

SLUM TOURISM IN MUMBAI GROWING IN POPULARITY



The recent award winning movie Slumdog Millionaire won many hearts. It has brought into focus an area where tourists were unheard of before. Now, they are queuing to come to Mumbai's poorest areas. Slums are simply the real thing.

Slumdog Millionaire appears to be the hit of the season. It has collected various awards in the recent months and more importantly, has managed to draw attention to the least likely place to lure tourists - the Mumbai slums. The raw character of these vastly overpopulated areas attracts a lot of attention and **several tourist agencies have already noticed this fact**. As soon as the demand for the slums increased, they were ready to offer unique tours here.

Mumbai is a city of contrasts. The financial hub of India features richness and luxury beyond imagination as well as unbelievable poverty. The Dharavi, Mumbai's biggest slum, is home to approximately one million inhabitants. Living in wooden shacks, the men, women and children share an area of 175 hectares with goats, cows, dogs...well, with all kinds of animals. The diverting maze of streets, mosques, Hindu temples, shops, charming market places, and food stalls becomes a truly impressive and adventurous experience.

The concept of guided tours initially angered many - after all, there is nothing noble in profiting from poverty. On the other hand, the major tourist agency which offers the 'Slumdog' tour returns most of its profits to Dharavi, helps finance several educational projects and thus is in favor of local inhabitants. Only six tourists are allowed per tour and the price starts at **\$10 per person**.

Life here is extremely difficult and sad. Even though the experience of touring the slum is very deep and raw, tourists agree that there is a sense of friendliness and even safety they get from the locals. It certainly is an unforgettable experience which many choose over the shiny beaches of Goa and the luxurious five star face of the very different Mumbai - even if it is only for a few hours.

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