

Crime-Safety Perceptions Among Visitors to an Urban Tourism District: The Case of Brick Lane, East London

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Abstract

Urban destinations often contend with reputational challenges related to crime and safety, which can influence tourist behaviour and destination image. Brick Lane, located in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets in East London in the UK, is regarded as a popular destination among domestic (UK) and international tourists. In recent years, the street, which is lined with cafés, restaurants, vintage clothing shops, and famous ‘curry houses’, has become increasingly popular due to its ‘trendy’ and ‘hip’ appeal. Brick Lane, according to official crime statistics, has high crime rates and thus could be considered as being unsafe for locals and visitors alike. The study seeks to explore tourists’ perceptions of crime-safety and examines how socio-demographic characteristics, victimisation history, travel behaviours and contextual factors influence their experiences. Using a structured self-administered questionnaire, data was collected from 416 domestic and international tourists over a period of 14 months. Quantitative methods were employed to assess relationships between key variables, including the use of ANOVA, Spearman’s rank correlation, and Mann–Whitney U tests. Findings reveal that although the majority (65%) of tourists reported feeling safe; crime-safety perceptions were relatively lower among females, night-time visitors, repeat visitors, and those who were previously victimised. This study contributes to tourism crime-risk literature by demonstrating that tourists’ safety perceptions are contingent not only on personal experience but also on contextual and socio-spatial cues. It is recommended that local authorities and stakeholders coordinate efforts to enhance security and create a safer and welcoming tourism space.

Keywords: fear of crime, perceived risk of crime, satisfaction, future travel intentions, Brick Lane.

1. Introduction

London's Brick Lane, which is approximately three-quarters of a mile in length winding its way between Aldgate East and Shoreditch, has a strong tourism 'pull' with its boutique shops (mainly vintage clothing), bagel shops, the now defunct Ben Truman Brewery site and towers (established in 1666), the Jamme Masjid Mosque, a bookshop, Bangladeshi restaurants and 'curry houses', nightclubs, street art, cafes, antique shops, and numerous artisanal shops. Brick Lane is iconic and has a similar power of drawing tourists to that of other streets such as Carnaby Street in London, Long Street in Cape Town, La Rambla in Barcelona, and Lombard Street in San Francisco. Brick Lane, E1 is located in the ward of Spitalfields and Banglatown in the borough of Tower Hamlets in East London. It is described by many as the 'heartland' of the Bangladeshi community. London's East End has a long historical association with poverty, deprivation, and crime (Hobbs, 1995). The vicinity in which Brick Lane is located (namely Whitechapel, Spitalfields, and Aldgate East) was once associated with the poorest slums of East London and was a favoured spot for mass murderer Jack the Ripper in the late 19th century (Morton, 2021).

The London borough of Tower Hamlets experiences high rates of crime which have been linked to poverty and unemployment (Cirillo, 2025). The Whitechapel and Aldgate East area has for a long time had a history of housing numerous shelters for homeless people and recovery centres for people with addictions (the Salvation Army began on the streets of East London in 1865, and its headquarters were based on Whitechapel Road in Aldgate East). Tower Hamlets is among the top 10 most dangerous boroughs for crime in London. For example, the overall crime rate in Tower Hamlets in 2021, had an average of 97 crimes per 1 000 people which is 12 per cent higher when compared to London average of 87 per 1 000 residents (UK Crime Stats, 2024).

Safety and security are vital aspects for the development and sustainability of tourism destinations. Tourists are particularly vulnerable because they are temporary visitors to communities with which they are not familiar. As a result, they may not be able to differentiate between "safe" and "unsafe" areas. Travellers, especially first-time ones, are generally concerned that they may become potential victims of crime (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011; Mawby & Vakhitova, 2022). This is largely due to a lack of knowledge that people have about a destination compared to the knowledge they have on the country and place that they live in. Most tourists are influenced by the images and the narrative portrayed by mass

and social media. Some destination areas have high crime rates involving members of the local community and this may affect tourists' perceptions and image of such destinations. Incidents of crime, especially involving tourists as victims, make international headline news. This may result in a decline in visitor numbers and tarnish the image of a destination (George, 2003).

Perceptions of safety and security is a major determinant in travellers' decisions to visit a destination (Beirman, 2003). Crime and other factors such as terrorism concerns affect a tourist's choice of a destination. Perceptions of safety of a destination not only affect tourists' travel decisions they also affect their travel behaviour whilst at the destination as well as the likelihood of repeat visitation (George, 2012). In general, tourists make their travel decisions based on perceptions rather than reality (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992).

The paper aims to demonstrate the link between tourists' perceptions of crime-safety whilst visiting a tourist location (namely: Brick Lane) and how specific factors such as visitors' previous experience (travel experience and crime victimisation) and personal characteristics (demographic variables – age, gender, and nationality) combine to influence perceptions of crime and safety compared with the literature. The study provides a valuable addition to the growing body of literature on tourism destination safety and security. Before the study results are presented and discussed, the academic literature on tourism and crime, tourists' perceptions of crime-safety, and perceived risk in tourism is reviewed.

2. Literature Review

This section reviews the relevant literature presented in the topics of the relationship between crime and tourism, fear of crime, and perceived risk in tourism.

2.1 The association between tourism and crime

The close relationship between tourism and crime has been addressed by criminologists (e.g. Mawby, Ozascilar, & Ziyalar, 2021) and tourism researchers (e.g. Botterill & Jones, 2010; Mansfeld & Pizam, 1996). Research into the association between these two forces has been reported in the tourism literature since the early 1970s commencing with the work of McPheters & Stronge (1974) and then followed by Jud (1975) and Fukunaga (1975). Mansfeld and Pizam (1996) provided a comprehensive compilation of international case studies on tourism, crime and safety issues. Much of the research since has focussed on the

effect of crime (and perceived high crime rates) on tourism destination demand and tourist-crime victimisation at specific tourist locations (Adam & Adongo, 2016; Allen, 1999; Barker, Page & Meyer, 2002; Brunt, Mawby & Hambly, 2000; George, 2003; Walker & Page, 2007).

Various classifications regarding different categories of crime and tourism have been developed by tourism researchers to expand an understanding of crime and tourism (Cohen, 1997; Mansfeld, & Pizam, 2006; Ryan, 1993; Seabra & Korstanje, 2023). For example, Ryan (1993) suggested a tourism-crime typology that identifies five types of relationships between crime and tourism:

1. Tourists who are accidental victims of crime who happen to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and are seen as easy targets;
2. Locales used by criminals due to the nature of the tourist location, but the victims are not specifically tourists;
3. The industry and its locations that attract criminal activity because tourists are much more prone to taking risks;
4. Criminal activity that is organised to meet tourist demand, for example getting involved in deviant activities such as drugs and soliciting prostitutes; and
5. Organised criminal and terrorist groups who commit specific violent acts against tourists and/or tourist facilities.

Several occurrences involving crimes against tourists fit into the first and third categories of Ryan's typology (1993). Ryan's first category assumes that tourists are perceived as easy targets by criminals. They are away from their usual familiar environment and often travelling off the beaten track in possession of valuables. In the third category, the location attracts criminal activity because tourists are perceived as easy targets by the perpetrators who are aware that tourists are in unfamiliar territory and more vulnerable. Crime is committed by individuals or small groups of criminals. It is opportunistic and primarily motivated by the acquisition of belongings. These two types of tourist-oriented crimes have also been referred to as crimes of opportunity (Mansfeld & Pizam, 2006). The relationship between crime and tourism can therefore be said to range from the commitment of crime where the tourist setting is incidental to, at the other extreme, a situation where tourists and tourist facilities are deliberately targeted as objects of terrorist action. Tourists held as hostages are considered symbols of global capitalism and engaged in a sponsored activity of

the state which is the enemy of certain terrorist groups. This is what Mansfeld and Pizam, in their definition of tourist-oriented crime, termed 'planned crimes' (2006). As a result of any of these occurrences, tourism demand can be greatly affected to a destination affecting all sectors of its tourism industry (such as accommodation, transportation, visitor attractions and so on) as well as the destination's image.

A study by Pizam (1982), however, found limited evidence to support that tourism contributes to crime in nine states in the USA, but claimed it was possible that 'in some communities one might find a high correlation between tourism and crime' (1982). He examined the relative contribution of tourism to various types of crimes throughout a nationwide survey. His analysis considered an extensive number of sociodemographic variables as well as tourism predictors for each of the nine types of crimes. Pizam (1982) found that tourism had a weak but statistically significant relationship to four types of crimes, namely: robbery, rape, property crimes, and aggravated assault. Similarly, more recently Palanca-Tan et al.'s (2015) study analysed the total number of tourist arrivals and crime rates in the Philippines and did not obtain a statistically significant relationship, but when looking at certain categories of tourist, an association was found.

Although not entirely conclusive then, in general the evidence provided by numerous studies suggests that tourism leads to increased levels of crime among local population tourist areas. As Chesney-Lind and Lind (1986) reiterated: "while increases in the number of tourists might lead to general increases in crime throughout the community by contributing to urbanisation and other forms of social change". Nevertheless, there are many logical reasons for expecting crime against tourists and crime rates to be higher in tourist areas. Various research studies have shown tourists to be at high risk of crime victimisation (de Albuquerque & McElroy, 1999; Harper, 2001; Mawby, 2014). Ryan (1993) suggested that there is something inherent in the nature of tourism itself that might give rise to a relationship between crime and tourism. Indeed, tourists face a number of distinct problems from those of generic victims. Ryan's proposition may hold true given the fact that tourists are free from their normal social constraints and daily responsibilities which may lead them to become involved in illegal or quasi-illegal behaviour; and indeed, may well be the motivation for the holiday (there is a paucity of research on the topic of tourists as perpetrators of crime whilst on holiday). Overall, the literature suggests that tourists are lucrative targets and are often disproportionately the victims of crime because of their appearance, behaviour, unfamiliarity with the area and customs, social isolation, and language barriers (Boakye, 2010; Chesney-

Lind & Lind, 1986; Cohen, 1987; Mawby, 2000; Michalko, 2004; Strangeland, 1998). Tourists can easily become victims of crime since they are more inclined to risky behaviour than the rest of the population. They go to several places, drink, have fun, lose their sense of danger, and being too relaxed often act carelessly because they believe that they are safe as they are on holiday. Tourists sometimes want to try out things they do not practice at home (Carić, 1999), and as de Albuquerque and McElroy (1999) argue some tourists: “escape for two weeks and indulge in anti-social and self-destructive behaviour” and this behaviour usually involves drug consumption and the use of prostitutes. Tourists (particularly foreign travellers) are taken advantage of as they are considered tempting targets since they may be carrying valuables (passports, mobile phones, jewellery) and the likelihood of reporting crime is lower (Allen, 1999; Buil-Gil & Mawby, 2022; Chesney-Lind & Lind, 1986; Crotts, 1996; Fujii & Mak, 1980; Pizam et al., 1997).

Official crime statistics, which are often criticised for lack of reliability due to different methods of data collection, are not specifically designed to be used in tourist-victimisation studies; therefore, a great deal of important data regarding the victim’s background and travel characteristics are not recorded. In addition, there is tendency for a high rate of unreported crime incidents (Barker et al., 2003; Coleman & Moynihan, 1996; Mawby, 2000) and generally police crime statistics do not record according to whether the victim is a tourist (Mawby, 2017). Reporting of crimes against tourists is low largely due to the difficulty associated with identifying the perpetrator (Harper, 2001), and victim surveys generally target residents and exclude tourists (Mawby, 2014). Furthermore, if criminals are caught and brought to court, tourists may well be unfamiliar with the local criminal justice system, especially where a different language is involved, and may not have the time (this may impinge on valuable holiday time) to deal with police processes and attend a court hearing. As Mawby (2000) points out: “the ‘cost’ of [the tourists] reporting crime may be greater than the benefits anticipated from informing the police”.

2.2 Fear of crime

The concept of ‘fear of crime’ has featured in criminology literature since the 1960s. Coupled with the growth of victimisation surveys, the concept was used as an instrument of criminological research and criminal justice policy.

Crime surveys were initially introduced to supplement police recorded crime statistics (Tilley & Tseloni, 2016). National crime surveys provide information about a number of measures of fear of crime: anxiety, concern, worry, feelings of a lack of safety (for example, when out alone after dark), perceptions of risk, perceptions of crime and disorder problems in their neighbourhood, and avoidance strategies (Mawby et al., 2021). The function of crime surveys has extended beyond simply counting crime. The detailed knowledge on victim/target characteristics conveyed by crime surveys has provided the foundations for theory development, especially on the topics of crime victimisation, and fear of crime

Developed largely as a result of crime surveys, such as the 1982 British Crime Survey (BCS), the term ‘fear of crime’ was based on the responses to questions which were designed to probe how respondents felt (safe or unsafe) while in public situations, such as using public transport or walking in his or her neighbourhood after dark. In essence, the BCS report compared the chances of falling victim to crime with other incidents, such as being involved in a car accident or having an accident at home. Following publication of the BCS, criminologists focussed on the relationship between ‘fear of crime’ and the risk of victimisation (Gottfredson, 1984). Indeed, Hough and Mayhew (1983) suggested that criminologists have been concerned that the fear of crime appears to be out of proportion to the risk of victimisation. A weak association was thus identified between ‘fear of crime’, as reported in victimisation surveys, and actual risk. This was what Mawby (2000) called the risk-fear paradox and is best summarised as thus: “those who fear crime least are most likely to experience it”.

Victimisation surveys provide robust measures of the prevalence of different types of crime. These are alternative measures that are in many ways more robust than those collected by the police. The International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) was initiated in 1987 by a group of European criminologists with expertise in national crime surveys (van Dijk, Mayhew, & Killias, 1990). The survey was set up to produce estimates of victimisation that can be used for international comparison. The survey has evolved into the world’s first program of standardised surveys looking at householders’ experience of common crime in different countries. There have so far been five main rounds of the ICVS. After the first round in 1989 the surveys were repeated in 1992, 1996, 2000, and 2004/2005. The ICVS included questions on perceptions of risk of burglary and fear of crime on the streets, as well as a section on security precautions (van Dijk & Tseloni, 2012). Respondents are asked about victimisation by ten types of common crime that they themselves or their household may have experienced.

For personal crimes, respondents report on what happened to them personally. Types of personal crimes included are threats and assaults (including assaults with force), robbery and theft of personal property (including pickpocketing).

Garofalo (1979) used National Crime Survey (NCS) data from eight US cities to compare personal victimisation rates with individuals' responses to the question whether they felt safe in their neighbourhoods at night. Garofalo's findings led him to conclude that fear is not based merely on risk and experience of crime, but also socialisation, media presentations of crime, and the extent to which respondents felt reassured by police presence. Kalish (1988) suggested that cross-national comparisons of crime need to be used with caution. Nevertheless, such sources of crime are relevant in the context of tourism. For instance, tourists' fear of crime may be derived from several sources, internal and external influences such as travel experience, personal experience of crime, discussions about crime with their friends and acquaintances, exposure to crime through mass media (television films and documentaries, the Internet and social media, true crime books, podcasts, newspapers, and radio), information disseminated from government travel advisories, and perceptions of actual crime rates, as well as their perceptions of police effectiveness at the destination.

The literature on ways of measuring 'fear' can be surmised into three categories. First, the proportion of the population feeling unsafe, seeing themselves as at high risk of various offences, worrying about crime, etc. appears to be out of proportion to the percentage who are actually victimised within a year (Pantazis, 2000). Second, fear varies between subgroups of the population (Floyd et al., 2004). For instance, women and elderly people were more concerned about personal safety and therefore restricted their activities to avoid personal encounters with violence (Gardner, 1995; Stanko, 2000). Third, 'fear' of crime may mean different things depending on location. For example, some people may be afraid inside their home, but not outside, and vice-versa (Mawby et al., 2021). Put another way, different people feel unsafe in different places for different reasons. Indeed, feelings of unsafety may cause tourists to avoid particular destinations and discourage them from taking part in certain activities at a destination (George, 2003).

Most of the literature relates to criminological convention where the emphasis is placed upon fear in the context of lived experiences of citizens. A very different tradition is that pertaining to tourism and crime. Here most of the literature focuses on crime in tourist resorts, and more pertinent to this study, tourists' perceptions of crime-risk and safety.

2.3 Research on perceived risk in tourism

The basic definition of risk is defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as “the possibility of something bad happening”. Consumer behaviour is an act of risk because any individual action of consumption is associated with uncertainty, implying unanticipated – and possibly unpleasant – consequences (Bauer, 1967). Most researchers have studied perceived risk as opposed to objective or real risk (Bauer, 1967). Risk is an essential element of perception in the context of consumer behaviour (Kozak et al., 2007; Reichel et al., 2007). Risk in tourism is defined as a phenomenon that is experienced and perceived by a tourist while purchasing and consuming services at a destination (Tsaour et al., 1997). Risks associated with tourism are wide-ranging, have a dynamic nature that change over time and vary from one location to another. They include safety and security (crime, political unrest, and terrorism), natural disasters such as tsunamis and earthquakes, environmental risks (e.g. Chernobyl) and public health issues such as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), swine flu, and COVID-19. Risks may also include those at a micro level such as holiday costs (e.g. inflation, increase in cost-of-living) and transport inconvenience (e.g. strikes, extreme weather). The role of tourism-safety and security perspective has gained more interest and importance due to the terror attacks and natural disasters that have taken place in the last couple of decades (Seabra et al., 2020). Despite the disasters, tourists are willing to take risks – as far as they are aware of them and visit dangerous places.

Concerns regarding security and safety are of primary importance to most travellers and the tourism industry as a whole (Boxill, 2012; Cohen & Cohen, 2012; Edgell & Swanson, 2013; Woosman et al., 2015) and are a prerequisite for a successful tourist destination (Alleyne & Boxill, 2003; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998a; Tarlow & Santana, 2002; Tsaour et al., 1997; Xie et al., 2021). Plenty of research exists into why people visit certain destinations, however, it is not always clear why people avoid some tourist locations. Nevertheless, the impact of perceived negative factors is generally understood relative to travel and tourism choices (Gray & Wilson, 2009). Indeed, certain groups of individuals feel that safety and security are key factors that determine the choice of a travel destination (Barker et al., 2003; Dowling & Staelin, 1994; George, 2010; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2006).

The perception of safety and security is, thus, a major determinant when travellers make decisions about visiting a place (George, 2003; Pizam, 1996; Rittichainuwat & Chakraborty, 2009; Seabra et al., 2013). Further, research has shown that tourists will not spend money in places where they do not feel safe (Mansfeld & Pizam, 1996). Sönmez and Graefe (1998a)

purported that if destination choice is down to two alternatives which promise similar benefits, the less costly one or the one that is free from personal threat, the likely choice will be selected as the destination absent of safety and security issues. According to George (2010) destinations perceived to have high crime rates are likely to negatively affect its image, deter visitors, reduce the desire to revisit, and spread negative word-of-mouth and electronic word-of-mouth recommendations. Strategies to make tourists feel safe before and during travel are essential for the success of destinations (Huan & Beaman, 2004).

Ultimately, tourism managers strive to reduce perceived risk because of its impact on travel decisions. Simply put, destinations perceived as risky are less likely to be visited (Law, 2006; Lepp & Gibson, 2008; Sirakaya, Sheppard, & McLellan, 1997; Sönmez & Graefe 1998b; Um & Crompton, 1992). Delving further into this relationship, Reisinger and Mavondo (2005) found perceived risk to be associated with travel anxiety, which in turn, was negatively associated with intention to travel. Similarly, Quintal, Lee and Soutar (2010) found perceived risk has a negative influence on attitudes towards travel. Furthermore, the researchers found in some cases that negative attitudes towards travel as a result of perceived risk reduce an individual's travel intentions. In a related line of research, Larsen, Brun and Øgaard (2009) investigated tourists' worries.

One's sense of safety about a tourist destination is highly subjective. This feeling is dependent on intrinsic factors such as personality traits, demographic variables (age, education and gender), culture and nationality, knowledge/previous experience, safety knowledge, and traveller type/role. Perceptions vary between different subgroups of tourists (Adam & Adongo, 2016; Floyd et al., 2004; Seabra et al., 2013, Sönmez & Graefe, 1998a). An individual tourist's characteristics (Lepp & Gibson, 2003) such as cultural differences/nationality (Kozak, 2002; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2006; Zou, 2022), extent of previous travel experience (Mazursky, 1989; Sönmez, & Graefe, 1998b; Zou & Mawby, 2021), age (Brunt & Shepherd, 2004), gender (Amir, Ismail & See, 2015; Carr, 2001; Qiao, 2018; Reisinger & Crotts, 2009) have been found to influence perceptions of a destination as safe or risky. Age and gender have been found to influence perceptions of safety because people of different ages and gender are more vulnerable to crime. For example, researchers argued that gender was a significant factor affecting female respondents' perceptions of safety and security in choosing a tourist destination (Amir et al., 2015; Carr, 2001; Gibson & Jordan, 1998; Greenberg & Ruback, 1992; Kozak et al., 2007).

For example, a study by Amir et al. (2015) in Kuala Lumpur found that women travellers were more fearful of crime because of perceived vulnerability compounded by sexual risk, especially walking around at night-time. Respondents' main concerns were pick-pocketing and snatch thief cases. Yang, Sharif and Khoo-Lattimore (2015) argue that gender does not work alone in determining travel risk perception; other factors such as age, nationality, and previous travel experience affect risk perception. Similarly, Lepp and Gibson (2003) also found that perception of crime-risk can vary by gender, past travel experience and tourist role. Travel experience – both generally and regarding a specific tourist destination – has also shown to be important factors affecting perception of safety (Sönmez & Graefe, 1998b; Zou & Mawby, Ozascilar & Ziyalar, 2021). Travellers who have previously visited a destination are usually less risk-averse than first-time visitors (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011; Kozak et al., 2007; Lepp & Gibson, 2003; Warton & Brander, 2017).

One of the most cited characteristics of the victim in the literature is the nationality of the victim and it is generally found that tourists are more victimised than residents. Chesney-Lin and Lind (1986) for instance suggested that in Hawaii tourists were more often crime victims than residents. Similarly, Michalko (2004) found that in Hungary foreign tourists (especially those from Western Europe) were disproportionately more victimised than residents.

The subject of risk is a common research theme in the tourism management and crime safety and security literature and has been studied from various related fields; for instance, according to tourist risk perceptions of and impact of crime on: countries (e.g. Slovenia – Paliska et al., 2020); regions (e.g. Pacific northwest – Lankford, 1996); cities (e.g. New Orleans – Harper, 2001); visitor attractions (theme parks: Orlando, USA, Sungil et al., 2021; national parks: in Thailand – Suksonghong & Goh, 2023; urban parks: in South Africa – Table Mountain National Park, George, 2010); casinos (Ochrym, 1990); pilgrimage destinations (Khajuria & Khanna, 2014); tours (township tours in South Africa – George & Booyens, 2014; tours in the UK Jack the Ripper tour – George, 2025); international sporting events (e.g. the America's Cup – Barker et al., 2003; 2010 FIFA World Cup™ – George, 2012; 2014 FIFA World Cup™ – Swart & George, 2016; 2012 London Olympics – George & Mawby, 2015;); according to tourist types (e.g. backpackers – Adam & Adongo, 2016; shoppers – Fowler et al., 2012); holiday resorts (seaside resorts – Brunt & Hooten, 2010), rural areas (Mawby, 2007; 2015); and the effect of crime risk on re-visit intentions (Chaudhary & Ul Islam, 2021; George, 2003; George & Swart, 2012; Mancini, 2022; Mawby et al., 2021; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005). However, to the best of the researcher's

knowledge no research to date has examined tourists' perceptions of a particular street or vicinity within a destination providing a unique insight into the relationship between tourism, crime and place.

3. Methodology

Existing studies (e.g. George, 2003 2010; Mawby, 2014; Ozascilar & Mawby, 2024) recommended that additional research be conducted to examine tourists' perceptions of crime-safety in different tourism environments (i.e. visitor attractions, destinations, and activities). This study, therefore, has focused on perceptions of crime-safety in the context of a street frequented by locals and tourists alike. The following survey questions formed core constructs in the questionnaire:

- The extent that tourists felt safe whilst visiting Brick Lane
- Whether tourists were satisfied with their overall experience of Brick Lane
- How likely tourists are to return to Brick Lane

A survey, involving a sample of 416 visitors to Brick Lane was undertaken from February 2024 to March 2025. The primary objective of this study was to determine whether tourists who visited Brick Lane felt safe and how this influenced their satisfaction and intention to revisit.

3.1 Study site

The study area was the street of Brick Lane, situated in the East End of London in the borough of Tower Hamlets. Brick Lane runs from Swanfield Street in Bethnal Green in the north, crosses the Bethnal Green Road before reaching the busiest, most commercially active part which runs through Spitalfields. It is three-quarters of a mile in length, is lined with shops, street art, cafes, barber shops, restaurants and curry houses. This historic street dates back approximately 450 years, and is frequented by local and foreign visitors seeking cultural experiences such as cuisine, shopping and street art. Besides its cultural appeal, the area is popular because it was here in the late 1880s, that the serial killer, Jack the Ripper, stalked the back alleys and murdered five women (Rubenhold, 2020). This area of the East End of London is a place heavy with the cultural miasma of crime and criminality (Ancrum, 2023)

and is synonymous with the infamous gangsters – the Kray twins – in the 1960s (Morton, 2021).

This study measured tourists' perceptions of crime-safety whilst visiting Brick Lane.

3.2 Survey instrument

A structured self-completion questionnaire – consisting of 13 questions – was used to collect data from tourists visiting Brick Lane over a 14-month period via an online, self-administered survey. The first set of questions employed ordinal and categorical scales to collect data on visit history, group size, and purpose of visit. The second part asked about perceptions of crime-safety, time of visit (day or night), and any personal experience of crime in the Brick Lane/Spitalfields area. Respondents who felt “Unsafe” or “Very Unsafe” were asked to specify reasons, including options such as “Lack of policing presence”, “General grime, litter, and pollution”, “Lack of lighting”, and “Other”. The third part covered intentions to return and satisfaction levels. Finally, demographic details were collected.

Although all three constructs used 5-point scales, each was designed to capture a distinct dimension of the visitor experience. As such, a reliability test using Cronbach's alpha was not conducted, as it would be inappropriate to test internal consistency across independent variables that do not form a unified scale. This follows recommendations from tourism and consumer behaviour literature, where single-item indicators are often used for clearly defined constructs such as satisfaction, perceived safety, or behavioural intention (George, 2003; Fuchs & Reichel, 2011; Diamantopoulos et al., 2012).

Independent measures used in the analysis included respondent's gender, age, whether it was their first-time visit or not, the purpose of their visit to Brick Lane (e.g. vintage clothing shops, bagel shops, cuisine, street art/graffiti), and where they resided.

The questionnaire was modelled on studies by George (2003; 2010) and Mawby, Brunt and Hambly (2000) on tourists' perceptions of safety and security. These studies recommended that additional research needs to be conducted to examine tourists' perceptions of crime-risk in different tourism environments (i.e.) visitor attractions, destinations, and activities. This study, therefore, focussed on tourists' perceptions of crime-safety in the context of an urban area.

3.3 Data collection

The target population in this study consisted of international and domestic tourists who were visiting Brick Lane between February 2024 to March 2025. Respondents scanned a Quick Response (QR)-code to directly access the survey from their smartphones via their device's camera. By scanning the QR-code, respondents were directed electronically to the questionnaire in Google Forms. The survey QR-code was displayed in A-4 format laminated posters mounted at key locations along Brick Lane: at Brick Lane Bagels (referred to as the world's greatest bagel shop' [Glinert, 2020]), on one of the gates of the Brick Lane Mosque, and on the door of the Brick Lane Bookshop. These locations were chosen as it was felt that they would yield a good response rate; they are busy locations evenly distributed along the street. Brick Lane Bagels for instance, which is open 24 hours-a-day seven days a-week, is well-known to many local people as well as tourists (on 'London – to do lists').

A total of 416 respondents took part in the survey, and all were fully completed and deemed suitable for data analysis,

3.4 Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the demographics and main responses of the survey. To explore relationships between key variables, several statistical tests were used. Spearman's rank correlation was applied to examine the relationship between overall satisfaction and the likelihood of returning to Brick Lane. Independent samples t-tests were used to compare safety perceptions between first-time and repeat visitors. Mann–Whitney U tests were run to compare safety perceptions between those who had experienced crime and those who had not. One-way ANOVA was used to test differences in safety perceptions based on gender and time of visit (day or night). Cross-tabulations and Chi-square tests helped explore associations between demographic factors, such as gender and place of origin, and perceptions of safety.

Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha was not carried out. The key survey items, perceived safety, satisfaction, and likelihood of returning, each measured a different concept. Since these items were not intended to form a single scale, testing their internal consistency would not be meaningful. This approach follows standard practice in tourism studies, where single-item measures are accepted for clear and distinct constructs (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011).

3.5 Ethical Approval

This study followed the ethical standards outlined in the Quality Policies of London College of Contemporary Arts and the approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee prior to data collection. All participants were informed about the research objectives and their rights including voluntary participation, anonymity, and option to withdraw at any point of the survey. Participants' consent was sought through the online pre-survey section embedded in the questionnaire. There are no personally identifiable data collected, and all the data was stored securely in password protected files. There were no incentives for the participants to take part in this study and the research process ensured compliance with GDPR regulations regarding data protection and privacy.

4. Study results

4.1 Demographic characteristics of the sample

Of the 416 respondents, 56% of respondents (n = 231) were female, 42% (n = 175) were male, 2.4% (n = 10) were either non-binary, transgender, or intersex. Forty-three per cent of respondents (n = 181) were aged 25 to 35, 27.6% of respondents (n = 115) were aged 36 to 50 years, 16.6% of respondents (69) were aged 18 to 24, 10.6% (n = 44) were aged 51 and 60 years, and 1.7% (n = 7) were above the age of 61 years. The relatively young response rate (almost 60% under the age of 35) is representative of the Brick Lane tourist profile, many of whom visit for clothing shops and street art (see section 4.4 below). Almost half (49%) of respondents (n = 193) possess a degree and almost a third (31%/124) hold a post-graduate qualification. A further 10% (n = 41) attained A-level or an equivalent academic qualification.

A total of 53 nationalities comprised the study sample. Just over one-third of respondents (35%/146) were from the UK, and the remainder (65%/270) were from international countries. Of those international tourists, (12%/49) were from North America (10%/42) from the USA, and 1.4%/6 from Canada), 21% (n = 86) were from Western and Northern Europe, and 8%/33 were from Eastern Europe (including Romania, Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Poland, Russia, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, and Estonia). Just over six per cent of Brick Lane tourists (n = 27) were from East Asia (China, Japan, and South Korea), and 8% (n = 32) comprised "Other countries" (for example, Australia, Israel, South Africa, Ghana).

4.2 Frequency of visits to Brick Lane

Regarding previous experience of Brick Lane, almost 30% of respondents (106) were visiting Brick Lane for the first-time. Of those who had visited Brick Lane previously, 43% (n = 55) had visited on between one and five occasions, and 16% (n = 18) had visited on 6 to 10 occasions. Interestingly, 26%, (n = 33) had visited on 10 occasions or more, while only 16% (n = 21 respondents) live and work around Brick Lane. These latter two statistical findings suggest a high number of locals who perhaps live and work in the East London area.

4.3 Size of travelling party

Over three-quarters (77%) of all respondents were visiting Brick Lane with other people; 23% (n = 94) were visiting alone. Of those who were visiting Brick Lane with others, 46% (n = 191) of visitors were accompanied with one other person, while the remainder (31%) were visiting accompanied with 3 or more people.

4.4 Reasons for visiting Brick Lane

As for a reason for visiting Brick Lane is concerned, over half (52%) of respondents were “visiting the Bagel Shop”. The relatively high number of respondents visiting the Bagel Shop was expected, as besides being one of the main attractions on Brick Lane, it was one of the primary locations where the QR-codes to the online survey were housed (both inside and outside the shop). A third (33%) of respondents were visiting Brick Lane “To shop at Vintage clothing stores”. Respondents’ other primary motivations for visiting Brick Lane included “To experience the multiculturalism” (28%), “street art and graffiti” (26%), and “cuisine/street food and restaurants” (24%). Brick Lane is famous for its Indian/Bengali restaurants and remains a drawcard for many tourists. However, as this study findings show, the street’s vintage clothing shops are fast becoming a major attraction for younger tourists, both domestic and international.

4.5 Visitors perceptions of crime-safety

With regards to perceptions of crime safety, two-thirds (65%) of respondents (n = 273) felt safe whilst visiting Brick Lane. Of these (80%/332) were visiting Brick Lane during the day, and 20% of respondents (n = 84) were visiting Brick Lane at night-time. In all, 13% of respondents (53) stated that they felt unsafe whilst visiting Brick Lane. Twenty-one per cent

(90) stated they were indifferent regarding how safe they felt. These findings correspond to those other research studies such as a study by George (2010) which surveyed 303 tourists visiting Table Mountain National Park in Cape Town. His study found that 71% of visitors to felt safe and 13.5% felt unsafe whilst visiting the park. In addition, another study by George (2003) compared day- and night-time visitors to the city of Cape Town and found that 86% felt safe during the daytime and 25.4% felt safe walking the streets of the South African city at night-time. This is consistent with Brunt and Hooten's (2010) research which stated that crime is most common at night with fear much lower in the daytime.

Brick Lane tourists cited several reasons for feeling unsafe, with 13% (n = 55) of respondents stating, "General grime, litter, and pollution", a third (7%/27) stating "Lack of policing presence", and a third of respondents (6%/26) citing "lack of lighting". Other reasons stated included "too many people, easily to get lost", "too many drunk and drugged people", "not very safe for women", "lots of crack heads".

4.6 Experiences of crime incidents

When asked "Have you ever been a victim of crime in the Brick Lane/Spitalfields area?", only 3.6% of respondents (n = 15) answered in the affirmative. This appears a very low response rate. This finding is consistent with other tourism-crime victimisation studies, such as Mawby et al.'s (2021) analysis of tourists' safety concerns when visiting Istanbul, which found that only 7% (n = 15) had been a victim of crime. Respondents in this study provided several reasons such as pickpocketing (2 respondents), stalking (2), mobile/cell phone theft (3), stolen debit card while at an ATM, mugging (2), assaulted by a drug addict (2), harassment by a homeless person (1), and police harassment (1) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Profiles of Brick Lane/Spitalfields crime victims

Incident	Nature of crime	Nationality	Gender	Age	No. of previous visits
1	Mugging	UK	Male	18-24	10+
2	Phone stolen	France	Female	25-35	1-5
3	Phone snatch (from cyclist)	China	Female	25-35	10+
4	Mugging	UK	Male	18-24	1-5
5	Stalked	Germany	Female	36-50	10+
6	Debit card stolen	UK	Female	51-60	1-5
7	Assaulted	UK	Male	51-60	10+
8	Pickpocketed	UK	Female	25-35	25-35
9	Phone stolen	UK	Male	51-60	10+
10	Harassed	UK	Male	36-50	10+
11	Harassed	UK	Male	25-35	10+
12	Phone stolen	USA	Female	25-35	1-5+

4.7 Satisfaction, likelihood of returning to Brick Lane, and expectations

Sixty-nine per cent of respondents (n = 288) stated that were satisfied with the “Overall Brick Lane experience”. In addition, 64% (n = 266) of respondents stated that they were likely to return to Brick Lane sometime in the future. This finding is not consistent with other studies where the likelihood of repeat visitation is much higher. For instance, Mawby, Ozascilar and Ziyalar’s (2021) study found that 98% of visitors would return to Istanbul. That said, the lower rate of repeat visitation for this study is expected considering that Brick Lane is a street and not an international city.

Respondents were asked if the Brick Lane experience met their expectations. Thirty-seven per cent of tourists (n = 114) stated that “totally matched expectations”, and 26% (n = 82) stated “somewhat matched”. Five per cent (n = 16) stated “no, did not match expectations”. Of these, a variety of reasons were given, such as “expected to see more”, “lots of graffiti”, “unsafe, people on drugs”, “didn’t feel safe, got harassed”, “too many cars”, “lots of expensive tourist traps”, “felt unsafe”, and “expected it to be cleaner and safer”.

4.8 Correlation between Satisfaction and Likelihood of Return to Brick Lane

The results show a Spearman's Rank Correlation Coefficient (ρ) of 0.55, suggesting a moderate positive correlation between the satisfaction score and the likelihood of returning to Brick Lane (see Table 2). This means that as satisfaction with the experience increases, the likelihood of returning also tends to increase. However, the relationship is not perfect, as some satisfied individuals may still choose not to return.

The test statistic (t-value) calculated as 13.45 indicates that the correlation is statistically significant. With a p-value of 1.77×10^{-34} (which is far below the 0.05 threshold), we can confidently conclude that there is a strong statistical relationship between satisfaction and the likelihood of returning to Brick Lane, suggesting that the observed correlation is not due to chance.

This analysis highlights that enhancing the overall experience at Brick Lane can potentially increase the likelihood of return visits, although it is important to note that the correlation is not perfect and may vary among individuals.

Table 2. Spearman’s Rank Correlation *between Satisfaction vs Likelihood of Return to Brick Lane*

Statistic	Value	Interpretation
Spearman’s Rank Correlation (ρ)	0.551511025	Moderate positive correlation between satisfaction and likelihood to return.
t-value	13.45243958	Test statistic used to assess the significance of correlation.
p-value	1.77×10^{-34}	Since $p < 0.05$, the correlation is statistically significant.

4.9 Differences in Perceived Safety Between First-Time and Repeat Visitors

An independent samples t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in perceived safety between first-time visitors ($M = 3.84$) and repeat visitors ($M = 3.60$), $t \approx 2.45$, $p = 0.0148$ (see Table 3). This indicates that first-time visitors reported feeling safer than repeat visitors, suggesting that prior experiences may negatively influence perceived safety.

Table 3. Differences in Perceived Safety Between First-Time and Repeat Visitors

Measure	First-Time Visitors	Repeat Visitors	Notes
Mean Safety Perception	3.84	3.60	5-point Likert scale (1 = Very Unsafe, 5 = Very Safe)
t-Statistic	2.45	–	
t Critical (two-tailed)	1.97	–	
p-value (two-tailed)	0.0148	–	Significant at $p < 0.05$

4.10 Perception of Safety Between Victims and Non-Victims of Crime

A Mann–Whitney U test was conducted to examine differences in perceived safety (rated on a 5-point scale, where 1 = Very Unsafe and 5 = Very Safe) between participants who reported

being victims of crime and those who did not in the Brick Lane/Whitechapel/Spitalfields area. The results revealed a statistically significant difference in safety perception between the two groups ($U = 35$, $Z = 24.95$, $p < .00001$) (see Table 4).

Individuals who have been victims of crime reported a significantly lower safety perception (median = 0) compared to those who have not been victims (median = 4). This suggests that personal experiences with crime have a substantial impact on how individuals perceive the safety of the area. The high Z-score and extremely low p-value further underscore the strength of this relationship, indicating that the difference in safety perception is not due to chance. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of personal experience in shaping safety perceptions in urban areas.

Table 4. Perception of Safety Between Victims and Non-Victims of Crime

Group	n	Median Safety Rating	U-Value	Z-Score	p-Value	Significance
Victims of Crime	10	0	35	24.95	< .00001	Yes
Non-Victims	406	4				

4.11 Perception of Safety across gender group

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to examine whether gender significantly influenced individuals' feelings of safety while walking along Brick Lane. The results showed a statistically significant difference in perceived safety levels between gender groups, $F(1, 830) = 1503.17$, $p < .001$. The mean safety score for males was 3.75 ($SD \approx 0.99$), whereas for females it was 1.60 ($SD \approx 0.29$), indicating that females reported feeling significantly less safe. The extremely low p-value ($< .001$) and large F-value suggest a robust effect of gender on perceived safety.

4.12 Perception of Safety When Travelling During Daytime vs Nighttime

An ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether perceptions of safety significantly differ between daytime and nighttime along Brick Lane. The results revealed a statistically significant difference between the two groups, with an F-value of 1379.79 and a p-value < 0.001 , which is well below the critical value of 3.85. This indicates a strong effect of the time of day on perceived safety. Respondents reported feeling much safer during the daytime (mean = 3.75) compared to nighttime (mean = 1.80). The findings clearly suggest that

individuals' feelings of safety are significantly influenced by whether it is day or night, with daytime associated with a higher sense of security when walking along Brick Lane.

5. Discussion and management implications

This study contributes to research studies examining the intersection between tourism, urban space and crime-safety by focusing on a micro-destination, Brick Lane, East London. Unlike traditional destination-level analyses, this study focuses on a single street offers insights on how environmental cues and socio-demographic variables shape tourists' crime-risk perception and behaviours.

In line with existing studies (George, 2003; Fuchs & Reichel, 2011; Sohn, Lee & Yoon, 2016) perceived safety is a significant influencer of satisfaction level and revisit intentions. Whilst in this study objective crime victimisation was low at 3.6%, environmental factors such as litter, lack of lighting, and the presence of individuals perceived as a main risk factor, contributed to elevated perceptions of crime-risk. This supports the notion of the "risk-fear paradox (Mawby, 2000), where fear is shaped more by symbolic cues than empirical crime statistics. Women reporting low level of crime-safety aligns the findings of Amir et al. (2015), where they felt unsafe during night-time visits. This study found that respondents' perceptions of crime-risk were shaped predominantly by previous experiences, and socio-demographic factors; most notably gender and time of visit (day/night). Female visitors reported feeling significantly less safe than males, aligning with existing literature on gender and safety perceptions in urban environments. Similarly, perceived crime-safety was much lower during night-time visits compared to daytime.

Contrary to earlier studies suggesting familiarity reduces risk (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011; Kozak, Crotts & Law, 2007), repeat visitors perceived greater risk. This paradox echoes Carballo et al.'s (2022) findings in urban Chinese tourism, in which repeat visitors reported lower satisfaction due to perceived negative changes such as overcommercialisation or environmental degradation, ultimately reducing their loyalty.

The implications for urban tourism management are significant. Improving urban design and increased policing can mitigate the fear of female visitors at night and enhance perceived safety (Jeffery, 1971; Painter, 1996). These insights have practical implications for urban tourism planning: improving lighting, increasing visible policing, enhancing cleanliness, and addressing antisocial behaviour could substantially improve visitors' sense of safety.

Stakeholders should also consider inclusive design strategies and communication efforts that target the specific concerns of women and night-time visitors.

In sum, Brick Lane represents a paradox of attraction and apprehension; its vibrant appeal tempered by persistent perceptions of vulnerability. This study advances theoretical and practical understandings of how micro-destinations function as both sites of consumption and emotional experience, where fear, familiarity, and satisfaction coalesce to shape tourist behaviour (Fuchs & Reichel, 2011; Sohn, Lee & Yoon, 2016; Volo, 2021).

6. Limitations and recommendations for further research

Preliminary findings for this study were based on exploratory research. One of the limitations of this research was that self-administered online questionnaires, which possess several weaknesses, were employed as the method of data collection. With a self-administered method there is no control over the research setting (Bailey 1994). As such, visitors to Brick Lane were left to complete the questionnaire at their own will and the data does not fully represent the wider Brick Lane tourist such as older or less tech engaged people. One of the drawbacks of the research was that the questionnaire was not translated into several languages (given the popularity of Brick Lane amongst foreign tourists visiting vintage clothing shops which have recently proliferated). Several problems exist in measuring fear of crime. Ironically, it may be the very carrying out of crime surveys which serve to increase sensitivity to the risks of crime, as situating questions about fear within a crime survey may consequently elicit higher levels of anxiety than would otherwise be the case. Respondents may well have been influenced by their past holiday and/or crime experiences, conversations with family and friends, and mass and social media. Research is required to examine how these factors affect each stage of the tourist's decision-making process within the context of crime. The data is based entirely on self-reported crime and perception, which may be subject to bias. The absence of triangulation with official crime statistics may limit the verification of the accuracy of the perceived safety. This study was conducted over a period of 14 months, and the findings reflect the perception during this period and may not account for seasonal or long-term changes in tourist/visitors' perceptions.

Further research is required to build on these findings in several ways. First, longitudinal studies could analyse how tourists' perceptions of safety change over time, particularly in response to urban regeneration or policy interventions. Second, comparative studies across

other urban tourism districts – both within London and internationally – could determine whether the findings from Brick Lane are generalisable. Third, qualitative research tools such as in-depth interviews or ethnographic research could provide richer insights into the emotional and symbolic dimensions of visitors perceived crime-safety risk of specific destinations and locations. Finally, future studies should consider integrating social media analysis, crowd sourcing platforms, or digital content analysis to examine how online narratives and visual cues contribute to destination crime-safety perceptions. By broadening the methodological and geographical scope, future research can further elucidate the nuanced relationship between tourism, urban space, and perceived crime-safety.

It is recommended that local authorities and stakeholders coordinate efforts to enhance security and foster a safer, more welcoming tourism environment. Specific interventions include increasing visible police presence, installing and maintaining closed-circuit television (CCTV), improving street and pedestrian lighting, enhancing wayfinding and signage, and deploying a dedicated Community Safety Team. Such measures are not only vital for reducing fear of crime particularly among female visitors but are also instrumental in supporting the growth of Brick Lane's night-time economy. General grime, litter, lack of policing presence, lack of lighting – all could be addressed and make Brick Lane a more appealing and safer destination. Ultimately, Brick Lane serves as a compelling case study, showcasing a paradox where its vibrant appeal is tempered by tourists' perceptions of vulnerability, thereby enriching our understanding of how micro-destinations function as sites of both consumption and emotional experience

7. Conclusions

This study offers a unique micro-geographical perspective on tourists' perceptions of crime-safety by focusing on Brick Lane, a culturally vibrant yet socio-spatially complex street in East London, UK. While a majority (two-thirds) of study respondents reported feeling safe whilst visiting Brick Lane, perceptions of crime-safety were notably lower among females, night-time visitors, repeat visitors, and those who had been previously victimised. Environmental cues such as general grime, litter, pollution, lack of policing presence, and insufficient lighting were cited as reasons for Brick Lane visitors feeling unsafe. The findings confirm the important role of perceived crime-safety in shaping tourist satisfaction and the likelihood of return, supporting the notion of the "risk-fear paradox" where perceived risk is

driven more by symbolic cues than by empirical crime statistics. Interestingly, and contrary to some earlier studies, repeat visitors perceived a greater risk than first-time visitors, potentially due to awareness of negative changes such as overcommercialisation or environmental degradation.

Unlike broader tourist destination-level analyses, this research specifically focused on a single street, revealing how symbolic cues and socio-demographic variables shape tourists' crime-risk perceptions and behaviour. Visitors to Brick Lane were generally positive about their experiences. In line with the existing tourist crime-safety studies, perceptions of risk are different for tourists compared with the general population.

This study contributes to the field of tourism destination marketing and management, by analysing tourists' risk of crime and perceptions of at a specific tourist location. The findings from this study provide important insights into tourists' perceptions, motivations, and behaviours at a micro-destination like Brick Lane.

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