

#1 Slumthing is going on!

Many of us are interested, curious and nosy about seeing the unknown, such as shanty towns which are one of those phenomenon's we want to explore. This blog will explain what slums are, what slum tourism is and how you (yes, you!) may contribute to it with your good intentions. I will also explore the moral dilemmas around such tours and question their sustainability.

Wonder what slums are? Here is a brief history – for you!

The United Nations defines a slum as 'a run-down area of a city characterized by substandard housing and squalor and lacking in tenure security' (UN, 2007). Slum tourism is not a new phenomenon, "Slumming" was added to the Oxford English Dictionary in the 1860s, meaning "to go into, or frequent, slums for discreditable purposes; to saunter about, with a suspicion, perhaps, of immoral pursuits." Township, favela, barrio, slum, shantytown, or ghettos are impoverished places, where the poor live, such urban areas have always inspired the popular imagination, and been considered to be places of 'otherness', 'moral decay', 'deviant liberty' or 'authenticity'. (Frenzel et al, 2012).

There are records of the middle- and upper-class Victorian Londoners heading over to tour the East End to gawk at the poor in the 19th century. In 1884, the *New York Times* published [an article](#) about the latest trend in leisure activities: "Slumming will become a form of fashionable dissipation this winter among our Belles, as our foreign cousins will always be ready to lead the way." Who would have thought, that by today, slum tourism would have grown into a global industry, millions of tourists per year visit ghettos, tour operators offer tours to places like townships of Cape Town and Johannesburg, the favelas of Rio, the slums of Mumbai and New Delhi, also including areas of LA, Detroit, Copenhagen, and Berlin (SHEPARD, Wade. 2021).



Slumming it?

Visiting slums is spreading in popularity across the globe and sparking debate around an uncomfortable moral dilemma. According to the [United Nations](#), about a quarter of the world's urban population lives in slums—and this figure is rising fast. The number of people living in slums worldwide increased from 803.13 million in 2000 to 1,033.55 million in 2018. Eastern and South-Eastern Asia are the two regions with the largest urban slum population as of 2018 (Szmigiera, 2021). It's almost irrelevant what you call it - slum tours, adventure tourism, poverty porn- the fact is that it is belittling for those who live less fortunately to have the wealthy look on as if they were monkeys in a zoo. While the industry makes it seemingly acceptable for the more fortunate to have a stroll around a slum home; would it be as acceptable the other way around? My guess is not. How would you feel were someone from a ghetto (or anywhere) to walk around your home uninvited and bless you with some-if any - pennies in return?

Slum on in!

According to Frenzel (2021), 'Slums have been visited, revisited, researched, and reported ever since they first appeared. They reflect abject human misery, but at the same time they obviously fascinate, incite, excite and inspire people from all walks of life'.

Dr Fabian Frenzel, a lecturer in organisation studies at the University of Leicester and senior research associate with the University of Johannesburg, has been investigating the impact of 'slumming it' for years. He argues that slum tourism doesn't have to be exploitative – it can draw attention to important global justice issues and encourage new networks of solidarity and care.



What can you do? Think Local, local, local!

Keep it local: Would you pay a company that cares only about profits giving little or none back to the local community; or a local guide employed by a local company, who can answer your questions having experienced slum living? The problem with the former is that those companies are profit motivated and not looking to support the poor while the latter can help people escape poverty. Taking outsiders through impoverished, marginalized districts should only be done by a local guide, if at all. Simply because they know the area, the unwritten code of conduct and being guided by them may also encourage more sensitive behaviour. In theory, a local guide means your £'s stay local, feed families and potentially support sustainable local development.

Buy it local: Townships often have handmade souvenir shops, buying local is a chance to help a mother put food on the table at the end of the day. Choosing local? Feel good! - you contributed to their wellbeing.

Eat it local: Choosing a local guide will almost guarantee that any lunch stop will be at a local food stall, where money will be well spent and contribute to the boost of the local economy. Not to mention providing an authentic experience by eating what the locals eat.

It must be understood that to have a local person as a guide is a fundamental prerequisite for the smooth operation of the tour, as well as enabling the tourists to experience slums (Frenzel et al. 2012). Participatory planning is the most credible approach to making slum tourism sustainable, acceptable and pro-poor, including planning and decision-making processes (Rolfes et al. 2009). However, this 'approach of recruiting local people as guides for these tours, often heralded as reflective of people's participation in slum tourism, only validates that participation as providers of services' (Frenzel et al. 2012).

Next up: #2 Volunteerism and Orphanage tourism