

Course Name: *Performance of/in Tourism: Agency and Economy in Fairs, Festivals, Cultural Markets, Museums and Heritage Sites.*

Course Code: LH-E-763

Credits: 4

Target Students: *Cross Elective* for all JGU students, 2nd year onwards

Faculty Name: Dr Poulomi Das

Faculty Biography:

Dr. Poulomi Das is an Assistant Professor of Writing, Culture, Performance, and Literary Studies at the Jindal School of Liberal Arts and Humanities. She holds an interdisciplinary PhD from the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi. Her ethnographic work focuses on the mangrove communities of the Sundarbans, culminating in her thesis, *The Bonbibi Cult of Sundarbans: Expressions and Expectations in the Performances of Everyday Life*. She has presented her research at the Historiography Seminars of the Summer Institute Cologne (University of Cologne and Northwestern University). Her scholarship intersects ethnography, performance studies, ritual studies, culture, tourism, gender, and heritage studies. Her recent publication includes a chapter in the OUP volume *Women Performers in Bengal and Bangladesh: Caught up in the culture of South Asia (1795-2010s)*. She is also the content guide and dramaturge of *Maati Kotha*, produced and performed by the Tram Arts Trust, an Object and Material Theatre performance that uses the hand-made dolls from Sundarbans to tell the myriad stories of the struggles and hopes of its people and their syncretic ethos to the world outside.

Course Description:

This course would introduce students to the performative aspects of/in tourism and the politics behind the marketing of indigenous cultures. Touristic itineraries and cultural exhibitions often stage visual, auditory, sartorial, gastronomical, musical, theatrical, and other performative elements, creating a dynamic interface between local communities, tourists, investors, and governments. These curated experiences claim to offer "authentic" cultural connections while simultaneously reconfiguring local traditions into commodified spectacles. Using theoretical tools from culture and performance studies, and methodologies from ethnography and tourism studies, students will critically analyse seemingly benign tourism projects and question narratives of marginalisation or empowerment. Case studies ranging from the 19th Century Paris Exposition, Red Fort (Delhi), Taj Mahal (Agra), IRCTC luxury trains, Bonbibi Pala performances (Sundarbans resorts), Sonajhuri Jhumur dancers (Santiniketan), Kutch Mahotsav (Gujrat), and Hornbill Festival (Nagaland) to Republic Day Parade in Delhi, Chowki Dhani (Sonipat) and Dilli Haat (Delhi, INA) will anchor discussions. The course is ideal for students interested in Sociology, International Business, Environmental Studies, Economics, Marketing, Tourism Studies, and Performance Studies.

The questions that this course would engage with are (but are not limited to):

- What are the processes by which various 'culture brokers' and 'cultural intermediaries' turn indigenous experiences into 'stage-managed' tourism experiences?
- How does the concept of 'authenticity' become problematic in cultural markets and exhibitions?
- What are the dangers of detaching ethnographic objects from their host cultures for touristic consumption?
- What roles do local myths, rituals, and histories play in shaping these processes?
- Why and how do communities select metonymic pieces from their cultural repertoire for tourist consumption?
- How can we map the layered and complex host communities and their internal power struggles?
- How do these performances become narratives of active resistance and agency?
- What are the politics of the 'mutual gaze' between tourists and hosts?

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- ✓ Critically analyse the processes through which indigenous experiences are stage-managed for tourism.
- ✓ Evaluate the tensions surrounding "authenticity" and cultural commodification.
- ✓ Map the internal dynamics and power relations within host communities.
- ✓ Apply ethnographic and performance studies methods to tourism case studies.
- ✓ Articulate the role of tourism in shaping narratives of agency, resistance, and identity.

What does this Course ask of you?

To make the most of this course, students are expected to:

- 1. Participate in Fieldwork**

Be open to at least two off-campus field visits, likely scheduled on Sundays, involving travel, observation, and community interaction.

- 2. Engage with AI Critically**

You may use AI tools during the course, but every use will be interrogated for critical reflection, knowledge-based engagement, and authentic understanding. Any submission may be called for oral or written defence at the discretion of the instructor.

- 3. Embrace Ethnographic Curiosity**

Demonstrate a willingness to conduct interviews, interact with local communities, and

document lived experiences—often requiring travel, time in the sun, and physical engagement.

4. Collaborate Effectively

Be open to group projects, shared field notes, collaborative presentations, and co-authored work as key components of learning and assessment.

5. Read and Write with Rigour

Approach academic readings with a willingness to learn and resilience to unpack difficult concepts. The course will scaffold argumentation and writing, but a baseline comfort with reading complex material is expected.

Tentative Scheme of Evaluation and Grading:

This is a **continuous evaluation course** and would require **at least 75% attendance** for all taught sessions (excluding the last two exam weeks), failing which students will not be allowed to submit their final presentations, creative assignments or sit for the written exam. Plagiarism and attendance policies apply as per JGU guidelines.

Course engagement and Office Hours: 10%

Mid Term Assessment: 30%

Student presentations: 20%

Final Assessment (Written Sit-down test and Creative Assignment): 40%

Some Course Readings:

Cohen Erik. “Authenticity And Commoditization in Tourism.” *Annals of Tourism Research*, 15, 1988: 371-386.

Das, Poulo. “Poverty to Sustenance: The Respectable/Shameful Journey of Women Folk Performers of Sundarbans.” *Women Performers in Bengal and Bangladesh: Caught up in the culture of South Asia (1795-2010s)*, edited by Manujendra Kundu, 289-303. New York: Oxford University Press, 2023.

Edensor, Tim. “Performing tourism, staging tourism: (Re)producing tourist space and practice.” *Tourist studies* (Sage) I , no. I, 2001: 59-81.

Feldman, J., & Skinner, J. “The technologies and techniques of guiding: Tour guides as cultural mediators.” *European Association for Social Anthropologists* 2014.

Howe, Leo. *The Changing World of Bali: Religion Society and Tourism*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

Kirshenblatt- Gimblett, Barbara. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998.

Maoz, D. ‘The mutual gaze’, *Annals of Tourism Research* 33, 2006: 221–39.

Pavis, Patrice. *Analysing Performance: Theatre, Dance and Film*. Translated by David Williams. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003.

Picard, Michael. “‘Cultural Tourism’ in Bali: Cultural Performances as Tourist Attraction.” *Indonesia* 4, 1990: 37–74.

Taylor, Diana. “Performance and intangible cultural heritage.” In *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, edited by Tracy C. Davis, 91–104. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Urry, John and Jonas Larsen. *The Tourist Gaze* 3.0. London, California, New Delhi, Singapore: Sage, 2011.