

TRAVEL

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INDIA: religious minorities in Kashmir and Lakshadweep
SRI LANKA: ethnic minorities on tea plantations
PHILIPPINES: lower-class minorities in the fishing industry

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INTRODUCTION



Dear reader,

What you are reading right now is a special online edition of *Travel*. Usually, we provide you with all sorts of nice travel deals and tips, but for this edition, we take a different route.

This time, we want to tell you stories about the downsides of tourism to countries' inhabitants. Tourism does not benefit everyone and not everyone has a say in whether or not for example destinations for tourists are being built or has control over the consequences. Especially minorities (this can be social, ethnic, linguistic, religious or other 'types' of minorities) are often disregarded when it comes to political decision-making. This special online edition will make clear why political representation of minorities is important and what the consequences are if misrepresentation happens.

Why should you, as a tourist, know about this? Why not just go on vacation without knowing about misrepresentation of minorities? As a tourist, you contribute to the economy of the country of your destination and therefore sustain the everyday practices that minorities have to face. When minorities are not well represented in politics, they lack a voice and power to decide on how the relation of their country with tourism should be. Besides that, minorities do not always get a share of the benefit from tourism and as a tourist, you might want everyone to agree on your visit.

In this edition, we will tell stories about how minorities are negatively affected by tourism in four countries. First, we will travel to India, from where we will tell a story about how the pro-Hindu regime negatively influences non-Hindu minorities in the northern region of Jammu and Kashmir, the Lakshadweep Islands as well as the Sherpa people who live in the very north of the country.

INTRODUCTION

Then, we go on to the tea plantages of Sri Lanka. We tell a story about the Malaiyaha Tamils who work on those plantages, why their political representation is low and how are seen by the ruling class as second-class citizens. We close off by giving you a recommendation when it comes to visiting plantages.



The third and final story is about the lower socio-economic class in the Philippines who are excluded from politics. Guided by an example from fishermen Calamianes Islands who see their livelihood worsen, we will explain why the lower class has no say in politics and how and why that is possible.



We hope you will find our stories interesting and captivating, and that it will help you explore new perspectives on tourism.





Do you know that India is one of the most popular backpacking destinations? When you think about India, you might think about crowded cities with bikes, lively streets and a very dynamic culture etc. At the same time, you might think about beautiful blue islands, big forests, and of course the huge mountains with permanent snow!

It sounds like India is a heaven for backpackers and nature lovers. It might be a heaven for travelers. But it seems that India is far from being a heaven. We already know that India is a country with a huge gap between rich and poor. For example, the GDP in Jammu and Kashmir, one of the famous destinations for backpackers, is only 21 billion in US Dollars.[1] Compared to the richest region, Maharashtra where the GDP is 350 billion, 21 billion is very low. Many other regions with low GDP are located in the Northern East of India where a lot of backpackers travel for trekking.

If you thought “people in the regions must have such a good life because there are a lot of tourists spending money”, it is wrong. As mentioned above, their financial situation is not as good as you thought, even though India is the 11th highest country on tourism income.[2] How can this happen?

The main religion of India is Hinduism. About 80% of Indians are Hindus, about 14% of them are Muslims, slightly more than 2% are Christians and slightly less than 2% are Sikhs.[3] The issue is that these religious minorities are discriminated against by Hindus. Under the government of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which is a pro-Hindu party, this discrimination is getting worse and more serious. How is it related to the poor regions then?

[1] Reserve Bank of India. www.rbi.org.in

[2] <https://www.atlasbig.com/en-us/countries-tourism-income>

[3] All India Region Census Data 2011.

<https://www.census2011.co.in/religion.php>



As a majority of Indians are Hindus, most of the members of parliaments are Hindus as well. However, compared to the population of Muslims, Christians, Sikhs or other religions, these religious minorities are not well represented in the parliament. For instance, Muslims in the parliament are only 5%, while the whole Muslim population is almost 15%.[4] There is no data about the other religions. But we can assume that the other religions are represented even worse than Islam, since the Hindus in the parliament make up over 90% of the representatives.

The main religion of Jammu and Kashmir region is Islam (about 80%).[5] The percentage of Muslim population is even higher, particularly, in Kashmir region. Now, consider that Muslims are not well represented in the parliament, that the government is pro-Hindus, and that most of the people are Muslims in the region. It's a thorn in the government's side. They launched a fencing project because they did not want more Muslims cross the border from Bangladesh and Pakistan.[6] The Indian government removed the autonomy of Kashmir and its territorial sovereignty. Consequently, military troops came to the region to control the people (Muslims). Suddenly, the people had a curfew and an information blackout for four months. The removal of the autonomy of Kashmir is seen as a sort of neocolonialism based on Hindu ethnonationalism. It is also seen as the Indian government classifying Muslims as invaders and foreigners.[7] As a result, they often do not get social benefits such as health care and education. Their rights to freedom of expression are also restricted.[8]

Furthermore, people in the region perceive the economic benefits from tourism whilst they perceive negative impacts from social and environmental benefits.[9] The reason is that whilst they get the economic benefits directly from tourists, they do not get social costs and environmental benefits from the government. One of the examples are Sherpas. Sherpa are the people who guide and help to climb the mountains across the borders of India, Nepal and China. Of course, they get money from hikers. However, their working conditions are bad since the Indian government does not provide a good infrastructure and health care, etc. One of the other examples is the Lakshadweep islands. The majority of the islands' population is Muslim. The Indian government successfully implemented a plan to attract tourists to the Lakshadweep islands.[10] However, the residents on the archipelago are under threat by the government and the tourism plan. The government expelled residents from taking part of the tourism industry and invaded their culture by banning beef. To protect their heritage, some of the residents protested against the government's plan.[11]

These issues with bad living/working conditions, losing one's own heritage, and protests against the government are difficult to be solved since there are too few representatives. There are too few representatives in the parliament for the religious minorities. Their rights are being threatened even more so under the pro-Hindu government. The way religious minorities can increase their rights is to have more representatives in the parliament. But again, the threshold to get into the political arena seems too big to reach under the BJP government and tensions/terrors between Hindus and Muslims or other religions continue.



You, as a tourist, have a moral obligation to know about the political situation in India. You should know about how people from religious minorities live, what the political situation is like, and especially whom your money is benefitting. It is not enough to know that your contribution to the economy as a tourist does not really make their lives better. Rather, your money might be used to consolidate the pro-Hindu government. However, acknowledging this before you go to India and spend your money carelessly might be the first step to improve the situation.

[4] Statista. <https://www.statista.com/chart/21025/muslim-representation-lok-sabha-parliament-india/>

[5] Census of India. <https://www.census2011.co.in/religion.php>

[6] Williams, 2015

[7] Zia, 2020

[8] UNHCR report, 2018

[9] Charag et al., 2020; Bhat et al., 2020

[10] Kokkranikal et al., 2010, p. 431

[11] <https://science.thewire.in/politics/rights/between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place-lakshadweep-locals-set-to-fight-tourism-plans/>

Sri Lanka, also called the pearl of the Indian Ocean, is not just a popular destination for tourists but also the fourth largest tea producer in the world famously known for its Ceylon tea producing around 300 million kilograms of tea per year.[1] As you might already imagine, the tourism industry is benefitting from the fact that Sri Lanka is famous for its tea. Many tourists not just visit Sri Lanka for its beautiful beaches, ancient cities and tasty food but they also come to pay a visit to one of the many tea plantations in the high land. Sri Lanka is loved by all types of tourists offering a variety of attractions for backpackers, high-end tourists, spiritual tourists and nature lovers. Getting to know more about the country can therefore be of great interest to many different types of tourists. Especially after the end of the two decades long civil war tourists should be aware of the political situation when traveling to Sri Lanka.



Sri Lanka is a diverse country with many ethnic and religious minorities. While the majority of the population consists of the Sinhalese (74.9% of nation's population) there are also Tamils (13% of nation's population) which form the biggest ethnic minority, Veddas and Malaiyaha Tamils (Hill Country Tamils) which live mainly on the tea plantations.[2] Between the Sinhalese and Tamils a civil war broke out in 1978 that officially ended in 2009. However, the discriminatory practices against the Tamils continue until today.

[1] <https://www.dw.com/en/sri-lanka-tea-workers-and-a-legacy-of-exploitation/a-55006963>

[2] S. N. R. Wijesinghe, P. Mura, R. Tavakoli, A postcolonial feminist analysis of official tourism representations of Sri Lanka on Instagram, 2020

The Malaiyaha Tamils came to Sri Lanka due to colonialism. When Sri Lanka was under British rule the British tried to grow coffee unsuccessfully and later tea on the island.[3] Therefore, they needed workers on the estates and implemented a system that transferred many Indians from Tamil Nadu to Sri Lanka.[4] Even though they did not live under slavery officially they did not get paid, their working conditions were horrible and many lived in debt which they needed to pay back until this rule changed after around 100 years.[5] In 1948 when Sri Lanka finally reached independence from the colonizer the government decided to declare the Malaiyaha Tamils as “temporary immigrants” denying them citizenship.[6] Excluding them from access to political power, welfare institutions, and public services.[7] Only in the 1980s did the government grant citizenship to the Malaiyaha Tamils.[8] However, as many claim the granting of the citizenship did not help them to increase their living conditions since many plantation workers continue to live and work under disastrous conditions and the ruling elite treats them as second-class citizens.[9] Consequently, Malaiyaha Tamils “continue to be among the most marginalized and impoverished people in the country”. [10]



You might think that the plantation workers could gain political influence via the trade unions. However, their union leaders are not elected, which has led many workers to view the unions with “cynicism and frustration”. [11] Furthermore, the trade unions work together with the government and do not side with the workers. Overall, granting citizenship has not eradicated the disadvantages faced by Malaiyaha Tamils since they continue to struggle to meet ends, getting exploited on the plantations and have low political representation due to the trade unions’ undemocratic set-up.

[3][4][5] <https://www.dw.com/en/sri-lanka-tea-workers-and-a-legacy-of-exploitation/a-55006963>

[6] <https://borgenproject.org/tea-plantation-workers-in-sri-lanka/>

[7] Hill Country Tamils of Sri Lanka, 2019, p. 18

[8] <https://borgenproject.org/tea-plantation-workers-in-sri-lanka/>

[9] <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2022/11/12/nqsq-n12.html>

[10] <https://www.dw.com/en/sri-lanka-tea-workers-and-a-legacy-of-exploitation/a-55006963/>

[11] Hill Country Tamils of Sri Lanka, 2019, p. 20



With this low political representation and the ruling elite seeing them as second-class citizens Malaiyaha Tamils have little influence on how tourism should be implemented in Sri Lanka. Many tea plantations profit from tourists visiting the estate and spending their money there. However, the workers who are mainly Malaiyaha Tamils do not benefit from that since the profits of the plantation are not shared. Without the workers, these plantations would not be able to exist in the first place since the plucking of tea is labor intensive work. Therefore, the profits should also be shared with the workers.

Knowing about the political misrepresentation of this minority can be the first step in understanding that there is more to Sri Lanka than its beautiful nature. The country is torn between ethnic tensions and discrimination despite the civil war being officially ended. When traveling to Sri Lanka keep in mind that the Malaiyaha Tamils have been and continue to be poorly politically represented and live and work under harsh conditions. Even though it might just be a small step, always ask first before you take pictures of the workers plucking tea and if they agree, do not forget to pay them for it. What might just be a few cents for you can help the workers gain some extra income and acknowledge their contribution to making Sri Lanka one of the most beautiful countries to visit in Asia. Additionally, there are also tea plantations that do provide fair and good working conditions such as Watawala Plantations PLC. Go there and visit their estate and spend your money on fair trade tea rather than supporting a regular tea plantation where workers do not benefit from any aspect of the tourism industry.



Now that winter is arriving, you might want to look for a warm destination for your winter holiday. Maybe a nice beach resort in the Philippines? The temperature in the Philippines is always around 30 degrees, which makes it a perfect country if you want to escape the cold weather. There are plenty of beaches, as the Philippines is an archipelago.

But is the Philippines really a perfect country? Let us have a look at what people living in the Philippines think of your visit there. You might think that a visit to the Philippines has only positive consequences, because as a tourist, you are contributing to the country's economy, right? That is the benefit for them. However, ask yourself the question: do all of the over 100 million inhabitants of the Philippines enjoy the financial benefits you generate? Not so much. Not all of those 100 million inhabitants enjoy the financial benefits that the tourism sector brings equally. Not very far away from the beach you might be relaxing at, poor fishermen are working hard to make a living. More than half of the households that are reliant on the fishing industry live below the poverty line.[1] The only income they have is under threat.

The lives of fishermen and coastal communities are further under threat, because the government of the Philippines is heavily promoting tourism. An important coastal fishing region in the country was the Calamianes Islands, located in the west of the archipelago. The government has insisted that fishers should transition to the tourism sector. Not all fishers are appreciating this, as many of them see tourism as a threat to their income and living. Tourism is associated with private property and wealthy businessmen. Fishery is more inclusive, whilst tourism is associated by Filipino fishermen with the elites.[2] On the website of Coron, one of the islands, tourists are lured by the description of how beautiful the lagoons, beaches and cliffs are. Officials in the region welcomed the expanded tourism, which started in the 1980s, with open arms and expanding the airport. What do the fishers themselves think about these developments? Not all of them support this development.[3]

[1] Palanca-Tan & Bayong, 2021, p. 1

[2] Fabinyi, 2010, p. 424-425

[3] Ibid., p. 421-422



As noted before, many households in the fishery industry live below the poverty line, and a big part of the population belongs to the lower class. How come, when the lower class makes up such a big portion of the population, they are not seeing their lives become better due to the revenues tourism brings? Even though the Philippines is a democracy, the lower class is not really part of politics. Only middle- and upper class interests are heard.[4] Why? Because of political dynasties. These dynasties are very wealthy families that are in power in all levels of governance and continue to grow.[5][6] Over half of the Filipino congresspeople and governors have a relative who has been in the same position before. [7] These dynasties make it hard to make life for the lower income groups better. Do they not care about these people? Arguably not so much. There is a clear positive link between the presence of political dynasties and higher poverty and lower income. And not only that: regions where political dynasties are active, have also lower attainment in lower education and higher child mortality when compared to regions in which these dynasties are less common.[8] Political dynasties cause a continuation of poverty.[9]

It is maybe not all that bad, because the government actually makes public funds available. There are also policies aimed at poverty reduction in existence. However, because of the presence of political dynasties, these policies tend to not work out well. Members use the public funds to assist their relatives and people that are close to them, such as allies in their districts. In the Philippines, exchanges are a common way to get people to vote for you. In a so-called clientelistic system, certain resources are given in exchange for a vote. People vote for a politician in exchange for goods (or promises). This all may lead to money and other resources not ending up in the hands of the poor. It is a self-perpetuating system.[10] It leads to the continuation of misrepresentation of various sectors of society, such as the lower class, in particular manual labour workers, the urban poor, small farmers, women and - as we saw - fishermen.[11][12]

[4] Lundgren & Petrosiute, 2017, p. 12

[5] Tadem & Tadem, 2016, p. 328; Rodan, 2021, p. 244; Mendoza et al., 2019, p. 2

[6] Tuaño & Cruz, 2019, p. 306

[7] Querubin, 2013, p. 191, 195

[8] Mendoza et al., 2016, p. 191, 195

[9] Tadem & Tadem, 2016, p. 332-333

[10] Mendoza et al., 2016, p. 192

[11] Teehankee, 2002, p. 195

[12] Lundgren & Petrosiute, 2017, p. 12



Can the lower class not just decide to participate in elections in order to change its political misrepresentation? They can, but it is hard. Candidates must have either popularity or great wealth to win elections.[13] However, the Philippines have been trying to do something about this, although they did not succeed. The largest share of seats in the congress of the Philippines is determined by a system in which only the winner of the election in a certain district gets a seat. To give underrepresented groups a chance, a part of the seats is now determined by a 'party-list system', which is also used in many European countries. Voters can pick their ideal candidate from a list, which should make the chance of getting elected higher for the lower class. However, this does not work, mainly because elites have their own party-list groups, sustained by relatives and allies who vote for them. The political dynasties use this as an opportunity to gain even more influence and power.[14]

Why should you, as a potential traveller to the Philippines, know this? You should know this, because you might have a picture of the Philippines that is not true. There is much more going on in the Philippines than the country just being a nice destination for vacation. Tourists, obviously, spend money in the country they stay and therefore contribute to the economy. Yet, as you know after reading this, that money might end up with the elites and not with the lower class due to the latter not having a meaningful say in politics. The lower class does not have the political power to decide where and how the money that tourism and therefore you generate, is spent.

[13] Teehankee, 2002, p. 195

[14] Tadem & Tadem, 2016, p. 335

Image sources

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