

An exploration of the educational impact of school tours as part of a safari itinerary in Matabeleland North, Zimbabwe

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Economic and political turbulence in Zimbabwe over the last three decades has led to a broken education system that relies on donor and non-government organisation funding to provide fundamental resources such as desks, textbooks and classrooms. In schools in Matabeleland North, this donor support is sometimes sought through funding provided from school tours which are conducted as part of tour packages of southern Africa. This paper explores development tourism in one case study school, in a tourist area of Zimbabwe, by examining the pedagogical impact of the school tour. The school hosts tourists in exchange for small gifts and, sometimes substantial, financial donations. Few studies have examined the implications of including a school tour in a mass tourism itinerary. Studies that explore the role of Corporate Social Responsibility or 'giveback' by tourism operators usually take a commercial lens when examining monetary donations. Further, studies have not explored the implementation of school tours using an educational lens. This paper reports on an ethnographic study that explores the effect of school tours on education at one school. By taking an educational lens, this paper considers the pedagogical impacts of school tours.

Data generated during three months of fieldwork included semi-structured interviews with teachers and tourism staff. Through the discursive framing of the macro-niche of development tourism and associated notions of development, a complex working and learning environment for the school community is created. In this environment, the school has a higher level of educational resourcing than local government schools but is required to manage the regular disruptions to the school day caused by school tours. The interviews with teachers and tourism personnel demonstrate that tourism is in some way beneficial as it provides resources and funding, allowing teachers to make use of pedagogical tools previously unavailable to them. However, school tours also deeply affect the ability of teachers to perform their role as a classroom teacher. This paper explores these tensions and concludes that school tours are under-researched and the complexities and nuances of school tours have potentially significant impacts upon educational experiences and learning for children.