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Disaster Tourism

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 Posted Jan 24th 2011 01:32 PM

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[stahlmandesign, flickr](#)

Some may find it gruesome, but so-called disaster tourism is on the rise, giving travelers first-person access to the locations of the world's most horrific crimes, catastrophes and calamities. These sites offer insights into human tragedies and disasters that move far beyond what one can glean from a magazine feature or a cable television mini-series. While some sites are decades removed from their associated atrocities, for others the memory of human suffering has barely waned from the headlines.

Chicago Fire, Chicago, Illinois

No Chicago visit would be complete without a trip to [Garrett Popcorn](#) (try the caramel over cheese) and a guided tour that details the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. Hundreds of people were killed and more than four square miles of Chicago destroyed. Yet despite the magnitude of the disaster, the Fire led to an aggressive and deliberate city development plan that transformed the city into one of the country's most vibrant, a renaissance chronicled during the tour. [O'Leary's Fire Truck Tours](#) shuttle guests along in a quasi-fire truck, where a guide provides details of the Fire while pointing out the buildings that survived, including the Chicago Water Tower and the Chicago Avenue Pumping Station.



[Ana Paula Hirama, flickr](#)

Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum, Poland

The largest of the Nazi death camps from World War II, the Auschwitz complex included 48 concentration camps where more than one million Jews, ethnic Poles, and Roma and Sinti Gypsies were killed. Since 1947, the [Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum](#) has provided access to the grounds and the majority of the buildings at the sites of Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II-Birkenau. Admission is free, but you can hire an Auschwitz Memorial guide for a fee.

JFK Assassination, Dallas, Texas

The [Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza](#), located on the sixth and seventh floors of the former Texas School Book Depository, contains a rich collection of films, photos and displays that chronicle in exacting details the events of November 22, 1963. More than six million people from around the world have visited the museum since it opened in 1989, a testament to JFK's legacy and the global impact of his assassination. Can't make it to Dallas? A [live webcam](#) delivers an exclusive view from the museum's sixth floor window, what the webcam host refers to as the "Sniper's Perch."



[11a, flickr](#)

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum, Hiroshima, Japan

On August 6, 1945, the first nuclear bomb to be used in war detonated in Hiroshima, Japan, forever changing the face of modern warfare, while ushering in a global arms race that has yet to recede. Just steps away from the bomb site stands the [Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum](#), a memorial to those killed or injured by the bomb and featuring the ruins of the former Industrial Promotion Hall (the building closest to the bomb site). This is part of the larger Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, a complex that includes a museum, conference center and memorial hall that was designated an UNESCO World Heritage site in 1996.

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Bhopal Gas Disaster Site, Bhopal, India

The world's deadliest gas leak occurred on December 2, 1984, at the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, India, during which a leak of methyl isocyanate gas and other chemicals led to the deaths of tens of thousands of people (the Indian Council of Medical Research estimates 25,000 people have died from the effects of exposure). In 2009, the Madhya Pradesh government announced [plans to open the factory for public tours](#), with a makeover that includes building a library, lecture hall and a memorial to those killed.



Efrem Lukatsky, AP

Nuclear Disaster Site, Chernobyl, Ukraine

On April 26, 1986, the [Chernobyl, Ukraine](#) nuclear reactor exploded, unleashing the world's most devastating nuclear disaster in history. A 19-mile radius around the reactor site was evacuated, sealed off from the public due to the highly contaminated atmosphere. No longer. Beginning later this year, Ukraine [will open the sealed zone to visitors](#), allowing unprecedented access to the explosion site, according to the Ukraine's Emergency Situations Ministry. Routes will be medically safe "if one follows the official route and doesn't stray away from the group," said Yulia Yershova in an Associated Press interview.

Khmer Rouge Sites, Anlong Veng, Cambodia

Cambodia's bloody Khmer Rouge regime is said to be responsible for the deaths of an estimated two million people between 1975 and 1979. Now the country's government is trying to entice visitors to visit the last stronghold of the Khmer Rouge in the town of Anlong Veng, about three hours from the must-see temples of [Angkor Wat](#). A major tourism plan is in the works that would include 15 sites such as leader Pol Pot's resting place and second-in-command Ta Mok's former home.



neverending september, flickr

Political Tour, Belfast, Northern Ireland

For those seeking first-hand knowledge of the British-Irish conflict, as told by former political prisoners and activists, consider a [Coiste Irish Political Tour](#) while in [Belfast](#), Northern Ireland. The walking tour gives in-depth knowledge of The Troubles, making stops at the most relevant and historic places, including Bombay Street (where many riots took place), the murals that have been painted along Falls Road, and Milltown Cemetery where three hunger strikers were buried in 1981.

Hurricane Katrina Tour, New Orleans, Louisiana

With a goal of documenting the destruction caused by Hurricane Katrina in 2005 while educating visitors on the effects of coastal erosion and the factors that contributed to the disaster, Gray Line offers its three-hour tour called [Hurricane Katrina-America's Greatest Catastrophe](#). Included in the itinerary are visits to an actual levee that breached during the storm and neighborhoods hardest hit by the devastation, where hundreds of thousands of residents were displaced. But the tour is not all destruction and devastation. Also included is a detailed look at how (and where) the city is rebuilding, a testament to the resolve of the city and its people.



Artist Rendering, The National September 11 Memorial and Museum

Ground Zero Memorial, New York, New York

Completion of the [National September 11 Memorial & Museum](#), which is being built at the World Trade Center site, is scheduled for completion this September 11, the 10th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks. When complete, the memorial will include the nation's largest manmade waterfalls cascading into reflecting pools set in the footprints of the WTC's Twin Towers, with the names of those killed in the 9/11 attacks and the February 1993 World Trade Center bombing inscribed around the pools' outer edges. Surrounding the pools will be a Memorial Plaza, with nearly 400 trees. The museum will present comprehensive details about the terrorist attacks of 9/11 and 1993, with a haunting set of experiences that integrate artifacts from the World Trade Center site. Until the museum and memorial open, a 9/11 Memorial Preview Site is currently open, which details plans and progress for the museum.

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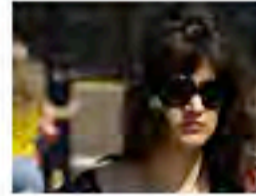
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