



## **Special investigation:** The world according to Nouvelles Frontières and others

To finish off our world tour with Nouvelle Frontières, we decide to follow one last promise made by the tour operator. It's the new trend: environmental tourism that respects nature and contributes to preserving endangered species.

And so to India, in search of a sacred animal: the Bengal tiger. The tour operator's programme is promising. "Reserves and tigers:" nine days spent crossing national parks to see the king of the Indian jungle in its natural habitat. Shivers down your spine are 100% guaranteed.

Reporter: "Are we sure to see some tigers?"  
Nouvelles Frontières agent: "Yes"

We're sold, and head 7000km eastwards to the centre of India, specifically the state of Madhya Pradesh – the Bengal tiger's kingdom. Here it is tourism that pays for a large part of the workings of the reserves, which have been created by the Indian authorities in order to protect these endangered species.

And at [the reserve's] entrance, the support of WWF is proudly displayed. Tomorrow we're joining the Nouvelles Frontières group for a photo safari in the Kanha Reserve, the best known on the tour circuit.

Reporter: "5.45, at the main entrance of the park. Thank you, goodbye."

So that we're treated as tourists, my cameraman and I decide to conceal our professions.

It's 5.40am and the tiger safari will start soon. To give a sense of exclusiveness, each group of tourists has its own jeep and driver. We meet Régis and Christiane who have come with Nouvelles Frontières.

"I didn't immediately think of going to India, but it was when I saw that there were reserves too. I thought, it's good to see a bit of India and the..."

"It's tourism that's a bit responsible?"

"Yes."

No time to continue our conversation. It's the starting "beep" for the five hundred tourists who have come from all over the world to see the tigers of the Kanha Reserve. We very quickly leave the other jeeps behind, since here it's a question of who will spot the first animal.

At that moment [of seeing a footprint] we are firm believers. And then we roam – and roam – the Kanha Reserve, without seeing a tiger's tail.

"Welcome to Nouvelles Frontières, please wait."

While waiting we saw lots of animals, like this species of big-eared buffalo. And a bunch of spotted deer (348 exactly – we counted).

We bumped into our fellow Nouvelle Frontières travellers, Régis and Christiane, and a lot of other surprises. But still no tigers.

But then, a twitching far off in the thickets. Err no – it's just the 349th deer. On that day, Régis and Christiane leave the reserve without having met the tiger that our travel agency had promised.

Reporter: "You didn't see a tiger?"

We came back the next day, and the next day. All in all, three long days before we could feel that much-anticipated shiver. The tiger appears, majestic on its rocky throne. There, 600m away. Can you see it? OK we'll help you out a bit.

There we go. Even if it's a bit blurry, we've filmed our tiger. But that's what we saw.

The industrial underside to our nature holiday: 150 jeeps waiting eagerly, the daily traffic jam in the reserve, one of the downsides denounced in this report.

The person ranting [in the report] is the adjunct manager of the region's forests.

Kanha Reserve is drowning under the weight of the tourists. 182,000 in 2012: a 229% increase in ten years. The manager of the reserve is upfront about it: there is an urgent need to stop the tiger-show to stop harassment to tigers. As it is, tourism is incompatible and detrimental to the most important objective: conserve the species.

But as we looked into the reserve, we discovered something far worse still. Behind these tigers that are shown off to tourists are hidden huge resettlements of local populations. It's our guide that first puts us on the trail.

Reporter: "Are there villages in the reserve?"

Guide: "No, no. No villages."

Reporter: "No villages?"

Guide: "Of course, there were some there before. But we moved them"

We ask one of the rangers to confirm this.

Ranger: "It started at least 25 years ago. In fact, every year there are easily one or two evictions."

Online, we find a recent alert released by the English NGO Survival. In 2012 it filmed testimonies of inhabitants threatened with eviction by the reserve's authorities.

[A clip from [Survival's film](#) is shown]

The people from this village – Jholar – all belong to indigenous tribes. Chased out, because they allegedly pose a threat to the tiger's natural habitat. However, this tribe is thought to have lived in this jungle for more than 20,000 years.

[Another clip from [Survival's film](#) is shown]

But according to Survival, these inhabitants ended up being resettled in the spring of 2014. Jholar, their village, was reportedly emptied at the same time as five other tribal villages were also wiped off the map.

But the NGO doesn't know where those who were evicted ended up, because today it's no longer allowed to enter the country. So we're going to try and find the victims of the tourist jungle, with the help of two local activists. The first activist – Mohan – is a journalist. Sher Singh – tiger in Hindi – is one of the tribes' spokespeople.

We're heading away from the reserve.

Sher Singh: "Now people are scattered everywhere. Nothing was sorted out for them. They've been abandoned.

Mohan: "Their culture, their society – everything is going to be destroyed. These tribes are about to disappear."

We reach the outskirts of Baihar, the local big city. It's here, by the side of the highway, that some of those who were evicted have ended up – 30km from the forest they were born in.

A lot of houses that were built in a rush and are still drying. No drinking water, no electricity. Here, this where we find some families from Jholar, one of the villages that were resettled in spring 2014.

Reporter: "Who of you here are from Jholar? Could you raise your hands?"

Baiga: "We're all from Jholar!"

Reporter: "You too?"

Jatiya was evicted from the reserve with her husband and her three children. Shortly after arriving in the town, her husband died. He was assassinated.

Jatiya: "Some men took him away and killed him. We have been suffering so much since we got here. It's dangerous."

The widow now lives under the protection of this young man in the yellow shirt, her husband's brother.

We show the family the video filmed in their village by the NGO Survival. By grim coincidence, they know one of the witnesses.

Baiga man: "Yes that's Sukhdev. That's the man they took away. He's the one they assassinated."

Reporter: "That's your brother?"

Baiga man: "Yes it's my older brother."

Reporter: "Sorry I didn't know – I hope we haven't upset you by showing you this video."

Baiga man: "You know, my brother had said everything in this video. That we wouldn't leave the village. That we would not go anywhere else. We were one of the last families to resist. But the people from the reserve forced us to leave. They told us they'd take care of us for three years, but they didn't do a thing. Even when my brother was killed, no one came to help us."

In total, how many families like Jatiya's were thrown out of the tourist jungle? A source agreed to reveal to us the extent of the forced exodus from Kanha Tiger Reserve. This [stuffed tiger] is all you'll see of our informant. On this USB stick they entrusted us with is an extremely sensitive document. To protect our source, we decide to also conceal the appearance of the file.

It's a confidential report by the Indian Ministry of Forests, dated 2012. It reveals a general plan to resettle local populations, reserve by reserve. The cost of the evictions, inventories of villages, number of families: everything is in there.

For example, in the Kanha Reserve, 2200 families are affected. Some villages (these yellow figures) will be resettled. Others (in red) simply removed, with no place for their inhabitants to stay. From this document we learn that resettlements began forty years ago and that dozens of villages (here in green) have been eradicated like the others.

We also find that, in the two other reserves on Nouvelle Frontières' tour, people are being moved left, right and centre. 2374 more families. At least 22,000 people resettled. We contact the Ministry of Forests that created the document – it doesn't reply to us. And so we think of WWF India, which sponsors these reserves. We meet with one of the directors in an informal setting, over a cup of coffee.

Reporter: "Do you agree to say, today, as a representative of WWF, that you strongly condemn the resettlement of the villages. Like those that took place in the Kanha Reserve, for example."

Yash Shetia: "I would not put it like that. But we don't encourage them. Under no circumstance to we support the resettlement of villages."

Reporter: "But are you opposed to it?"

Yash Shetia: "Well we think that there's a greater mission. If we engage with the authorities on six cases and we don't share their point of view on one of them, why should we suspend the rest of our engagements, to the extent that we work with endangered animals?"

Reporter: "Because this case in particular affects thousands of human beings – it's not a small problem."

Yash Shetia: "Obviously we're putting all our effort into this case. You may not see what's going on, it may not be obvious in every place but, very clearly, our colleagues on the ground are sending on our messages."

Reporter: "Thank you very much for your time and for answering these questions."