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'Reality Tours' to Chiapas, Mexico:
The Role of Justice Tourism in
Development

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the role of justice tourism as a form of tourism and as a form of activism. It contains the results of research carried out in Chiapas, Mexico on a Reality Tour organised by San Francisco-based human rights organisation, Global Exchange. The research investigated the views and experiences of the three main parties involved in the tour, Global Exchange, the tour participants and the host NGOs.

In acknowledging that the aims of the parties involved go beyond that of tourism development, it uses the concepts of empowerment, the role of NGOs and social movements to assess the tour's usefulness in the context of both alternative and post development. In doing so it suggests that although the practice of the Reality Tours is set within alternative development and that the tours are able to support alternative development initiatives, it also presents a way Northern NGOs can support post development processes that are occurring in Third World countries.

The research was designed to firstly assess the impact of the tour as a form of tourism. Through comparison to the tourism literature it concluded that it is a form of alternative tourism with a high level of measures taken to ensure social responsibility in its operation. Unlike the majority of forms of tourism it is not intended to contribute to the development of an industry. Secondly the research was designed to assess the tours usefulness as a method of education and tool for activism. With regards to activism the research highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the Reality Tours as a method of stimulating action. It concludes that the experiences gained during the tour are particularly useful in supporting certain forms of action that are both diverse and closely aligned with the participants existing interests.

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List of Abbreviations

CIDESI	<i>Centro Indígena de Capacitación Integral</i> Indigenous Centre for Integral Training
CIEPAC	<i>Centro de Investigaciones Económicas y Políticas de Acción Comunitaria,</i> Center for Economic and Political Research for Community Action
EZLN	<i>Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional</i> Zapatista National Liberation Army
Fray Bart	<i>Centro de Derechos Humanos Fray Bartolomé de Las Casas</i> Fray Bartolomé Human Rights Centre
GX	Global Exchange
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PRI	<i>Partido Revolucionario Institucional</i> Institutional Revolutionary Party
UNDR	United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights