



# Sustaining Tourism during War: A Case of Russia and Ukraine

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War tourism,  
Destination  
marketing, Tourist  
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**Abstract.**

This study investigates the underlying motivation for visiting Russia and Ukraine based on which policymakers can frame policies and campaigns around tourism in these war-ravaged countries. Finding ways to promote and sustain tourism in such destinations can immensely contribute to the economy of these nations. The study was conducted by collecting both primary and secondary data. For secondary data, online news sources and Google Trends were employed; for primary data, responses were collected from 207 Indian subjects through an online questionnaire for eliciting responses from a diverse set of subjects a broader reach. The results indicated a clear impact on rising interest of tourists in these countries despite the popular assumption that war might deter tourists from entering such destinations. The subjects admitted that the war ignited their curiosity in Ukraine's people, culture and destinations. This research is the first of its kind, which explores the motivation of tourists to travel to Russia and Ukraine while they are still at war and the ways in which countries can sustain tourism during the period of war.

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**Kata Kunci:**

Wisata perang,  
Pemasaran destinasi,  
Motivasi wisata,  
perang Rusia-  
Ukraina, Parwisata  
yang berkelanjutan.

**Abstrak.**

Studi ini menyelidiki motivasi mendasar untuk mengunjungi Rusia dan Ukraina yang menjadi dasar bagi para pembuat kebijakan untuk menyusun kebijakan dan kampanye seputar pariwisata di negara-negara yang dilanda perang tersebut. Menemukan cara untuk mempromosikan dan mempertahankan pariwisata di destinasi tersebut dapat memberikan kontribusi yang sangat besar terhadap perekonomian negara-negara tersebut. Penelitian dilakukan dengan mengumpulkan data primer dan sekunder. Untuk data sekunder, sumber berita online dan Google Trends digunakan; untuk data primer, tanggapan dikumpulkan dari 207 subjek di India melalui kuesioner online untuk mendapatkan tanggapan dari beragam subjek dengan jangkauan yang lebih luas. Hasilnya menunjukkan dampak yang jelas terhadap meningkatnya minat wisatawan terhadap negara-negara tersebut meskipun ada asumsi umum bahwa perang mungkin menghalangi wisatawan untuk memasuki destinasi tersebut. Subjek mengakui bahwa perang memicu rasa ingin tahu mereka terhadap masyarakat, budaya, dan tujuan Ukraina. Penelitian ini adalah penelitian pertama yang mengeksplorasi motivasi wisatawan untuk melakukan perjalanan ke Rusia dan Ukraina saat mereka masih berperang dan cara negara-negara tersebut dapat mempertahankan pariwisata selama periode perang.

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## 1. Introduction

After officially breaking its ties with the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine fell into an abyss of deep economic depression. It took almost a decade for the country to start developing slowly (Dancs, 2009; Berghauer, 2012). Tourism was seen as one of the critical sectors to solving the economic crisis owing to Ukraine's natural attractions and cultural conditions. (Sass, E., 2020). This pushed the tourism industry to boost its services for further growth and development. However, the economic-political-military transformation that Ukraine went through since the hybrid war (armed conflict in Eastern Ukraine) in 2014 posed several challenges to the development of the tourism industry.

Before tourism in Ukraine could recoup from the pandemic that hit hard in 2019, On February 2022, the world witnessed Russia launch a bloody invasion in Ukraine, which left the significant sites of Ukraine being reduced to rubbles. During this warfare, cities like Kyiv, Berdyansk, Chernihiv, Kharkiv, Odesa, and Sumy were devastated. According to UNESCO, more than 150 cultural sites were damaged, including churches, museums and monuments. The officials claimed that Russian forces deliberately targeted Ukrainian culture (Porterfield, C., 2022, June 23). Western officials claimed that by scope, the war could be the largest in Europe since 1945. (Seaton, A. V., 2009).

While the war is still ongoing, a tour company named 'Visit Ukraine' is unexpectedly providing tour services to outsiders for visiting the cities invaded by Russia. The website of the organisation projects shelled shopping centres, bombed TV towers, and damaged sculptures and monuments as major highlights of the tour. It describes the sufferings and resilience of these cities and urges the tourists to visit them and learn more about the stories of these brave cities while walking through its blood-bathed streets, charred buildings and military equipment, bomb-damaged monuments, landmines etc. Anton Taranenko, the founder and CEO of Visit Ukraine, stated that "even though this would be a rather ghoulish vacation, it's not the same as dark tourism, which draws tourists to other places of death, calamity, and destruction throughout the globe" (Tiwari, S., 2022). While the idea of visiting Ukraine at this moment would sound bizarre owing to safety concerns, a more inexplicable fact is that the tour company reported that despite receiving numerous warnings against visiting Ukraine at this time, 150 tickets have already been sold and that 1.5 million visitors per month—up 50% from pre-invasion levels—visit its website that provides advice on travelling securely to and from Ukraine (Tiwari, S., 2022).

Several countries have promoted war tourism or dark tourism in the past by allowing tourists to visit those places and learn about their histories. War-related tourism is a unique form of dark tourism that reflects tourists' interest in exploring battlefields, places of war, and the tragedy relating to others. Visiting war-related sites belongs to the prominent dark tourism activities (Butler & Suntikul, 2013; Mansfeld & Korman, 2015). Sites associated with war account for the world's largest single category of tourist attractions (Henderson, 2000; Smith, 1998). In another attempt to encourage people to visit Ukraine, UNWTO has urged the international populace to show their determination in contributing to the revival of Ukraine. The organisation has appealed to the ordinary people to contribute to the economic recovery of Ukraine by visiting the country as a tourist; they refer to this as solidarity tourism- "*Tourism-related action taken by governments, tourism businesses and tourists to help people suffering during and after crises, driven by empathy towards people, a sense of unity, and a shared understanding of societal standards and responsibility*" (Dolnicar, S., & McCabe, S., 2022).

Russia, on the other hand, is facing the brunt of invading Ukraine. Tour companies worldwide have revealed they are in no hurry to conduct business with Russia as they find it toxic. Tour operators like G Adventures, Rick Steve's Europe and Trafalgar Tours have echoed their sentiments about the political stance of Russia by cancelling all tours to Russia for the year 2022. They mentioned that they would like to resume tour operations in Russia after the peaceful war settlement between Russia and Ukraine. (Sampson, 2022). While other countries have started attracting travellers to their destinations

post-covid, Russia takes a back seat after entering the worst fight since World War II. Most European countries have issued sanctions against travelling to and from Russia. However, countries like China, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, Turkey, and Brazil have not joined the sanctions (O'Neil, 2022).

As a result, Russia is aggressively trying to woo the nations with friendly relations. To do so, Russia will issue electronic Visas to 52 countries, including India. In a recent move to attract Indian tourists to Russian destinations, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed visa-free entry between Russia and India (TOI, 2022). To fill in the tourism void in Russia, India's online travel business – MakeMyTrip - is selling tour packages from India to Russia, including theme packages like Russia Honeymoon Package, Russia Adventure Package, Russia Tourism Package etc.

Against the backdrop of the Russia and Ukraine war, the present study investigates the motivation of Indian travellers in these two war-affected countries. While the study has clear benefits for these two countries, the current work has been undertaken to answer some broader questions related to war tourism. The present work attempts to understand how war arouses interest in the countries involved. If war attracts attention to a tourist destination, does it also stir tourist interest in these countries? Usually, wars can make a country suffer economically, and if the government can attract tourists, it can have economic gains from the increase in tourist footfall. An increase in tourist footfall may signal to other countries that the country is turning conducive for business and trade.

Against the backdrop of the Russia-Ukraine war, the present study is being undertaken to explore the motivation of Indian tourists to visit tourist destinations in these countries. The research questions for the study included: Does war arouse interest in a country? Does interest in the country increase tourism aspirations? What attributes of the war-affected nations trigger touristic aspiration in tourists? In the following sections, the research questions, method, discussion, conclusions & implications and limitations of the study have been presented in the order they are listed here.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *RQ1 Does War Arouse Interest in a Country?*

The impact of war is not just borne by the countries waging it; the entire world gets perturbed. Apart from the first-hand sufferings of people caught in the crossfire of violence, the rest of the world experiences the resulting tremors of the war in waves. It causes socio-political unrest, obstructs the everyday routine of trade and commerce, and destabilises the countries' economies. Therefore, wars attract global attention. People want to stay updated with the warzone's happenings and how it affects the rest of the world, especially them. They scan the newspapers and stay glued to news channels, social media sites etc., to gather every little information related to the war. Pan, Oatman, Moy, and Reynolds (1994) reported an increase in news consumption through media exposure during the first Gulf war. Another study on UAE citizens revealed a rise in media use, especially television, during the Iraq War (Ayish, 2004).

Regarding the amount of news that people consumed during the war, Jason Steinhauer, author of *History, Disrupted: How Social Media and the World Wide Web Have Changed the Past*, says, "People want to educate, people want to inform, people want to bear witness (Ducharme, J., 2022). Available texts, images and videos of war are also preserved to form a shared knowledge of the past. They serve as a collective memory of the people who have experienced or witnessed the war. This also creates a sense of shared experience amongst the people who have been through wars or conflicts at any point in history (George, E. W., & Das, M., 2017). Newspapers, magazines, documentaries, television and films are popular tools for disseminating collective memory. At more informal levels,

collective memory is relayed through conversations, oral stories, letters, diaries, postcards, etc. (Olick JK, Robbins J, 1998)

## 2.2. *RQ2 If War Attracts Attention to the Countries Engaged in a Fight, does it also Stir Touristic Interest in these Countries?*

Several factors that motivate a tourist to travel have been represented by Crompton (1979) through his Push and Pull Model. Push factors include the internal desires of a traveller to take a break and go somewhere without having a specific destination in mind. Pull factors, on the other hand, include attributes of a given destination which attract tourists to visit that place. Crompton (1979) identified seven socio-psychological factors that act as push motives; escape, self-exploratory, relaxation, prestige, regression, Kinship enhancement and social interaction. Novelty and education were the two factors which accounted for pull motives. These motives, however, were analysed to understand the aspirations when the tourist wished to travel for leisure. War tourism or dark tourism was not much explored in Crompton (1979). Later research showed that the motivations behind visiting a war site include education, heritage, historical/ cultural interest, personal connection, pilgrimage, ideological and political values and beliefs, fascination with the morbid and entertainment (Chen & Tsai, 2019; Kang et al., 2012; Light, 2017; Petrevska et al., 2018).

Security is one of the fundamental human needs all over the world. After creating the conditions for existence, this is our most crucial need according to the accepted human norms (Maslow, 1943). Tourists gauge the risks involved in travelling to a specific country or destination while making their travel plans. Natural or manufactured disasters like floods, earthquakes, an outbreak of various diseases like COVID and Ebola, terrorist attacks, and civil wars can influence a tourist's behaviour. The immediate reaction of a tourist in such situations would be to either refrain from visiting these places or cancel the reserved trips. Therefore, safety is a significant concern when one makes a travel plan.

However, some tourists are willing to risk their security to have an extraordinary experience. Isaac (2017) reported that the urge to witness history in the making is one of the most popular motivations among tourists. Therefore, they show immense interest in visiting regions with the ongoing war. In that sense, danger can be viewed as an attraction that enables visitors to experience an emotional edge. (Juan et al., 2020). Being in war zones and getting the whiff of conflict and tragedy makes the touristic experience more authentic than armchair tourism. For instance, after the signing of the Panmunjom Declaration, which marked the denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, Panmunjom gained popularity. This village is situated close to the borders of North Korea and South Korea. As one of the last vestiges of the cold war and testimony of the existing tension between South Korea and North Korea, it receives high footfall from national and international travellers. The buffer zone between the two conflicting nations and a site filled with minefields and watchtowers during the cold war makes it attractive for tourists. Exploratory research on tourism experiences suggests that travellers experience solid and intense emotions when they visit war sites. They have described their experience as profound and extraordinarily meaningful (Gelbman, 2008; Kang et al., 2012; Seaton, 2009; Weaver et al., 2017).

## 3. Research Method

### 3.1. Design

The study was conducted by collecting both primary and secondary data as we required both data from online sources and primary subjects to meet the research objectives. While online sources were referred to for studying the consumption of news related to the war, we collected responses from

Indian tourists regarding their interest in visiting war-affected countries. An online questionnaire was used to reach out to diverse groups of tourists.

### 3.2. Participants and Procedure

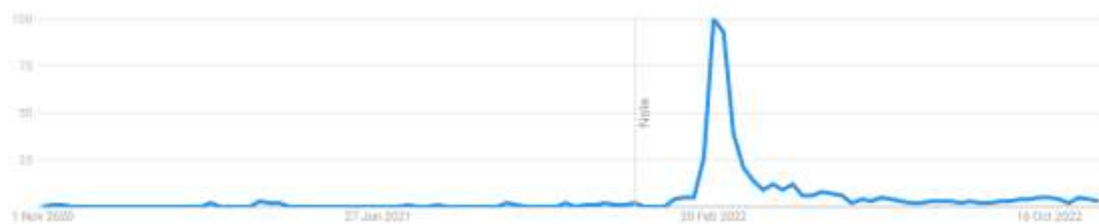
An online survey was designed to collect responses from Indian students and working professionals using a Google Form. A total of 207 individuals participated in the study, of which 141 were male. Most of the responses were received from the subjects in the age group of 18-35; only seven subjects were above 35. Most participants, excluding 14, admitted to having travelled outside their city once a year.

### 3.3. Measurements

An online questionnaire was sent to students and working professionals aged between 18 and 35. The questionnaire included several yes/no questions and a few short responses to capture qualitative responses. Some of the items in the questionnaire had How often did you look up information about Ukraine – Russia war online? Was Ukraine on your tourist destination list before the outbreak of war? 3. Do you like reading about tourist attractions before visiting a tourist destination? The instrument used for data collection is shared in Appendix One. By including both forced-choice and open-ended questions, the measurement tool was designed to study tourist interest in the two countries, Ukraine and Russia, affected by war.

## 4. Analysis and Discussion

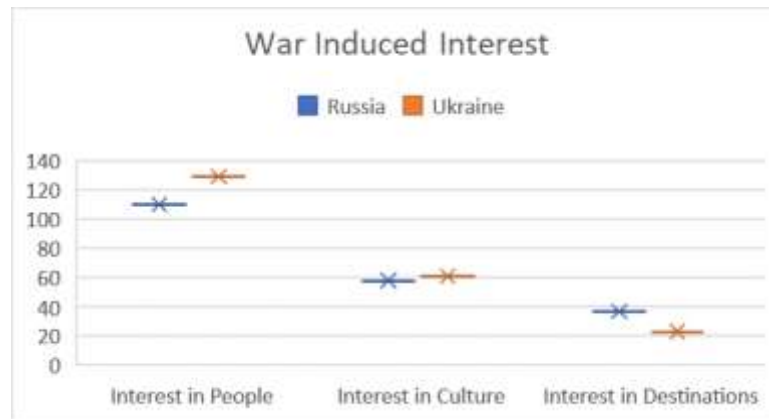
Wars attract people's attention and can arouse interest within and outside the country. To study its impact on news consumption, we reviewed various online sources and found that the Russia-Ukraine war highly engaged the readers. The Guardian reported its fifth month for page views on February 22, when the war was at its prime. The newspaper also shared the number for its Ukraine live blog, which went as high as 2 million views per day. Similarly, another English newspaper – the Sun, reported it saw 70 million-page views for its stories on Ukraine. The readers of other popular newspapers also consumed war-related news; for example, the Telegraph reported engagement at 300 per cent of the standard rate. During the week when the war broke out, the BBC news live page said the war received 396 million page views (Kersley, 2022).



**Figure 1.** Interest Over Time in the Keywords Russia Ukraine (Search conditions: Between October 28 2020, and November 28 2022; Geography: India)  
Source: Google Trends (2022)

Even in India, interest levels rose way above the normal interest levels in Russia and Ukraine-related stories. A Google Trends search on the keyword – Russia Ukraine, returned the graph shared below. This figure shows a sharp increase in engagement levels related to Russia and Ukraine in February 2022. Further, to understand the level of awareness, interest and intent to visit the destinations in Ukraine and Russia, we analysed qualitative and quantitative responses from Indian tourists. The

quantitative results indicated a clear impact of war in terms of rising interest in the two countries. The subjects responded that they wished to enter war-ravaged destinations of Russia and Ukraine against the widespread assumption that war might reduce tourists' willingness to visit the war-affected countries. The subjects also shared that Ukraine was earlier not on their list of tourist destinations, but the war ignited their curiosity about the country's people, culture and destinations. Figure 2 shows that the war increased interest in Ukraine's people and culture and not as much in popular destinations in Ukraine and Russia. Remarkably, the war triggered the highest interest in people, followed by other attractions like culture and monuments.



**Figure 2.** Impact of War on Touristic Motivations

To understand the tourist intent to visit the war affected destinations, we asked the participants about their motivations to visit these two countries – Russia and Ukraine. We found that although the people interest numbers were high, the interest of tourists in Ukraine and Russia was driven by their interest in not just the people of these two countries, but also by their interest in the culture and destinations of Ukraine and Russia. Figure 3 shows that while the p value is significant for all the three categories studied for this research, that is, people interest, cultural interest and destination interest, Cramer's V value is a bit higher for destination interest in comparison to people and cultural interest.

**Table 1.** Results of Crosstabulation for Interest in People, Culture and Destinations

	Willingness to visit Ukraine		Willingness to visit Russia	
	P value	Cramer's V	P value	Cramer's V
People Interest	.0092	.182	.0076	.186
Cultural Interest	.0029	.208	.0017	.219
Destination Interest	3.36E-06	.325	3.07E-06	.326

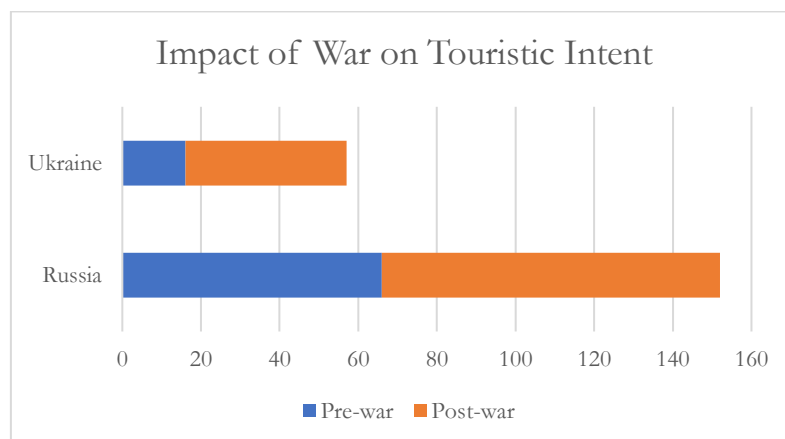
Later, when we analyzed the intent of male and female tourists to visit destinations in Russia and Ukraine, the crosstabulation analysis failed to show any differences between the two groups. The p value of 0.1652 and 0.2279 for the intent to visit Russia and Ukraine respectively, in Figure 4 shows that the two groups – males and females didn't have any significant differences in their intent to visit the war-ravaged destinations.

**Table 2.** Results of Crosstabulation for Males and Females with Respect to Their Intent to Visit the Two Destinations

	Intent to visit Russia	Intent to visit Ukraine
chi-square	1.93	1.45
p value	0.1652	0.2279

Further, to comprehensively understand the quantitative responses, we carefully reviewed the qualitative responses, which explained the reasons for higher interest in people. Indian tourists described interest in people as witnessing the spirit of people, understanding the effect of war on people and how the citizens withstood the troublesome times and how the war affected their lives. While people's interest attracted tourists to Russia and Ukraine equally, the cultural ties between Russia and India gave Indian tourists more reasons to visit Russia. Indian tourists highlighted the rich history of Russia and the country's deep friendship with India as a big pull towards this destination. Several subjects also admitted their willingness to visit temples and religious locations in Russia. While the landscape of Ukraine attracted many subjects, the historical cities and monuments in Russia emerged as a pull factor for the country. The subjects explained that while the monuments of these countries might have been destroyed in the war, the beautiful landscape of Ukraine and Russia might remain unaffected and be the reason for them to visit these countries. Some minor reasons for visiting these two countries included the adventurous spirit of subjects, Ukraine being a unique destination, governance and the notion of power in Russia.

Even though the two countries' armies had retreated, security concerns still intimidated several subjects, and they wished to visit these countries, especially Ukraine, only when the war ceased. The security concerns affected many who didn't wish to visit Ukraine. The other minor reasons for not visiting Ukraine included the destruction of popular sites, the frigid climate, the lack of popular destinations, lack of recommendations from tourists. Some subjects didn't intend to visit Russia and Ukraine because of language barriers and lack of career relevance. The political ties between the countries with regard to India also emerged, favouring Russia because of its strong relationship with India. We have found that the interest in people, culture, landscape and other destinations affected the intent of individuals in considering Ukraine and Russia as tourist destinations. While fewer subjects showed their interest in Ukraine as a tourist destination, the number increased for the country, primarily driven by a strong interest in the condition of people affected by war. Despite the huge leap in interest for Ukraine, Russia remained the destination of choice for more subjects driven by its strong ties with India, rich history and beautiful landscape.

**Figure 3.** Impact of War on Tourist Interest in Destinations: A case of Russia and Ukraine

## 5. Conclusions

Tourism is quite a sensitive industrial sector directed mainly at peaceful territories (Aubert, 2011). Most People like to travel to destinations which are safe and secure. This intention may have a negative impact on tourism in politically volatile countries. Against this widely reported tourist behavior, the present study explored the feasibility of promoting war-ravaged destinations. As reported in previous studies (Garg, 2013; Rittichainuwat, 2013), safety and insecurity intimidated many subjects participating in the study from showing intent to visit the two countries; however, the solidarity with the people affected by war and the urge to witness their spirit emerged as a strong motivation for many Indian tourists. Further, our study also showed that the intent to visit the war affected destinations didn't change for male or female tourist groups. Marketers can therefore target both males and females while trying to promote tourism in war ravaged destinations.

War also increased interest in people and culture and made the destinations in war-affected countries of higher interest to tourists. The study revealed that while the political and cultural connections between countries increased tourists' intent to visit the war-affected countries, tourists also showed interest in the people and their condition, irrespective of any past relations between the source and destination countries. The study showed that war increased awareness about the affected countries and their people and culture and drew the attention of many tourists who might otherwise have never intended to visit Ukraine and Russia.

The study is beneficial for marketers and policymakers attempting to recover the economy from the effect of war and working on drawing the attention of international tourists. While promoting tourism in war-affected countries, marketers and policymakers should address tourists' security and safety concerns as much as possible since many tourists decline to travel to war-affected countries for fear of losing their lives. Beyond safety assurance, policymakers can promote tourism in countries with a history of close political and cultural associations with them for better outcomes from their promotional campaigns. If the policymakers choose to promote their countries in places with little or no political affiliation or cultural association, they should highlight the landscape, culture and especially the human spirit to cope with the adversity in their marketing campaigns. The results of the study support the view that tourists continue to take interest in the destinations despite war as the landscape of the war-affected destinations may remain unaffected even when residential areas and monuments get damaged. Marketing campaigns underscoring the uniqueness of culture and its impact on the people of the land, and the spirit of people to cope with adverse situations may also attract attention and arouse intent to visit war-ravaged destinations. Marketers can also work towards creating solidarity tourism products by leveraging the desire of the global population to assist people in war-torn countries. By appealing to human relationships, cultural ties and highlighting the landscapes of these destinations, marketers can attract tourist footfalls and overcome the fear of travel to destinations engaged in a war.

## Limitations and Future Scope

The present study has examined the aspirations of tourists to visit war sites and the reasons behind them. According to Lennon and Foley (2000), tourists participate in war tourism due to the perceptions they build depending on their personal or impersonal connection with the war site. In this study, however, we didn't attempt to explore any emotional relationship with Ukraine or Russia. Still, participants proactively reported the friendly ties between Russia and India as one of the reasons for visiting tourist destinations in Russia. Future studies can explore how a personal connection with war-affected nations can develop into touristic aspirations. This can add another dimension to the motivation of the people visiting war sites. Second, it is also possible that the touristic aspirations change over time. For example, if the Russia-Ukraine war ceases, the intention to visit these countries



might also change. Therefore, longitudinal studies can be conducted to report the increase or decrease in the intent of tourists to visit war-affected countries. Studies could also be undertaken to understand the immediacy effect and lag effect of war on tourist intent to visit such destinations. Third, we can investigate 'interest in people' further to know whether this means showing solidarity, empathy, curiosity about their condition or something else. Fourth, future studies can also be conducted on comparing intent to choose between two tourism options, for example, war tourism and other tourism types.

Even though the present study reports both qualitative and quantitative aspects of the war-induced interest in tourism, it remains limited in being a descriptive study of tourist intent. It can improve by explaining if the change in purpose is statistically significant. However, it might be challenging for researchers to collect information about tourist intent pre and post-war because of the sudden nature of wars. In addition, future studies attempt to identify more factors that arouse tourist interest in war sites and how war tourism can help strengthen those countries' economies.

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