

TIGERS AND TOURISTS

Advertisements offering well-to-do travelers a chance to see the Indian tiger are common in environmental magazines, travel websites, and the travel sections of major newspapers. Here is an excerpt of an advertisement from Tiger Package Tours:

Earlier the hunting preserve of the Maharajas of Jaipur, the Park at Ranthambore was once the scene of royal hunting parties. Today, it is famous for its tigers and is one of the best places in the country to see these majestic predators in the wild. Tigers can be spotted quite often even during the day, at their normal pursuits—hunting and taking care of their young. With the strict measures that have been taken, [they are] accustomed to human activity and are not disturbed by it.¹

Tourism is thriving in Ranthambore Park to such an extent that the normally elusive tiger is no longer bothered by the foreign tourists who flock to its home.

DISCUSSION

What visitors to Ranthambore and other tiger preserves will not see are the human costs associated with the creation and operation—the “strict measures”—of such preserves.

The 400-square-kilometer Ranthambore Park was created in 1973, largely as the result of an international effort to preserve the Indian tiger. The park consists of both core and buffer areas. The core areas are strictly off-limits to

local villagers. In the buffer areas, the taking of forest products, fuelwood, and livestock fodder is severely restricted. In 1979, twelve entire villages in buffer areas were abolished and their thousands of residents displaced in order better to protect the tigers' forest habitat. Such dislocation is associated with all the Indian preserves. Sometimes, as at Ranthambore, it is done by government fiat in order to enlarge the preserve; at other times, it happens as a result of the economic collapse that results from new restrictions on the local population's use of forest resources; sometimes, locals are simply displaced by new businesses moving in to tap the tourist industry.

Only rarely are villagers—expelled from lands on which their families have depended for generations—compensated. Almost never are they given comparable new land in exchange. As a result, tension between those who manage the preserves and those who were displaced to create them is high: In some places, tigers have been killed or fires set to damage their habitat, and surreptitious entry, in order to take fuelwood or other resources, is a continual problem. The Indian scholar Ramachandra Guha asserts that Project Tiger and its sponsors (such as the World Wildlife Fund) have caused “a direct transfer of resources from the poor to the rich.” “In no case,” Guha claims, “have the needs of the local population been taken into account.”²

Tiger preserves have brought some economic benefits to the communities they affect. Money generated by tourism has funded improvements to local infrastructure, such as roads. The preserves—especially the luxury lodges and hotels associated with them—do create new jobs. But there is no evidence that the preserves have helped reduce the enormous income disparities that predate their creation. If anything, the majority of the poor who were displaced are worse off, and the few who manage the reserves are better off. Many of the tourism dollars never reach Ranthambore at all: Only travel agents who promote the system and who usually are thousands of miles away benefit.

QUESTIONS

1. Should families who lived in a village for generations (perhaps centuries) be forced to move in order to provide protected habitat for tigers?
2. To what extent should efforts to protect the tiger restrict local residents' access to the basic means of subsistence, such as fuelwood?

3. Those who benefit most from the tiger preserves are the tour operators who bear none of the social impacts associated with the creation of the preserves. Should local people who are adversely impacted by the preserves be compensated by those who profit from the parks? If so, what sort of system should be established to ensure that this takes place? Do tourists visiting the parks have any obligation to support or encourage such a system?
4. Compare this case to Case 8: Matinicus Island and Case 15: Oil and ANWR. Should the fact that certain families have been living in a particular ecosystem for generations or even centuries give them any special voice in decisions about how that ecosystem is used?

NOTES

1. "All India Travel Guide: Ranthambore National Park," available at www.all-india-travel-guide.com/jungle-wildlife-lodges/ranthambhor-jungle-lodges.html.
2. Ramachandra Guha, "Radical Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique," *Environmental Ethics* 11, no. 1 (spring 1989): 71-83.

SOURCES

"All India Travel Guide: Ranthambore National Park." Available at www.all-india-travel-guide.com/jungle-wildlife-lodges/ranthambhor-jungle-lodges.html.
 Guha, Ramachandra. "Radical Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique." *Environmental Ethics* 11, no. 1 (spring 1989): 71-83.
 Wildlife Chronicle. "Project Tiger." Available at http://66.96.219.61/Project_Tiger.htm.