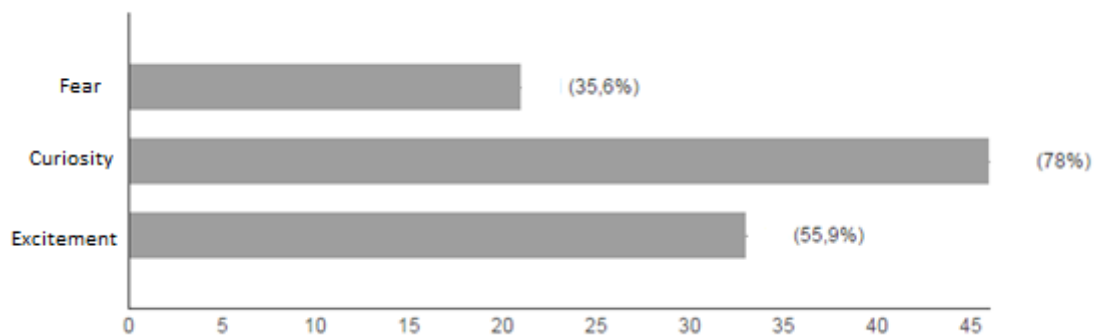


Chart 15. „What do you feel during such an expedition?”  
Source - Based on author’s own research.

People participating in the survey are not limited to haunted places tourists (Chart 16). Only 24.7% of the respondents declared that they only deal with the tourism to haunted places.

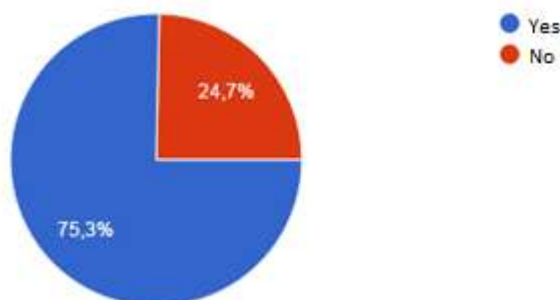


Chart 16. „Do you practice other forms of tourism?”  
Source - Based on author’s own research.

The last question concerned the cost of travelers. The result depends on many factors, such as whether a tourist wants to just see and take a few photos, or whether he or she intends to explore actively and observe some phenomena. Approximately 44% of the respondents

(Chart 17) spend up to PLN 500, while 32.7 % refer to stay within the limit of 100PLN. However, quite a large group - 23.9% - spends over PLN 500 on this purpose.

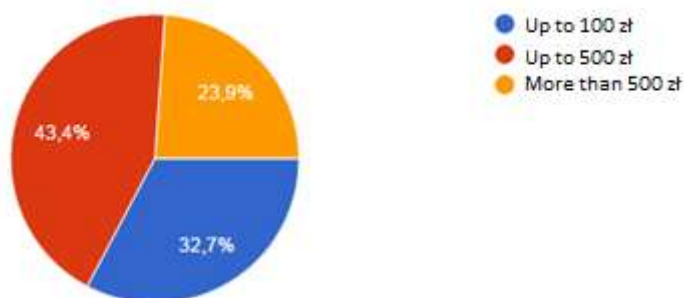


Chart 17. „How much do you spend during expeditions?”

Source - Based on author's own research.

## **DISCUSSION**

The survey was conducted on a group of 150 people let the author to draw some conclusions. Tourism to haunted places is becoming more and more popular among young travelers, who are open to new trends. The respondents were mostly women, which demonstrates their interest in this topic and is a valuable tip for future investors in this type of tourism. More than half of the respondents were young people, under 24 years of age, mainly working persons and students. The results also showed that education is of no importance when it comes to attracting the attention of the haunted places tourists. The number of respondents with higher and secondary education was very similar, this is also true with the type of occupation - groups of students and workers were around 40% each. The remaining respondents were unemployed and high school students

The survey showed that more than 60% of respondents believe strongly or less strongly in supernatural phenomena, while the rest of the participants, despite their unbelief, took part in the study, which proves their interest in the topic. The next question was about personal experiences, and only 32% of them confirmed this. This result suggests that in the remaining group of “believers”, the belief in the reality of supernatural phenomena is purely theoretical.

In the researched group, only about 40% of the participants visited the haunted places, mostly abandoned homes and forts, which were involved in ghost stories or strange phenomena. Haunted houses are the easiest destinations, because almost every town has such facilities, and they have an important advantage - the admission is free - which make them so popular among young tourists.

The answers concerning the time spent on traveling to haunted places were interesting. The number of active participants in this type of tourism is inversely proportional to the time interval, so it can be stated that interest in this subject has increased significantly in recent years. Approximately 60% of respondents declared active participation in such trips during the last three years. Young tourists are driven by curiosity, looking for risky situations and experiences. Interest in paranormal phenomena also play a significant role here. These are the key motivations for this form of tourism. It is interesting that more than 20% of the respondents considered the importance of fighting their own fears as an important cause, which can be seen as a form of therapy.

Most of the respondents prefer to visit facilities that are no more than 100 kilometers away, only 13.6% declare their willingness to travel more than 500 kilometers. This result is quite puzzling because the communication network is well developed and even a far distance to the destination should not be a problem. The results of this study concerning the preferred distance confirm the answer to the next question - respondents in the vast majority prefer to

visit unusual places in Poland than abroad. Certainly, a great role in this case play travel costs, but also the fact that our country is abundant in facilities and sites, which are attractive to supporters of this form of tourism.

Researchers strongly favor spring and summer as the best time of the year for exploring and sightseeing, which is understandable, because good weather is conducive to traveling, especially for several days. The time spent in a given location is not very impressive - more than 50% of respondents declare a stay of no more than one day, more than 30% - from 1 to 3 days, others spend more than 5 days and a small group - even over 15 days. They are passionate about the subject and conduct their own observations and research, often using specialized equipment.

Emotions accompanying the traveling to the haunted places were primarily curiosity and excitement, but 35.6% of the respondents admitted that they felt fear. Most respondents also practice other forms of tourism, only 24.7% are limited to visiting unusual places.

The last question was about the costs that respondents spend on tourism to haunted places. The most numerous group - about 44% spend up to 500 PLN, while 32.7% try not to exceed 100 PLN - they are probably those travelers who choose a goal for a one-day trip. However, many respondents are able to incur costs over 500 PLN. What are the factors that drive costs during such expeditions? Apart from the obvious: distance, means of transport or the type of accommodation, the nature of the visit will also be affected. In the case of a regular trip like "I was, I saw" the expenses would be relatively low. On the other hand, when a tourist intends to actively observe and record supernatural phenomena, the costs will increase considerably due to the need for professional equipment such as video cameras, IR cameras, sensitive cameras, EEG radiation and temperature meters.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The research problem of this work was the following question: does the tourism to haunted places have a future as a new alternative variety of traveling? To answer the question the author also formulated the following hypothesis: tourism to haunted places bodes well for the future and is aimed primarily at young travelers, open to new trends.

The results of the study have confirmed the legitimacy of the hypothesis. The survey was conducted mainly among young people under 30 years of age. Youthfulness can be characterized by the fact that it craves for new sensations, adventures and even risks, and these are the dominant factors of the choice of spending free time.

Most young tourists do not have much financial resources, so they are looking for cheaper solutions (nearer destinations, inexpensive accommodation) for vacation or free-time expeditions. With the issue of expenditure, a duality of the nature of the expedition emerges. Some of the respondents only visit, while others conduct their own research and this group can invest large sums in their ventures.

There is yet another significant factor for traveling to haunted places among younger enthusiasts, and this is health. Although this form of tourism does not require being very sporty or fit, many forms of observation take place at night, during various weather conditions, and often in uncomfortable positions (cellars, attics, scrubs, ditches), which require some physical preparation. These factors fit perfectly in the nature of haunted tourism, but they are not (though very important) the growing popularity of this form of leisure. The main reason is the ever-increasing fascination with the subject of supernatural phenomena. The results of the survey clearly show that in recent years there has been a special development of tourism related to this field, and the main motives are interest and curiosity. Based on the survey conducted by the author and respondents' answers, it can be said that the haunted tourism has a future ahead as an alternative, interesting form of leisure. Targeted

young people can be a great idea for a vigorous investor who would like to promote a new specialty in the travel industry.

People have always been fascinated by phenomena that cannot be explained by science and rational thinking. This applies not only to the extrasensory world but also to other peculiarities whose existence or origin cannot be explained in any way.

Facilities affected by paranormal phenomena also fall into this category. What is incomprehensible or crosses the boundaries of understanding attracts both researchers who, through their own observations, seek clarification, but also adventurers and thrill seekers.

Today's technologies and the global information network are conducive to the development of tourism to haunted places by providing more information about the location and history of such facilities, as well as providing more and more advanced testing equipment for such phenomena. The media (radio, television) are also popularizing this subject by producing a vast number of documentaries and series devoted to paranormal activities. Literature also contributes to this interest by shaping demand for this way of spending time. Tourism to haunted places attracts the greatest interest in the young generation, who do not spend much time and money on it. These expeditions, however, allow to satisfy the curiosity and fascination with the subject of supernatural phenomena, and by the way they allow to spend time in a new unknown environment, learn the history of the facility, the area and the natural environment around it.

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