

Poorism As A Global Trend In The Field
of Marketing:
A Case Study on India

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Table of Contents

Section I: Poorism As A Global Trend	3
Section II: Poorism In The Field of Marketing	9
Section III: The Impact of Marketing Poorism in India	15
Appendix One	23
Appendix Two	24
Images Referenced in Text	27
Post-Script	31
Bibliography	32

Section I: Poorism As A Global Trend

A global trend that has been growing in the recent years is the act of visiting and touring impoverished countries, which is most commonly known as poorism. Many critics from the 21st century, including journalists and residents from poor communities, have shed light on this current trend, believing it is a voyeuristic act on behalf of the tourist, and ultimately exploits the poor communities. However, supporters of poorism, including tour organizations and frequent tourists, believe that awareness of global poverty is being created through organizations and travel agencies who host these poverty tours.

Poorism is often referred to as poverty tourism or slum tourism. Poorism has been traced back to the Victorian era, where “respectable middle-class Londoners would visit seedy neighborhoods such as Whitechapel or Shoreditch, while wealthy New Yorkers roamed The Bowery and the Lower East Side to see how the other half lived” (OBrien 36) (See Figure 1). During this time, slum tours were described as a “fashionable London mania” (OBrien 37). Something that used to be so celebrated back then has transformed into a major concern in society. Times have dramatically changed since then, especially during the last decade of the 20th century. Poorism has spread worldwide, affecting numerous countries, such as India, Brazil, Mexico, Kenya, Thailand, Netherlands, United States, and many more.

The numbers of participants who sign up for poverty tours all over the world continue to increase. For example, an estimated 40,000 tourists visit the Rocinha favela in Brazil each year along with 300,000 who visit the townships in Cape Town (OBrien 36). While poverty tour organizations praise the increase of tourists, critics loath the overall

industry. Undoubtedly, poorism has a considerable effect on the lives of both locals of impoverished areas and the tourists visiting them. It has evolved into a global issue that impacts countries economically, socially, and politically, and has become a debate of whether or not the practice is ethical.

Many poverty tour organizations exist around the world, some being a non-profit and others a non-government organization. However, many companies that operate poverty tours often do not donate a share of their profits to the communities they visit. As a result, community locals are not benefiting from these tour groups, and are simply just relying on the purchases tourists make of their local foods and products (Whyte et al. 342). However, the spending habits of tourists are not always a reliable source of income for locals because many times tourists walk through an area without purchasing anything at all. Because there is no direct compensation to the local residents, operators often encourage tourists to donate to their own organization or one that is working in the region. Fortunately, there are a small number of travel companies who actually give back their profits to the community, such as Reality Tours and Travel and Transformation Travel (OBrien 38).

It is difficult for tourists to justify poorism as an ethical practice by going on numerous vacations in which they consider a poverty tour to be one of them. By simply refraining from going on vacation, they can instead donate the money they would have spent to a reputable charitable organization (Selinger 3). This can be easily done with a simple change of thought, yet so many people continue to overlook this and go on these tours. Essentially, both tourists and poverty tour organizations are commodifying the local residents. It immediately begins when one, two or more percent of the profits go

back to the community. It is then that the residents have been turned into a product in the service of an industry (Selinger 3). David Fennell, author of *Tourism Ethics* writes, “We feel we have the right to go anywhere we want on the planet...Everest. Antarctica. The Amazon. Wherever. If you put your money down, you have a right to go” (Selinger 3). While tourists carry this mindset of having the funds and freedom to go wherever whenever, tour companies are also willing to capitalize from their expenses. Considering that both the tourists and tour companies share a mutual, beneficial relationship, poverty tourism would appear to be generally exploitative.

In order for poverty tour organizations to be more sensitive and empowering to the communities they visit, regulations need to be implemented. Many suggestions have been made by critics to improve the economical ethics surrounding poorism, such as employing the local residents, donating the majority of profits to the community, supporting the local economy, and building new infrastructure for the residents (Whyte et al. 341). These regulations will ensure that the people of the community are economically benefiting from poverty tours.

Poorism has become an extremely controversial issue because of the negative and positive outcomes people argue it provides. Tourists believe that by going on poverty tours, they will gain an authentic experience of poverty (Whyte et al. 339). They argue that their experience of being embedded in the center of poverty differs significantly from being exposed to poverty by what they see, read, or hear in the media (Selinger 3). Furthermore, supporters strongly feel that poverty tours are raising awareness of the severe poverty around the world. However, there is a gray area between creating awareness and indulging in a voyeuristic activity.

People travel to poor communities for personal gain and interest, to see what actual poverty looks like in real life, essentially seeking a form of entertainment (Whyte et al. 340) (See Figure 1.1). Supporters refute this claim by saying that the purpose of poverty tourism is “tied to educational benefits, and the tourists, operators, and residents are all better off” (Whyte et al. 339). Ultimately, residents are not made better off from poverty tours because they continue to live in great poverty and poor conditions. Poorism does not relieve the poor of their troubles. Seeing tourists dressed in expensive clothing, traveling in expensive vehicles, and knowing that tourists have leisure time available to take such tours do not make residents feel any better about themselves nor improve their situation.

As someone who once lived in a slum that is now highly toured, Kennedy Odede shared his story with The New York Times. When Odede was 16, he sat outside his slum home, “washing dishes, looking at the utensils with longing because [he] hadn’t eaten in two days. Suddenly a white woman was taking [his] picture” (Odede). Odede admits to feeling like a tiger in a cage, and before he could say anything to the woman, she had already moved on (Odede). Many residents of impoverished communities, like Odede, feel that they are perceived as animals at a zoo. They are so vulnerable to being judged about their poverty, and they ultimately lose a piece of their dignity. Poorism exploits the poor. There is a negative social impact rooted from poorism that deeply affects the residents and their feelings, self-value, and overall happiness. Many foreigners visit slums, wanting to understand poverty, and they return home thinking they have gained a better grasp of the global issue. As Odede says, “People think they’ve really seen

something, and then go back to their lives and leave me, my family and my community right where we were before” (Odede).

One major political concern that arises out of poverty tourism is that of consent and privacy. Planning tours usually does not involve meaningful collaboration and consent between residents and tourists (Whyte et al. 339). Because the tourists are not aware of whether or not the residents have consented, they have to simply trust that the tour organization uses ethical judgment. This is an intrusive form of tourism. Residents lack the right to accept or reject tourist groups entering their communities, and often frown upon tourists photographing their struggles. Tourists argue that having one’s picture taken or being watched is not explicitly harming the residents, however room for exploitation still exists (Whyte et al. 344).

Poorism is often compared to celebrity tourism; therefore a double standard is formulated. In celebrity tourism, tourists see wealthy people’s homes and observe them going out in public. Although the concept and the motivation of tourists may be the same for both poverty and celebrity tourism, the measures in which each group can take to protect their privacy are completely different (OBrien 39). Celebrities can afford to protect themselves from tourists watching their every move, whereas poor people do not have this same luxury. Those who oppose poorism believe that one possible solution for this would be to set up fair trade poverty tours. The fair trade standards would “aim to ensure that certain collaborative procedures are followed and certain levels of compensation and privacy are protected” for all local residents (Whyte et al. 346).

Research evidently shows that there are two clear sides to the global issue of poorism. While supporters of poverty tourism believe that it will raise awareness of

global poverty and aid in alleviating the poor through donations, opposers believe that it is exploiting and dehumanizing them through such voyeuristic acts. Regardless of which side one might be on, changes must be made in the way poverty tourism is conducted. From small changes, such as prohibiting photos or reducing tour group sizes, to larger changes, such as funneling more profits back into the communities and truly evaluating one's purpose for traveling, these can all make a significant global difference on poorism.

Section II: Poorism in the Field of Marketing

Numerous poverty tour organizations are based all over the world in the countries where poorism exists significantly. Although these organizations intend to “bring awareness to the areas they tour, educate tourists about the reality of poverty, and dispel negative stereotypes surrounding residents,” they each have certain methods they use in order to accomplish these intentions (OBrien 37). These methods can be referred to as marketing tools. Because poorism is neglected by many, organizations have to properly market their tours to appeal to potential tourists. Marketing involves promoting content online or in print, branding one’s company by sharing values and ethics, demonstrating social responsibility, advertising with pleasing words, and offering various services. Poorism is observed in the field of marketing through one main concept: selling poverty.

The target market for poverty tours primarily consists of international tourists. Similar to regular tourism, poorism has its high and low seasons of incoming tourists as well. The current market for poorism is continuously “booming” (Selinger 2). Many critics see poverty tourism as just “another example of tourism operators finding a new niche market to exploit” (OBrien 37). In order to prevent criticism, tour organizations have to make sure they are promoting the right things in the right way. However, poorism is not necessarily right to begin with; therefore, this makes it difficult to promote an issue that is extremely sensitive to many.

One aspect of marketing in which tour companies have to strongly focus on is the type of vocabulary they use to sell their services. This is important because positive words can change someone’s perspective about their tours. For example, after easily finding a tour through a quick Google search, many organizations appear on the list with

advertisements reading, “the friendliest slum in the world,” or “raw and eye-opening” (Patinkin). In addition to describing their tours, companies also use different terms to categorize their tours based on type. Several variants of these terms include slumdog tourism, poverty safaris, ghetto tourism, and disaster tourism. Poverty safaris are “visits to places like the Millennium Villages in Rwanda, where tourists are asked not to offer food or water to villagers” (OBrien 35). The term ‘safari’ suggests adventure and wildlife, which is not at all what poverty tourism is. This further emphasizes the idea of residents of the communities feeling like animals in a zoo. It is reasons such as these that marketers of tour companies need to be cautious about what words they decide to use to promote their tours.

No matter what phrase companies use to call their tours, they are essentially insinuating the same action, which is people going to an impoverished area and watching the poor. Therefore, critics accuse companies of poverty porn. Poverty porn is “any type of media that exploits the conditions of the poor in order to generate the necessary sympathy for increasing charitable donations, support for a given cause, or just for selling newspapers” (OBrien 35). Organizations argue that they are not exploiting the poor because they assure potential customers that their money would be benefiting the community. Though, how can potential tourists be so sure that a tour company has beneficent motives and is not taking advantage of their business for the primary purpose of profiting? (Selinger 4). It is reasonable to be skeptical about tour companies because potential tourists have no prior contact to the residents whom they are visiting; instead the tour companies serve as the middleman, connecting with the communities themselves.

Poverty tourism can include homestays, in which tourists go to an area and stay with a family to get a more culturally enriched experience. The operators of the organizations who organize the homestays set the homestay profit to be low enough so that the residents of the home would not be motivated to behave much differently than they do in their everyday lives. Tour operators use this pricing scheme to ensure that their tourists actually see what it is like to live in that particular community. This authentic experience is their selling point to potential tourists. As a result, companies feel that they can advertise their tours as a ‘transformational experience’ because “the tourists are promised personal observations of the real living conditions in the community” (Whyte et al. 341).

In the process of giving tourists the authentic experience of viewing local residents in their community, tour operators also attempt to disprove the negative stereotypes that surround the poor, such as crime, lack of education, and no work. Kibera Tours, a Kibera-based organization, is an example of a tour company who tries to show the positive aspects of poorism through the way it markets itself. Kibera is the largest slum in East-Africa, located in Nairobi, but also the “friendliest slum in the world” as the tour organization describes the city (Kibera Tours) (See Figure 2). Martin Oduor, a tour operator for the company, says, “We want to demystify this place, that it is so dangerous and sad. People are poor, but they have normal lives” (Rice). Another tour guide says she hopes her tourists take away one image from their visit, “You see people are just smiling despite the fact that they have all those problems” (Patinkin).

Using words, such as ‘friendliest, normal, and smiling,’ makes poverty tourism seem benign. Living in a slum is far from living a normal life, however, this might only

feel normal to the residents because it is the only life they have experienced. Kibera Tours takes a light approach to market their tours so that people will be more inclined to sign up for one. Though, it is a misleading approach because it does not advertise the reality of poverty and the severity that potential tourists would see. The organization also states on its website that security guards would accompany the groups throughout the tour. One would think that because the slum is so ‘friendly,’ the tour group would not need security guards.

Kibera Tours is also unclear about how much of the 2,500 Kenyan shillings tourists pay go back into the community and for what purposes. Although the organization mentions on its website that half a dozen guides, all Kibera residents, work for the company, tourists do not truly know how much of the profits these workers are receiving in return for their help (Patinkin). Transparency is not reflected upon the company’s website. A lack of transparency is detrimental on any tour company because it opens up room for distrust between a potential tourist and the company. Finally, the website does not state whether or not tourists can personally donate clothing, money, or other items to locals themselves during the tour, or if they have to do it through the organization. By addressing this online, potential tourists could determine how much actual interaction they would have with the locals.

Because Kibera Tours lacked all of this important information on its website, I decided to reach out to the organization to learn more about its tours. My questions were targeted towards specific things stated on their website, such as their slogan, security, profits, and donations (Refer to Appendix One for the full list of questions). Kibera Tours

states that it tries to answer emails within two working days, but unfortunately I never heard back from them after sending an email with my inquiries.

Even though I did not receive answers from Kibera Tours, I managed to read about a journalist's experience with the tour company. According to Jason Patinkin, his tour "ended in a small room with a few couches and a bed, a typical Kibera home. On the coffee table was a tip jar, t-shirts for sale and laminated brochures for resorts on the Kenyan coast" (Patinkin). Tours in Mexico and Brazil follow this same method of advertising with vacation spots. La Viña, a church group located in a beach resort town in Mazatlan, Mexico where there are many wealthy retirees, runs tours of the local garbage dump, where locals earn a living picking through trash (Weiner). Furthermore, most hostels in Rio de Janeiro advertise favela tours on the same terms as hang gliding, or tours of the National Park, Sugar Loaf, and the Christ the Redeemer statue (Otterson et al. 45) (See Figure 2.1). A significant percentage is paid to hostel owners, as a commission for directing tourists to particular tours (Otterson et al. 45). This common theme of tour companies advertising their poverty tours along with vacation and leisure-related activities is a marketing tool that many use in order to appeal to potential tourists. This questions the ethics of marketing for poverty tour organizations because poverty tours and fun, adventurous tours are very different in what they aim to do. There is no clear line drawn between the two.

Another unique form of marketing in which poorism is associated with is through the use of films. The international popularity of films, such as *City of God* set in the favelas of Brazil and *Slumdog Millionaire* set in the slums of Mumbai "seemingly coincided with the growth of slum tourism in Brazil, India, Mexico, Africa, and

elsewhere” (OBrien 35). Films such as these exploit the impoverished areas of large cities, where not only tourists who actually visit those areas can view the poor, but instead whoever views the film can see it too. Just as critics argue that poverty tours are a form of entertainment for tourists, these films are essentially another form of entertainment in which the viewer can gawk at the poor.

Whether poverty tours are advertised online, in print, or in films, it is important that tour companies market the region of the tours appropriately, given that poverty is a serious issue around the world. In other words, companies should be careful with their vocabulary so that they do not stray away from the actual meaning and purpose of their tours. Misleading potential tourists into thinking that a poverty tour is fun and exciting, just like Kibera Tours did, poorly represents poverty tourism. For example, Real Bronx Tours gave tours around the Bronx in New York, but was later shut down due to the demands of city council members. A letter to the tour company stated, “We are more than happy to welcome tours to our community that celebrate the rich culture and history of our neighborhoods, but using the Bronx to sell a so-called ‘ghetto’ experience to tourists is completely unacceptable” (Murphy). Changing the description of a tour like this one does not make it any better to rightfully tour the poor area. Although a ‘ghetto tour’ may be insensitive and morally wrong to many, it is nonetheless describing what people will literally see, but a tour that ‘celebrates the rich culture and history’ is clearly masking the fact that people will engage in poverty tourism. The use of marketing in poverty tour organizations not only affects and questions the professional ethics of running a business or organization, but also the ethics of poorism.

Section III: The Impact of Marketing Poorism in India

Poorism is a global issue that continues to increase, but because India is largely populated with poor communities, there is more room for poverty tours to exist there. In the rural areas, almost three out of every four Indians live in poverty (India). Although the poverty rate in India has been reduced over the years, it still remains painfully high. The increase of tourists at one particular tour organization called Reality Tours and Travel, located in Mumbai, is proof of how much poverty tourism has increased. In 2008, the founder of the organization, Christopher Way, said that “he could barely muster enough customers for one tour a day. Now he is running two or three a day and recently expanded to rural areas” (Weiner).

The Dharavi squatter settlement in Mumbai is the biggest slum in Asia. The slum is home to 10,000 small factories with a majority of them categorized under the informal sector (Lancaster). To envision the size of Dharavi, these factories provide sustenance to the “million or so people who are thought to live in Dharavi, which at 432 acres is barely half the size of New York City’s Central Park” (Lancaster). There is no recognizable garbage pickup and there is only one toilet for every 1,440 people (Lancaster). Consequently, the people of Dharavi live in extreme poverty (See Figure 3). For this reason, tour organizations choose to show this region to tourists the most.

John Lancaster, a writer for *Smithsonian Magazine*, published an article online detailing his experience of going on a tour through Dharavi with Reality Tours and Travel. During his tour, he saw locals at work, often doing labor-intensive tasks. He noted that “few of the recyclers wore gloves or other protective gear, despite exposure to solvents and other chemicals that caused eyes and throats to burn after just a few

minutes” (Lancaster). In another part of the tour, Lancaster watched workers melt steel into a belt-buckle mold while holding it between their bare feet. This shows that the poor are hardworking, which is one of the things the tour company tries to prove through their tours. In contrast to this, it also shows that the poor put their health at risk because they have no access to protective gear nor have regulated business. A tour, such as the one Lancaster went on, exploits the local’s lack of resources and healthcare. The fact that people are willing to see this through tours is a main reason why poverty tour organizations are criticized.

One tour operator describes his organization’s goals by promising tourists an outlook of the positive side of a slum. When there are people suffering on a day-to-day basis, working and living in poor conditions, bathing in dirty water, and searching for food on the streets, finding a ‘positive side’ to show is not easy. Another tour operator from Reality Tours and Travel says to Lancaster that the people living in the Dharavi slums are happy to be there and that they do not want to move out of Dharavi. To claim that a local is ‘happy’ to be in a slum is a brave statement made by the company, especially when there is very little or no communication between the locals and the tour groups. At one point during Lancaster’s tour, he told his tour guide to ask a young boy who was working at a factory to find out how old he was, but the tour operator refused to ask this one simple question (Lancaster). Consequently, tourists are unable to hear a resident’s perspective.

Reality Tours and Travel is the most commonly known poverty tour organization based in India. It has been featured in *Lonely Planet*, *The New York Times*, *Insight Guides*, and several other popular travel guides. For this reason, I decided to look further

into the organization and find out how it markets its services to potential tourists. The company states that its purpose is to show that the slum is also “a place of enterprise, humor and non-stop activity. By showing this enterprise and community spirit, [they] hope to try and help dispel the negative image that many people have about Dharavi and slums in Mumbai” (OBrien 37). Although the organization vows that their goals are ethical, critics think differently. In 2006, the Indian English-language *Times Now* television channel accused the organization of exercising in voyeurism (Lancaster). Even though Reality Tours and Travel receive a significant amount of criticism from those who do not support poorism, the organization still manages to make an impact on potential tourists.

Michael Cronin, a college admissions officer who traveled to India for work purposes, came across a flier one day that advertised slum tours (Weiner). At the time, he was staying at a grand Taj Hotel in Mumbai, where a bottle of champagne cost the equivalent of two years’ salary for many Indians (Weiner). Cronin stated during an interview with *The New York Times* that the flier resonated with him immediately, but he did not know what to expect (Weiner). Eager to find the answer of what makes a tour organization recognizable and meaningful in the eyes of a tourist, I analyzed Reality Tours and Travel’s website to see what key words or elements of marketing the organization used. In addition to this, I also contacted the tour organization through email in order to get more information. I was fortunate enough to receive a response from Stephanie Hays, a representative from the organization, the next day (Refer to Appendix Two for the full email conversation).

The first page of Reality Tours and Travel's website reads "See the real India. We have real social impact on the Dharavi community. Eighty percent of all tour profits go to education, health and other projects in the area" (Reality Tours) (See Figure 3.1). Unclear as to what the organization meant by 'real,' I directly asked this in my email along with what made the organization different from any other poverty tour organization. The representative of Reality Tours and Travel responded to these questions by saying, "We would not call our tours poverty tours. If you are coming to look for poverty and gawk at the unfortunate conditions of the people in Dharavi, you will find this isn't the focus of our tours. Yes, we give a tour of a slum, but we aim to show a complex, well-rounded picture, one that poverty is a part of, but doesn't define" (Hays). No matter what the organization chooses to describe its tours, it is in fact a poverty tour. Referring back to section one, poorism or poverty tourism is defined as the act of visiting and touring impoverished countries. This is exactly what someone who signs up for a tour with Reality Tours and Travel would be doing. A tour operator from the organization even referred to the tours as 'slum tours' during an interview with Lancaster, which is a synonym for poverty tours (Lancaster).

Throughout the website, I noticed that the words 'adventure, energy, and fascinating' appeared often to market the tours. The purpose of using words like these is to engage potential tourists and provoke positive feelings towards the tours. Furthermore, Reality Tours and Travel offers 12 different tours for people to choose from, including customized tours. In my email, I asked what makes them decide what places to show and what activities to do. The reason for this question is because poverty tourists cannot be assured that the areas they visit are not selected over alternatives because representatives

from that area cut special deals with tour companies (Selinger 4). The tour representative wrote, “All of our tours are united by one simple thing- we want to show visitors places in Mumbai that might be difficult to see, experience, or visit on your own, and in doing so, allow visitors to gain a full understanding of the city- an understanding that includes becoming aware of social issues that exist in Mumbai, while also celebrating some of the fantastic, amazing sights the city has to offer” (Hays). The way Reality Tours and Travel markets their tours with custom tour packages and likeable descriptions, comes off as though they are making light of a poverty tour and what it really is.

Despite all the negative criticism this tour organization has received, it does manage to remain ethical in some ways by placing importance on the measures it takes to conduct tours responsibly. A majority of the areas visited on the tours, including Dharavi and the Adivasi village, prohibit photo taking due to government rules and security issues (Hays). Also, tour groups are limited to five or seven people at a time (See Figure 3.2). Not allowing photography and minimizing group sizes are two of the easiest steps an organization can take to reduce exploitation and prevent tours from becoming too intrusive. The organization also promises that 80 percent of its profits are donated to Reality Gives, which is a sister organization. According to the tour operator, “this works out to be 25 to 35 percent of the ticket price after [they] pay expenses and organizational fees” (Hays). Reality Tours and Travel strongly follows its transparency ethic by posting its yearly financial accounts on the website, which are reviewed by a registered auditor to assure people that it is truly giving back to the community. “We do this because we are open and honest and have nothing to hide,” says the organization (Reality Tours).

Another approach in which poverty tour organizations in India take in order to market their services and please tourists is through story telling. Salaam Baalak Trust is an organization that conducts street tours in Paharganj, New Delhi. The tours are conducted by former street kids who were able to improve their lives through the organization (Basu). While one tour operator of the organization walks his group through a run-down street, he shares his story of how he ended up in the streets. His parents used to fight and his father beat him, so he ran away to the streets of New Delhi (Basu). This method of story telling evokes sympathy and concern from the tourist in hopes that they will donate to the organization. However, these feelings are only momentarily experienced. At the end of the day, when donations are turned in to Salaam Baalak Trust, tourists scatter back in their taxis and escape the slums to return to comfort, leaving thousands of other poor children in the streets.

Several films that have been produced in Mumbai and in the city's slums have also made an attempt to create awareness of poverty in India, however, the people of India have thought differently about these films. *Slumdog Millionaire* is one film in particular that has received significant backlash from the city's locals. The film tells the story of an 18-year old orphan who grew up in the slums of Mumbai, and who is one question away from winning 20 million Rupees after earning a place on India's hit show, 'Who Wants To Be A Millionaire.' This film was nominated for ten Academy Awards and received four Golden Globe awards (Singh). Regardless of how much praise this film received within its own industry, protestors in India took it to the streets to attack the film. Many locals found the word 'slumdog' in the film's title "to be insulting to slum-dwellers. The rags-to-riches romance has [also] been called 'poverty porn' for the way it

casts a glowing light on a very poor section of Mumbai society and promotes ‘slum tourism’” (Real Roots). Other critics of the film believe that it is too much reality for what should be entertainment. A public relations executive who left halfway through the film’s premiere stated, “We see all this every day. You can't live in Mumbai without seeing children begging at traffic lights and passing by slums on your way to work. But I don't want to be reminded of that on a Saturday evening” (Singh).

Films are a questionable form of marketing poorism due to the various perspectives and meanings viewers take away from them. While some may feel that *Slumdog Millionaire* is casting a negative light on the residents of the Dharavi slum, others feel that it is sending a message of hope, especially to the lower middle-class aspiring for a better life (Singh). Ultimately, the film is only showing what is real, in terms of shooting scenes of the slums. There is no other way to incorporate authenticity into the film, than to include images of the slums.

India acts as a vulnerable country that falls under the global trend of poorism because of its large regions of poverty, such as Dharavi. Because of this, the country is easily targeted for poverty tours and film production. Considering that poorism is on the rise, more poverty tour organizations will continue to form until government action is taken to either regulate the industry or get rid of it completely. Even though small steps are being taken by tour organizations to avoid any association with exploitation, such as prohibiting photography, reducing tour group sizes, and donating profits to the communities, it is still not enough for critics to fully support the idea of poverty tourism. There is also no escape from criticism in the field of marketing when dealing with poorism. When tour organizations advertise their tours as being adventurous and a

learning experience, they are accused of voyeurism, yet when they advertise the truth by describing the severity of poverty to create awareness, they are accused of degrading the poor. If my speculations of poorism increasing in the future are correct, then the professional field of marketing in this unique tourism industry will receive a negative reputation by many not just in India, but also all over the world.

Appendix One:
Email of Questions Sent to *Kibera Tours*

Hello,

I came across your website while looking at several different poverty tour organizations. It was yours that caught my eye the most. I am interested in learning more about what your company does and how your tours are organized. I would greatly appreciate any feedback you could provide me with to the following questions I have imposed below.

1. When are the best times to go on your tour and how many people are there per tour group?
2. I noticed how on your website you emphasize on "Kibera, the friendliest slum in the world and a city of hope." Why do you believe this?
3. I read that security guards will accompany the group throughout the tour. Is the city dangerous, or would I feel unsafe?
4. How much of your profits go back into the community of Kibera to help locals? Is this including all of the 2500 Ksh I would be paying? Also, how does your organization provide employment for the people of Kibera?
5. I read that you only allow pictures at designated places. Which parts of the tour are these "designated places?" The reason I ask is because I would really love to photograph any special moments I encounter.
6. If I was interested in a custom-made tour, what are the places I would be allowed to choose from? Is there any extra fee in requesting this type of tour?
7. Can I personally donate clothing, money, or other items to locals myself during the tour, or do I have to do it through your organization? Can I purchase local products from the community?
8. What makes your organization different from any other poverty tour organization?

I look forward to hearing back from you soon!

Thank you very much,

Catalina

Appendix Two:
Email Conversation with *Reality Tours and Travel*

(Message from Me):

I introduced my email to the organization by saying:

Hello,

I came across your website while looking at several different poverty tour organizations. It was yours that caught my eye the most. I am very interested in learning more about what your company does and how your tours are organized. I would greatly appreciate any feedback you could provide me with to the following questions I have imposed below. (I apologize in advance for the load of questions!)

Following this statement, I listed questions about the organization, which are seen below.

(Response from Tour Representative):

Hi Catalina,

Thanks for getting in touch. Are you planning a visit to Mumbai soon? Or are these questions for an article or research? Either way, please find my answers below and don't hesitate to ask any more if you require additional information.

1. When are the best times in the year to go on your tours?

We run tours everyday, but Mumbai has the best weather between November and March, and therefore, this is also the busiest season. The monsoon period is June to September, so things can get a bit wet!

2. Is the city dangerous, or would I feel unsafe at any given time, especially when visiting the most impoverished areas of the slums?

Like anywhere you travel, you should be careful, but I don't think you'll feel unsafe in Mumbai, especially in comparison to other large, Indian cities. The slums are no more or less safe than other areas of the city, and we've never had any problems on our tours in the seven years that we've been running.

3. You say that your company gives back 80% of all profits to your sister organization, Reality Gives, yet you also say that 25-35% of the profits go to them as well. I am very confused about this, and was wondering if you could elaborate.

80% of our *profits* are donated to Reality Gives. This works out to be 25-35% of the ticket price after we pay expenses and organizational fees, which we feel is a very strong, admirable margin.

4. I read that no pictures are allowed in the Adivasi village, but are pictures allowed anywhere else on the tours?

In Dharavi and at the Adivasi village are the only two areas photos aren't allowed. You'll also encounter a few spots on other city tours where photography isn't allowed (Sassoon

Dock, inside Mumbadevi Temple, etc.), but these are per government rules and have to do with security issues, not imposed by us.

5. If I was interested in a custom-made tour, what are the places I would be allowed to choose from? Is there any extra fee in requesting this type of tour?

The possibilities are endless! Please see this page for examples, but we are completely flexible, and you can combine components of any of our tours, if it makes sense.

6. Can I personally donate clothing, money, or other items to locals myself during the tour, or do I have to do it through your organization? Can I purchase local products from the community while on the tours?

We'd prefer if you donate through us, as we can identify what is needed and the best way to get it to those who need it most since we work in the community everyday. You can purchase an assortment of products after our tour, and 100% of these profits are used to fund Reality Gives. Some items are from the community, while others aren't, but all support the NGO or like-minded NGOs we partner with.

7. You are one of a few companies I have found that offers so many different kinds of tours. What makes you decide what places to show and what activities to do, such as visiting the laundry or recycling area?

All of our tours are united by one simple thing- we want to show visitors places in Mumbai that might be difficult to see/experience/visit on your own, and in doing so, allow visitors to gain a full understanding of the city— and understanding that includes becoming aware of social issues that exist in Mumbai, while also celebrating some of the fantastic, amazing sights the city has to offer.

You'll notice we don't tend to visit the Gateway of India, Taj hotel, etc. These things are in all the guidebooks and simple to visit by yourself. We hope to add value to your holiday by taking you places you may have not seen otherwise.

8. You mention on your website that after visiting Dahravi, we will leave with an enlightened sense of the purpose and determination that exists in the area. What does this exactly mean?

Dharavi is a place of incredible industry, community, and perseverance. The industry in Dharavi turns over 650 million US Dollars a year! It's an incredible experience to such a strong, hardworking community despite all the daily problems they have to face. While of course the living conditions and issues that exist in Dharavi are unfortunate, there is also a lot to admire about the people, and that's part of what we hope to convey on our tours.

9. I noticed how on your website you emphasize on having a “real social impact on the Dahravi community” and how we can see the real India through your company. What makes your organization different from any other poverty tour organization?

First of all, we wouldn't call our tours poverty tours. If you are coming to look for poverty and gawk at the unfortunate conditions of the people in Dharavi, you'll find this isn't the focus of our tours. Yes, we give a tour of a slum, but we aim to show a complex,

well-rounded picture, one that poverty is a part of, but doesn't define.

Our NGO, Reality Gives, really sets us apart the most. We are running our tours for a purpose—to create social change and improve the lives of the people in the communities we visit.

Hope that helps!

Steph

(My Follow-up):

Hi Stephanie,

Thank you for getting back to me so quickly! I really appreciate all of the information you provided me with. The reason for all of my questions is because I am currently working on a research paper for school about poverty tourism and how it is marketed. I am incorporating a case study about India and the poverty tourism, or "poorism" that occurs there. Because there are several different organizations negatively criticized for being poverty tours, I wanted to use yours in a positive way, as one that is not a poverty tour, like you stated.

I see that Reality Tours & Travel has been featured in many media outlets and has been praised for its ethical practices. In terms of marketing, what has your organization done to achieve this positive reputation of your tours? What do you think other organizations who have been negatively criticized lack in marketing their tours?

With you being an expert in the industry, I would love to get any of your input or views on this matter!

Thank you again,
Catalina

(Response from Tour Representative):

Hi Catalina,

Sorry for the late reply. As for marketing, we haven't done that much formally. We rely a lot on word of mouth, TripAdvisor, and have been mentioned in many guidebooks such as Lonely Planet. When we do market ourselves, or respond to press enquiries, we emphasize the fact that we donate 80% of our profits to our NGO, and the great work in the community that Reality Gives is able to achieve due to people coming on our tours. We also place importance on the measures we take to conduct the tours responsibly (small groups, no photos, guides from the area or similar backgrounds, constant communication with the community.)

Thanks,
Steph

Images Referenced in Text



Figure 1 – Tourists roaming the ‘slums’ of New York City, 1885
Source: Library of Congress



Figure 1.1 – Tourists being entertained by children from the streets of Brazil’s favelas.
Source: Tucker Landesman from Favel Issues

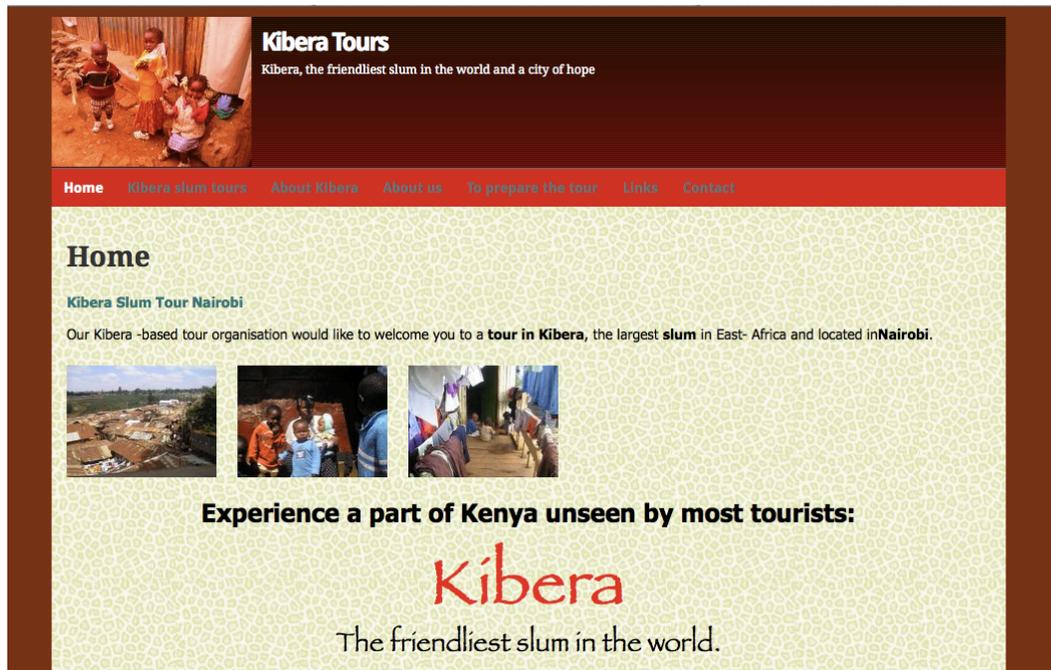


Figure 2 – Home page of the Kibera Tours website
Source: Kibera Tours



Figure 2.1 – The Rocinha favela of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.
Source: Flickr image by Adam Johnson



Figure 3 – The Dharavi slum in India.
Source: National Geographic

Figure 3.1 – Home page of the Reality Tours & Travel website
Source: Reality Tours & Travel



Figure 3.2 – A sign advertising Reality Tours & Travel in India
Source: This is Africa

Post-Script

After reflecting on all of the time and effort I put into this final paper, I can honestly say that I have never been so passionate about any assignment I have done in my four years of college. I began this paper not knowing what I would learn about poorism and how greatly my profession would be impacted by it. The extensive research I did really opened up my eyes to a serious issue; one that I cannot believe even exists.

After learning about the advantages and disadvantages of poorism, I found myself strongly opposing this trend. It is extremely upsetting that people actually think touring impoverished communities is okay to do, regardless if they think it is benefiting locals or themselves. Moreover, analyzing the websites of Kibera Tours and Reality Tours and Travel made me realize the extent to which companies will take to market their services.

As a communications major, I have learned many tools companies use to present, market, and advertise themselves to convince people to think differently. It took me by surprise that the representative from Reality Tours and Travel rejected my comment about being a poverty tour organization. The reality is that they in fact are one, but refuse to be associated with that label because of the negative connotations that are placed on it.

This contemporary perspectives paper has given me a different outlook on the world we live in. People will do anything for their own personal gain and enjoyment and companies will exploit the poor for profit and status in the industry. There are other ways to address poverty. People can learn about this issue by getting educated in school and reading books, *not* by visiting the poor and taking pictures of them. Organizations can market themselves responsibly and give back to communities by asking for donations online, *not* by creating and customizing tour packages for people to join.

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