

## EXERCISE 9.1

### THE USES OF DARK TOURISM

We use the term 'dark tourism' (Lennon and Foley, 2001) to describe a recent cultural development whereby people increasingly visit sites associated with death, war, suffering and holocaust. Large numbers of tourists visit sites such as Robben Island in South Africa and Colditz, Auschwitz, and other Nazi concentration camps. The attractions are often criticised for the way they commodify death, i.e. they turn human drama into a tourist product, just like any other, devaluing the impact of death. However, such attractions are also important in enabling collective grief and a collective engagement with the past. They avoid the traditional conservatism of the tourist and heritage industries by apparently being less selective and dealing with the difficult, dirty, unattractive and unpleasant aspects of history. Each site can act as a forum for public debate, a place to publicly mourn and as an artefact to be displayed in its own right.

None of the above necessarily explains actual tourist motivations for visiting these sites. This exercise gets you to think about some of these issues in relation to two sites currently developing a profile as tourist attractions, and to attempt to imagine why people might wish to visit them. Obtain copies of newspaper articles on dark tourism and discuss the following questions:

- What are the positive aspects of tourism development at the site?
- The negative aspects of tourism development at the site?
- How could the 'voyeuristic and exploitative' tendencies of tourism be avoided?
- What are the important considerations in terms of heritage interpretation at this site?
- Would you like to visit this site? Give reasons why/why not.
- What kinds of people do you imagine would visit this site? What might their motivations be?
- What lessons could the site teach us? Are there lessons for anyone other than locals?
- Does the site still have political or emotional resonance? Who for?
- Will the site still be interesting in 100 years' time? Why/why not?