

# Township Tourism in Cape Town, South Africa

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In 2008, I completed nine months of fieldwork in South Africa for my dissertation, *Township Tours: Restructuring People, Place and Cultural-Heritage in Cape Town*. This was my third visit to the post-apartheid nation to study the implications of cultural tourism in a city which boasts over 1.7 million international arrivals for 2007. My current research examines how members of post-apartheid society are addressing understandings of African urban spaces, history, and culture, as well as the structuring of contemporary social inequality specifically through township based tourism.

Townships are sprawling residential enclaves at the city's edges. They were produced by decades of economic, racial, and ethnic segregation to contain an underclass, labor pool. In the last 10 years, township tours emerged as a premier cultural activity for visitors to Cape Town. This parallels a global trend of "pro-poor" or "alternative" tourism featuring environments offering distinctive experiences that benefit local communities. In Cape Town, tour operators claim to offer an excursion into the "real" South Africa. They visit impoverished shantytowns and other developing areas in dire contrast to the European urbanism and natural beauty

of the central city bowl. Township tourism further draws on post-apartheid discourses of multiculturalism, reconciliation, and economic restructuring.

My fieldwork is based primarily in the townships of Langa, Gugulethu, and Khayelitsha. Here, I assess local residents' roles in and reactions to tourism practices including their view of risks, benefits, and responsibilities that come with involvement in township tourism. For example, I worked with many bed and breakfast owners, primarily entrepreneurial women. Much of my participant observation took place from community arts and craft centers



frequented by foreign visitors. I spent significant time with tour operators, guides, and tourists. And I was invited to be a member of the City of Cape Town Department of Tourism's Task Team on Cultural Tourism. While much of my research with tourists was conducted in English, in the townships I was able to draw on my language training in Xhosa. Through the FLAS fellowship program, I was fortunate to study Xhosa at UF for three years with a native speaker.

Building on pre-dissertation research carried out in Summer 2002 and 2006, I am also investigating how members of the tourism industry shape the production of place, history, and culture and generate new social practices. In this component of my project, for instance, I examine the design, construction and competing narrative descriptions of several anti-apartheid monuments in Cape Town's townships which have become popular tourist sites. Finally, I probe the paradoxical situation tourism creates between the integration of townships into Cape Town's wider urban landscape and continued differentiation of townships from the city through culture, class, and spatial organization. The project seeks to add to our understandings of the factors that direct, sustain, and complicate heritage tourism.

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