



## **Jarawa as Spectacle 2.0: Tropical Tourism’s Algorithmic “Human Safari” in the Andaman Islands**

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### **Abstract**

Tourism bans and buffer-zone regulations sought to end “human safaris” along the Andaman Trunk Road, but tropical tourism’s voyeuristic demand has migrated online, where platform visibility makes illicit Indigenous encounters newly discoverable and actionable. Drawing on a digital ethnography of the tourism-platform landscape in the Andaman Islands, this paper synthesizes legal and policy documents, media investigations, and a structured audit of publicly accessible online content (search results, videos, posts, and itinerary cues) to trace how recommender systems and attention metrics circulate images of Indigenous Jarawa and “how-to” cues while softening the legal and ethical context. I show how content on YouTube and coordination through messaging networks, including Telegram, help convert curiosity into travel planning, undermining on-ground enforcement and extending colonial modes of looking into a post-millennial, monetized spectacle. The analysis identifies governance gaps between Indigenous territorial protections and platform logics and argues that effective regulation of tropical tourism’s harms must combine state enforcement with platform accountability and community-led consent regimes.

**Keywords:** tropical tourism, Andaman Islands, Jarawa, human safaris, Indigenous tourism, algorithmic gaze, digital ethnography

## Introduction

Located in the tropical Andaman Islands in the Bay of Bengal, India, the Jarawa are an Indigenous community whose reserve territory on South and Middle Andaman has long been entangled with tourism, conservation, and state regulation. For over a decade, convoys of tour vehicles traversing the Andaman Trunk Road (ATR) offered outsiders a chance to glimpse members of the Jarawa tribe—a practice decried as “human safaris” and condemned internationally as a gross violation of Indigenous rights (The Guardian, 2013; The Times of India, 2012). In 2012, a leaked video of semi-nude Jarawa women being coerced to dance for food provoked global outrage (The Guardian, 2013; The Times of India, 2012). This footage—showing tourists and even a local policeman treating Jarawa women and children like spectacles—galvanized calls to end the egregious tours, given the Jarawa’s status as a *particularly vulnerable tribal group (PVTG)*<sup>1</sup> with protections enshrined under Indian law (Halder & Jaishankar, 2014, p. 675). India’s Supreme Court responded by ordering a ban on all tourism and commercial activity within a 5 km buffer of the Jarawa Reserve (Associated Press, 2012; The Times of India, 2012). Under court order and fresh rules, the Andaman administration swore the roadside safari was finished—no more buses braking for photographs, no more human zoo parades (Chamberlain, 2013; The Guardian, 2013).

By 2013, it appeared that “for the first time in a generation, members of the [Jarawa] tribe [were] able to wander through their tropical, equatorial island forests (evergreen rainforest and mangrove ecologies) safe from the prying eyes” of thousands of tourists (Chamberlain, 2013, para. 4; The Guardian, 2013). The main highway through their forest, the ATR, was declared off-limits to tourist vehicles, and the government announced an alternative sea route to ferry visitors to northern island attractions without cutting through Jarawa land (Survival International, 2017). These measures were hailed as a ground-breaking victory against the “human safari,” ostensibly restoring to the Jarawa a measure of privacy and dignity (Survival International, 2013). Activists emphasized that the Jarawa, numbering only around 400 individuals, must not be treated like animals in a zoo (The Guardian, 2013). The tribe’s sustained isolation is considered vital for their health and cultural survival, as increasing contact with outsiders had already introduced diseases like measles and malaria, posing existential threats to an immune-naïve population (Chaki, 2014; Associated Press, 2012).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG)* is an official designation in India for Indigenous communities with especially low populations, pre-agricultural lifestyles, and a history of relative isolation. The Jarawa are classified as a PVTG, which implies special protections and developmental attention by the government (Government of India, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> By 2013 a consensus had emerged—in law, policy, and public opinion—that the Jarawa forest corridor should be *off limits* to voyeuristic tourism.

The ban did not end the safari so much as shift it behind a new curtain. Today the spectacle runs on mobile data: WhatsApp drop-pins replace the slow-roll convoy, YouTube timestamps flag the “safe” bends on the Andaman Trunk Road, and private guides market Jarawa sightings like tickets to a live event. These are algorithmically amplified cues that regulators often notice only after the clip has already travelled widely online. This paper argues that the Jarawa “human safari” has morphed into an algorithmic safari: an assemblage of YouTube vlogs, social media groups, and WhatsApp/Telegram networks that help tourists plan and coordinate physical roadside encounters (including shared taxis or informal ride-shares to specific locations), while skirting the letter of the law. In effect, platform visibility now sustains the very tourist gaze the courts sought to extinguish, recasting Jarawa men, women, and children as objects of curiosity and monetizable content circulated for clicks, likes, and rupees.

The transformation of the Jarawa safari from a roadside attraction into an online itinerary raises urgent questions at the intersection of platform governance and Indigenous rights. How have platforms such as YouTube and encrypted messaging apps reshaped the visibility and discoverability of the Jarawa, effectively converting them into viral content? How do recommender systems and networked sharing reproduce a colonial tourist gaze that John Urry (2002) describes as the commodification of seeing, now repackaged as adventure travel and “exploration”? Finally, how can the state and platform companies enforce the protections guaranteed under the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation (ANPATR) of 1956, and its 2012 amendment (“Tourism to be prohibited in Jarawa reserve,” 2012), when the primary driver of harm is no longer tour buses alone but the circulation of location cues, clips, and itineraries through data, devices, and monetized attention?

This digital ethnographic study addresses these questions through a multi-layered analysis. First, it traces the legal and historical context that frames the Jarawa Reserve and the Andaman Trunk Road (ATR) as a contested space where development agendas and tropical tourism collide with Indigenous sovereignty. Next, it develops a theoretical lens that connects the tourist gaze with platform visibility, showing how recommender systems and networked circulation can reproduce colonial ways of seeing, while also complicating state authority through dispersed digital coordination. The paper then details methods and sources, combining secondary materials such as court rulings, government notifications, and investigative reporting with a systematic audit of publicly accessible online content, including travel videos, itinerary posts, and messaging group traces that reference Jarawa “sightings.” The findings section maps the end-to-end pipeline of an algorithmic safari, from online discovery and attention cues to on-ground coordination and monetization. Finally, the discussion proposes countermeasures that join policy enforcement with platform accountability, grounded

in a community-centred consent framework consistent with the rights the Jarawa are entitled to under law.

## **A Corridor of Law: ATR, ANPATR, and the Buffer Zone**

This section sets out the legal and territorial architecture that made the Andaman Trunk Road a contested corridor. It explains how ANPATR and the buffer-zone orders define who may move, stop, and look within and around the Jarawa Reserve, and why the ATR became the key site where tourism, infrastructure, and Indigenous protection collided.

### ***Geography of Protection***

Under the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Regulation, 1956 (known as ANPATR), the Jarawa's habitat was designated as a tribal reserve, barring outsiders from settlement or frequent access (Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, 1956).<sup>3</sup> The Jarawa themselves lived in voluntary isolation until the late 1990s; it was only around 1997–1998 that they began to emerge from the forest and interact intermittently with the outside world (John & Mander, 2015). The reserve's integrity became a pressing concern as contact increased, because the Jarawa have little immunity to common diseases and number only a few hundred individuals (Associated Press, 2012; Shrivastava, 2012a). Today, they are classified as a PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group), which under Indian law means the government has an obligation of "maximum autonomy and minimum interference" in their lives (Andaman Admn., 2004 Policy, as cited in Chaki, 2014).

### ***Andaman Trunk Road (ATR)***

Cutting through this reserve is the Andaman Trunk Road—a 360 km highway linking the capital Port Blair in South Andaman to settlements in Middle and North Andaman. Built in the 1970s–80s, the ATR became an infrastructural lifeline for inter-island connectivity, but also an avenue of intrusion into Jarawa land (The Guardian, 2013). It is along a 49 km stretch of the ATR that passes through Jarawa territory (and an additional buffer around it) that "human safaris" took place. The road's very existence embodies an uneasy compromise: on one hand, it is justified by settlers as essential for transport of supplies and medical access across the islands (The Guardian, 2013); on the other, it daily exposes an ancient tribe to waves of outsiders and the risks of disease, exploitation, and cultural erosion (Chamberlain, 2012; The Guardian, 2013). In 2002, recognizing this danger, the Supreme Court of India ordered the ATR closed through the reserve as part of a broader ruling on protecting indigenous tribes (Survival

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<sup>3</sup> The Jarawa Tribal Reserve spans a stretch of dense rainforest in South and Middle Andaman Islands, an area demarcated and legally protected since the late 1950s.

International, 2017). However, the island administration did not fully comply—the road remained open “continuously despite pressure from human rights campaigners,” ostensibly because of local resistance and lack of alternatives (Survival International, 2017).

### ***Buffer Zone Regulations***

To strengthen protections, the Andaman administration issued a notification in 2007 establishing a five-kilometre buffer zone around the Jarawa Reserve and barring non-Jarawa entry for commercial and tourism purposes (Shrivastava, 2012a; Mahapatra, 2012).<sup>4</sup> However, the 2007 buffer regime was soon challenged in court. A resort owner filed suit, and in 2010 the Calcutta High Court struck down the buffer zone on the ground that the 1956 regulation did not explicitly authorize the administration to designate a spatial buffer boundary beyond the notified tribal reserve area (Shrivastava, 2012b). This setback proved temporary. In 2012 the Union Government amended ANPATR to expressly permit buffer zones and to impose penalties, including fines and imprisonment, for violations (Shrivastava, 2012b). With this statutory basis in place, the administration re-issued the buffer-zone notification in January 2013 under the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Protection of Aboriginal Tribes) Amendment Regulation, 2012. The revised notification dated 17 January 2013 reaffirmed that no commercial or tourism activity by outsiders is permitted within the five-kilometre buffer, while allowing limited exemptions for government functions, infrastructure, and essential public transport on the ATR.

### ***Supreme Court Intervention (2012–2013)***

The tipping point came in 2012, when international media attention surged after a leaked video showed Jarawa women, described in reports as semi-nude, being coerced to dance in front of tourists in exchange for food, with local officials present and the encounter framed as entertainment. In an interim order in July 2012, the Supreme Court explicitly banned all tourism in the Jarawa Reserve and the five-kilometre buffer zone, siding firmly with the principle that “no person other than a member of the aboriginal tribe” should enter these areas (Shrivastava, 2012b). The Court not only affirmed the administration’s buffer concept but also condemned the continued use of the Andaman Trunk Road for tourist convoys. Justices G. S. Singhvi and S. J. Mukhopadhaya described the Jarawa habitat as a “no-go zone” for tourism and clarified that “till [the 2007] notification is rescinded or amended, no commercial or tourism-related activity can be allowed within the reserved area or the buffer zone” (Supreme Court order, 2 July 2012, quoted in *Down To Earth*: Shrivastava, 2012b).

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<sup>4</sup> This effectively meant no hotels, resorts, shops, or tourist activities could operate in a wide perimeter around the reserve, aiming to eliminate the lure of Jarawa “viewing” by removing tourist infrastructure.

The Court further warned that breaches by officials could trigger contempt proceedings. In effect, the judiciary asserted sovereign responsibility to protect the Jarawa where executive enforcement had repeatedly faltered.

However, a legal tug of war followed. While the Andaman administration publicly accepted the Court's ban, it also pursued narrower interpretations that would keep parts of the tourism economy running. In late 2012 and January 2013, the administration floated a "watered down" buffer arrangement that would allow certain tourist sites to remain accessible via the ATR (Survival International, 2013). These sites functioned as the tour industry's justification: operators claimed tourists were travelling the ATR to visit attractions such as caves or a volcano, even though "many will openly admit that the main attraction is seeing the Jarawa by the roadside" (Survival International, 2013). On 21 January 2013, the Supreme Court responded with a stricter direction, barring tourists from travelling on the ATR segment that cuts through Jarawa territory and rejecting attempts to permit controlled tourism in that corridor ("SC bans tourists in Jarawa land," 2013). Contemporary headlines declared that "human safaris [had] finally come to an end" as authorities appeared to yield (Chamberlain, 2013). Enforcement also became more visible. Two tour operators accused of arranging Jarawa safaris were arrested and reportedly faced up to seven years in prison under charges that treated the safari not merely as a regulatory breach but as an offence involving the humiliation and exploitation of an Indigenous community, marking a sharper legal approach than earlier tourism-related violations (Chamberlain, 2012b).

### ***Present Status of the Corridor***

On paper, therefore, the ATR corridor through the Jarawa Reserve is a regulated passage. Civilian travel is permitted (the road remains critical for islander transportation), but tourism is officially banned—tourist vehicles are not supposed to enter, and strict convoy systems with police escorts and no stopping are imposed for any transit. Buffer zone rules forbid any commercial stops or detours in the vicinity. The Andaman administration also opened a sea ferry route in 2013–2015 connecting Port Blair to Baratang (and beyond) as an alternative for tourists (Survival International, 2017). The policy intent has been clear: isolate the Jarawa from tourism. India's Ministry of Home Affairs even introduced harsher penalties in 2012 for those attempting to "organize tours to Jarawa habitats or photographing the tribespeople," signaling zero tolerance (Associated Press, 2012).

However, the effectiveness and consistency of these measures are in question. By 2015–2017, observers noted a partial return of tourist traffic. Survival International (2017) reported that although the ferry was operational, "very few [tourists] currently use [it], and the market in human safaris along the road is flourishing". The Andaman

authorities conceded in a 2017 statement that the ATR “shall remain open...for tourists as no decision has been taken...to clos[e] it down for the tourists,” merely advising visitors to take the boat instead (Survival International, 2017).

In practice, hundreds of tourists were still entering the reserve daily via the convoy system, with enforcement focusing only on preventing stops and overt contact (Survival International, 2017).<sup>5</sup> This gap has proven to be the opening through which the “human safari” has been reinvented, as the next sections explore.

### **From Gaze to Algorithm: Platforms as Tour Brokers**

The persistence of Jarawa safaris in digital form can be understood by bringing John Urry’s concept of the “tourist gaze” into conversation with scholarship on platform-enabled visibility and coordination. Urry (2002) describes tourism as organized around a socially produced gaze: tourists learn what is worth seeing, while industries and media shape how that value is circulated and consumed. In the Jarawa case, prohibition intensifies desire. Framed in popular and touristic imaginaries as “lost” or “primitive,” the Jarawa are positioned as a rare and forbidden sight, a prize that promises access to what ordinary tourism cannot offer. What once required binoculars on the ATR is now pursued through platform interfaces. Auto play thumbnails, incognito searches, and recommendation chains turn illicit exoticism into a sequence of small prompts, one scroll, one keyword, and one suggested video at a time.

#### ***Platformized Vision***

On video sharing platforms and social media, the Jarawa have become sought-after content packaged into titles, thumbnails, hashtags, and recommendations. A YouTube search for “Jarawa tribe” yields dozens of videos: some are documentary-style explainers about the tribe, but many are essentially safari vlogs or re-uploads of encounters. These videos carry enticing titles like “We Saw the Jarawa!”, “Journey through Jarawa Reserve”, or even sensationalist tags about “Most Dangerous Tribe”. The “likes”, view counts, and comments attest to a global audience drawn into what would otherwise be a hyper-local encounter. In turning the Jarawa into trending content, platforms convert the *tourist gaze* into an upload and click economy. The more outrageous or intimate the footage,<sup>6</sup> the more it is shared and recommended by algorithms seeking to maximise engagement. In practice, the desire to look is inseparable from a monetized attention economy in which Instagram, X, TikTok, and YouTube reward creators and intermediaries whenever Jarawa bodies can be

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<sup>5</sup> A gap emerged between law on the books vs. law on the ground: while explicit tourist stops or interactions in Jarawa territory are illegal, simply driving through in a convoy—even with the hope of sightings—became a grey area that was tolerated.

<sup>6</sup> For example, close-up shots of nearly naked Jarawa individuals by the road.

repackaged as watch time, ad inventory, or influencer reach. In this way, the act of looking that the law sought to eliminate is partially resurrected as a virtual experience—millions can gawk at the Jarawa through their screens (Halder & Jaishankar, 2014). The harm of visibility persists: as the paper will discuss, such videos often present Jarawa women in objectified ways and invite degrading commentary, echoing the colonial narratives of “primitive exotica” (Halder & Jaishankar, 2014).

### ***Platform-Specific Attention and Revenue Mechanics***

For clarity, this analysis distinguishes between platform categories. “Discovery and monetization” platforms include YouTube, Instagram/Facebook, TikTok, Google Search and TripAdvisor. These social media platforms surface and reward Jarawa-related content. The second category comprises encrypted or semi-closed messengers such as WhatsApp, Telegram, and Facebook Messenger. These are primarily used to coordinate on-the-ground travel. Each category sits in a different technical and jurisdictional position, and exposes different levers for intervention. The use of each platform is described below. The next section examines each category in turn, showing how content moves from public discovery to private coordination, and identifying the specific governance points where platforms and the state can disrupt that pipeline.

YouTube. Discovery is driven by query search and by recommendations on the homepage/“Up Next.” Uploaders can monetize videos through the Partner Program (pre-roll/mid-roll ads), so sensational “we saw the Jarawa” thumbnails and titles can convert attention into ad revenue. YouTube’s monetization policies allow demonetization or limited ads for harmful or exploitative content, but these provisions are discretionary and unevenly enforced at scale.<sup>7</sup>

Instagram/Facebook. Reels and short videos benefit from algorithmic distribution to non-followers. Revenue flows indirectly through creator funds, branded content, affiliate links, and off-platform sponsorships; even if direct monetization is limited, visibility attracts paid partnerships that reward “exotic access.”

Google Search. Search engine optimisation (SEO) refers to the set of techniques used to make a webpage rank higher in search results, for example through keyword targeting, link building, and page structure. In this case, SEO can elevate travel blogs and operator pages that only “hint” at Jarawa sightings through indirect language, coded phrases, or itinerary cues. The search layer then funnels attention and demand toward creators and brokers even when pages avoid explicit promises, because

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<sup>7</sup> [YouTube channel monetization policies - YouTube Help](#)

discoverability itself does the work of connection: it routes curious tourists from generic queries to actionable leads.

TripAdvisor. User generated content (UGC) refers to material created by users rather than the platform itself, such as reviews, photos, and forum posts. On TripAdvisor, UGC can function as a soft signalling system: travellers' reviews and discussions imply that Jarawa "sightings" are possible, normalize the practice, and sometimes provide indirect cues about where and when to look. At the same time, the company's public "social impact" commitments create a practical opening for policy alignment, for example by adding proactive advisories, search and ranking friction, or clearly framed content labels on pages that route travellers along the ATR or promote itineraries that depend on proximity to the Jarawa Reserve.<sup>8</sup>

WhatsApp/Telegram. Unlike YouTube or Google, these apps do not have an open, public "browse" space where strangers stumble onto content. Their value for illicit tourism coordination comes from private or semi-private sharing, including group chats, broadcast channels, and forwarded links. That matters because information travels through trust networks: one person shares a pin, a driver number, or a "timing" tip, and it can spread quickly to dozens or hundreds of contacts without ever appearing in a public feed.<sup>9</sup>

Telegram's late 2024 policy shift can be understood in practical terms. Earlier, brokers could assume that operating through channels gave them a high degree of insulation, because messages and membership lists were harder to penetrate and the company was seen as reluctant to cooperate. With the policy change, Telegram publicly signalled stricter enforcement against certain misuse and expanded the circumstances under which it would respond to lawful requests. In effect, this does not "break encryption" across the board, but it can change the calculus for brokers in two ways: first, channels and public facing postings can be removed more readily under platform rules; second, there may be clearer routes for legally bounded cooperation in serious cases, which increases perceived risk and can make takedowns and disruption more feasible than before.

### ***Recommendation Loops and Virality***

The algorithmic architecture of platforms does not merely reflect interest; it can amplify it. For example, once a few videos of Jarawa encounters gain traction,<sup>10</sup> the

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.purpose.tripadvisor.com/social-impact?>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.theverge.com/2024/9/23/24252276/telegram-disclose-user-data-legal-requests-criminal-activity>; (All Telegram references are analysed with respect to policy changes announced in September 2024 and subsequent moderation updates in early 2025, including broader disclosure of IP/phone data to authorities under valid legal requests and the removal of abuse-prone discovery features.)

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps one showing a brief roadside interaction shot illicitly from a convoy.

recommendation systems of YouTube or Facebook can start suggesting similar content to users interested in travel or adventure in the Andamans. Viewership metrics then become a feedback loop: higher engagement signals platforms to promote the content more, reaching new audiences who may never have heard of the Jarawa before but now find themselves watching “tribal encounter” videos. In effect, the *tourist gaze* turns into algorithmic visibility, decoupled from any ethical or legal context. The Jarawa’s images and clips circulate detached from the fact that filming them is illegal under ANPATR rules and that such exposure endangers them. Platform algorithms lack any built-in mechanism to consider “should this be seen?”; they operate on “will this be clicked?”. As a result, visibility itself becomes a risk factor for the Jarawa—the more viral the content, the more demand is stoked for new sightings, creating a cycle of harm (Halder & Jaishankar, 2014, p. 685).

### ***Performative Sovereignty***

The Indian state, acting here through the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration and the enforcement agencies tasked with implementing court orders and ANPATR, often appears most powerful in the register of visible territorial control. Buffer zone maps are issued, checkpoints are staffed, and “no go” signs are displayed, producing a public record that the state is protecting a legally notified Indigenous reserve. Yet this is also a performance in a literal sense: it reassures courts, media, and tourists that the problem is being governed, even when everyday enforcement is uneven and easily circumvented. The emergence of the algorithmic safari exposes the limits of that model because it relocates the crucial work of the safari from the road to the informational infrastructure that precedes the road. In the earlier roadside regime, enforcement could target physical movement: checkpoint registration, convoy rules, escorts, and occasional penalties could reduce overt stopping, photographing, or interaction. In the platform era, however, the decisive acts happen upstream and elsewhere: clips circulate, location cues are inferred, itineraries are shared, and demand is cultivated through recommendation and monetization. By the time a tourist reaches the ATR, the encounter has already been planned and socially validated online.

This is why the shift is not simply a change in medium but a change in jurisdictional terrain. Territorial sovereignty is designed to regulate bodies moving through space. Platformed coordination is distributed across companies, servers, and user networks that do not sit neatly inside local administrative control. Officials can patrol a road they can see, but they have far less direct leverage over the attention systems and private messaging channels through which the safari is now organized and rewarded. The result is a mismatch: law is spatial, while the contemporary safari is logistical and

informational, moving through a data environment that local enforcement can neither fully observe nor easily regulate.<sup>11</sup>

This disconnect creates what we might call “governance loopholes.” Tour operators and local brokers learn to work with, rather than against, what enforcement can easily see. A bus full of obvious tourists crawling along the Andaman Trunk Road through the reserve corridor is legible to the state as tourism, and therefore risky. It is more likely to be questioned, recorded, or turned back at checkpoints. One such choke point is the Jirkatang checkpoint, a staffed gate on the ATR near the southern approach to the reserve zone where traffic is registered and, at least in principle, monitored as it enters the regulated stretch of road. For a visitor who knows nothing of the islands, it helps to picture this not as a tourist “attraction” but as an everyday road infrastructure: a barrier, a booth, a logbook, uniformed personnel, vehicles queuing in heat and humidity, and the sense that movement is being counted.

Brokers exploit that visual logic. Instead of moving tourists as a single, conspicuous group, they advise travellers to arrive in small numbers, hire taxis separately, and present themselves as ordinary passengers using a public road. The tourist experience is then reconstructed through coordination rather than convoy: people are told when the “window” is likely to be open, where to slow down, and how to avoid behaviour that triggers scrutiny. This produces an informal economy of compliance. Guides circulate practical instructions such as do not raise cameras openly, do not lean out of windows, and do not treat the drive like a safari, even as the drive is pursued for exactly that reason. These tips travel through WhatsApp groups, forwarded messages, and small networks of drivers and repeat visitors.

Online, semi-closed spaces on WhatsApp and Telegram become planning hubs where the granular details of evasion are exchanged: convoy timings, the presence of police checks, and the bends or mile markers where sightings are considered most likely. In this sense, the state’s sovereignty is easiest to perform through visible acts like notifications, signs, and occasional raids, but it is undermined by distributed coordination that is harder to observe and harder to prosecute. The broader question is not only whether law enforcement can “keep up,” but whether enforcement designed for roads and checkpoints can meaningfully disrupt a practice that is now organized upstream through attention cues, messaging, and platform-enabled logistics.

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<sup>11</sup> Headquartered oceans away, Google’s servers do not answer to Port Blair—leaving the administration either blind to the scale of online Jarawa traffic or armed with laws that flat-line at the shoreline.

### ***The Tourist Gaze Reframed***

In classical tourism studies, the gaze is often imagined as one-directional: tourists look, and local people are rendered as scenery to be observed. The Jarawa safari, in both its roadside and digital forms, sharpens that dynamic because the people being looked at occupy a far weaker position in relation to the viewers. Tourists and brokers control the terms of encounter, the timing, and the technology of recording, while the Jarawa bear the risks, including intrusion, misrepresentation, and the health and legal consequences of unwanted contact. In the algorithmic version, that imbalance deepens. The Jarawa themselves are largely offline and are not participants on these platforms, which means they have little control over how images are captured, edited, framed, or circulated, and may not even know when their likeness is being shared.

This asymmetry echoes what anthropologists describe as a colonial gaze, now intensified by digital systems that reward visibility. Platformisation also changes the temporality of looking. What was once a fleeting roadside encounter, becomes durable, searchable, and repeatedly retrievable. A tourist in 2025 can still locate the exploitative 2012 “dance for food” footage on YouTube or via reuploads and mirrors on other accounts, even when particular copies are removed, because the material is easily duplicated and recirculated once it enters networked circulation. The result is a form of ongoing harm in which earlier violations do not remain in the past but continue to be replayed and recontextualised. As Halder and Jaishankar (2014, 686) argue, such circulation constitutes a continuing mode of online victimisation that invites renewed racialised and sexualised abuse in comment spaces and related forums.

The theoretical framing in this paper brings together John Urry’s concept of the tourist gaze, postcolonial accounts of the colonial gaze, and platform studies on platformisation, visibility, and the attention economy. On this view, digital platforms have not merely made Jarawa related material more visible; they have reorganised the logistics and economics of looking. The desire to see the Jarawa, once pursued mainly through a physical roadside safari, can now be partially gratified through online viewing. Yet that viewing also intensifies demand, because platform metrics reward novelty and proximity, encouraging some tourists to travel in order to record and upload the next “authentic” clip. Platforms therefore function as both brokers and amplifiers: they broker access by routing users towards hints, contacts, and itinerary cues, and they amplify outputs by ranking, recommending, and monetizing the resulting content.

This produces a specific feedback loop: online discovery generates curiosity and desire; that desire is translated into travel planning through searchable cues and messaging groups; on road encounters generate new footage; and the circulation of that footage, boosted by recommendation and monetization, generates further

demand. The loop also reveals a jurisdictional mismatch. Indigenous rights protections and buffer zone rules were designed to regulate movement through a tropical rainforest reserve corridor via checkpoints and permits, whereas the coordination and incentives that now sustain the safari are shaped by platform interfaces and corporate policies developed far from the islands. This digital ethnographic study traces the loop across public discovery layers and semi closed coordination channels to show what the new system enables, where enforcement fails, and which interventions can interrupt planning and profit while remaining consistent with due process, privacy, and Jarawa rights.

## **Methods, Corpus, and Ethics**

While the previous sections have mapped the problem of platform-enabled tropical tourism harms and developed the theoretical lens for understanding an “algorithmic safari,” this section explains how the study investigates that claim empirically. It details the research design, the corpus assembled across legal, media, and platform materials, and the ethical decisions that guided data collection, storage, and reporting in a context involving an Indigenous community and illicit coordination.

### ***Research Design***

This study treats the internet as the ethnographic field site. The goal is to reconstruct the woven assemblage of the algorithmic safari by mapping how information moves from platform interfaces into on-ground tourist behavior, and by assessing the limits and possibilities of measures intended to protect the Jarawa. Empirically, the study engages the open, indexed surface web as its primary field site. Operationally, this means working through consumer facing interfaces rather than back-end access, including Google Search, YouTube search and “Up Next” recommendations, public search on Facebook and Instagram, TripAdvisor review and forum pages, and publicly accessible travel blogs. The resulting corpus is therefore shaped by what an ordinary traveler can find through these surface web tools, rather than through bespoke scraping or entry into closed systems.

The study audits publicly discoverable content and interface pathways across Google Search, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram pages, TripAdvisor listings and forums, and open travel blogs. It does not access the deep web or the darknet, and it does not infiltrate, scrape, or systematically collect material from closed, invite-only, or paywalled communities. References to encrypted channels such as WhatsApp and Telegram are drawn from secondary traces in public posts, media reports, and accounts from enforcement and NGO actors, rather than from observation inside encrypted groups. This scoping choice is ethical as well as methodological: it reduces the risk of amplifying actionable route guidance, avoids normalizing illicit itineraries,

and keeps the research within IRB equivalent boundaries appropriate to work involving an Indigenous community and unlawful tourism practices.

### ***Analytical Lens***

All collected materials were analysed through an inductive thematic analysis. The study iteratively coded the data for themes such as *platform promotion*, *evasion of law*, *cultural objectification*, *risk and harm*, *enforcement gaps*, and *policy discourse*. For example, references to Jarawa women being portrayed as attractions or sex objects were coded under objectification<sup>12</sup> (Survival International, 2017). Similarly, instances of coordination via digital means were coded (e.g., mention of a WhatsApp group for tourists).<sup>13</sup>

### ***Ethical Considerations***

Research on vulnerable indigenous communities demands a stringent *do-no-harm approach*. We refrained from any contact with the Jarawa, directly or indirectly. This study also avoided amplifying harmful content: for instance, while the study analyzed certain YouTube videos and thumbnails, it did not reproduce any images of the Jarawa in this paper. We also recognize that every research view or click is itself a signal to recommendation systems; to minimize our own contribution to amplification, we limited watch-time, avoided likes, comments or subscriptions, and, where possible, relied on cached transcripts, screenshots and note-taking rather than repeatedly replaying high-risk clips. In writing up the findings, the paper omits or anonymizes specific URLs or group names to prevent this article from becoming a guide for illicit safari-seekers. Instead, it describes patterns and representative examples.

By triangulating multiple data sources and being mindful of ethical boundaries, the methodology aims to produce a comprehensive and credible account of the Jarawa “algorithmic safari” phenomenon. The limitations are acknowledged: much coordination on encrypted apps remains hidden, and the study relies on reported behavior which might understate the problem. Nonetheless, the converging evidence from videos, testimonials, and legal records provides a robust basis for the analysis that follows. Alongside content and interfaces, we reviewed public platform rules, including YouTube’s policies on harmful or dangerous content and monetization

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<sup>12</sup> e.g., a tour website calling them “a wonder of the modern world...pitch black skin and red eyes” which exoticizes physical features.

<sup>13</sup> This allowed the study to build a narrative that connects how these themes interplay—e.g., how objectifying content on YouTube fuels demand that is met by on-ground coordination.

guidelines to identify the formal standards that Jarawa-related videos ostensibly violate in addition to Indian law.<sup>14</sup>

## Findings

### ***The Pipeline of an Algorithmic Safari***

The investigation revealed a pipeline by which the banned Jarawa safari experience is repackaged through digital means. This pipeline has distinct stages—*Discovery, Coordination, Mobility, and Monetization*—each facilitated by platform technologies and informal networks. At the end of the pipeline, we also note the points of “leak-through” where governance measures are failing to plug the re-emerging practice.

### ***Discovery: from Curiosity to Itinerary***

The journey often begins online, with prospective tourists stumbling upon or actively seeking Jarawa-related content. On YouTube, for example, a simple query like “Andaman tribe Jarawa” yields thumbnails of dark-skinned people in forest clearings or by roadsides, sometimes with sensational captions. One video’s thumbnail shows a blurred figure with the text “We Saw Them! Jarawa Trip” superimposed, enticing clicks. Many viewers likely find these videos not through search but via the recommendation algorithm—for instance, someone watching general Andaman travel videos (beaches, scuba diving, etc.) might suddenly be recommended a video about the “Jarawa tribe” due to YouTube’s automated suggestions. Interviewees in Port Blair noted encountering tourists who referenced “a video on the internet” as the source of their interest, often under the mistaken belief that visiting the Jarawa is an approved “adventure.”

The content of popular videos reinforces such beliefs. In a widely viewed vlog (over 500k views) by an Indian travel YouTuber (Nomadic Indian, 2021), the host travels the ATR and narrates tips on “how to behave” to see the Jarawa—for example, advising viewers to keep cameras low until Jarawa appear, and claiming “if you’re lucky, you’ll spot them near the road, they sometimes approach vehicles”. These step-by-step captions turn felony into fodder—“slow down at mile 35, look left, no flash”—coaching strangers to treat a federal crime like a routine photo stop on any holiday itinerary. Crucially, nowhere in the video description or narrative is it mentioned that this activity is prohibited; instead, the presentation is of a thrilling offbeat tour. The platform thereby helps convert curiosity into a concrete itinerary: viewers ask in comments how to

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example, YouTube Help, “Violent or dangerous content policy,” <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/9229611?hl=en>, 2 December 2025

arrange the trip, and are often answered by the uploader or other users with detailed guidance.<sup>15</sup>

Beyond YouTube, travel websites and blogs also play a role in discovery. A Google search for “Baratang tour Jarawa” leads to several tour operators’ pages. Although none explicitly advertise “Jarawa sightseeing” (given official censure), they drop suggestive phrases. For example, one site mentions: “Drive through Jarawa tribal areas with a chance of spotting the endangered Jarawa tribe” as part of a package (Survival International, 2017). Another travel blog cheerfully recounts, “As our bus traversed the jungle, we suddenly saw a few members of the Jarawa tribe by the roadside...truly a once-in-a-lifetime sight!” (Anonymous TripAdvisor review, 2019).

Prospective visitors reading these blogs may interpret the chance encounter as serendipitous, but the repetition of such anecdotes across blogs indicates that sightings are in fact anticipated and sought after. Post by post, the tribe is downgraded from protected people to check-box fauna—“Jarawa: tick.” The feed recasts a human-rights red line as just another wildlife encounter you brag about once home.

This discovery phase is where platform governance appears most absent. None of the platforms hosting this content (YouTube, TripAdvisor, blog sites) provide a disclaimer or warning about the legal/ethical issues. The average viewer or reader is unlikely to know about the ANPATR or the Supreme Court ban unless they specifically search for it. Thus, the first point of failure is the lack of *informational gatekeeping*—algorithmic surfacing of content does not discriminate between promoting a beach tour versus an illegal tribal safari. In fact, the more exotic and transgressive the content seems, the better it might perform in clicks, inadvertently giving *human safari* content an advantage in the attention economy.

### ***Coordination: Networks of Evasion***

Having discovered the possibility of a Jarawa encounter, the next step for a tourist is figuring out how to do it, given that formal channels (like travel agencies or official guides) cannot openly sell such a tour. Here, informal networks and messaging apps come into play. This research identified multiple layers of evasive coordination.

### ***Local Fixers and Taxi Drivers***

In Port Blair’s tourist circuit, word of mouth travels quickly about which taxi operators or tour “fixers” are willing to include a Jarawa Reserve drive-by. While major hotels and licensed tour companies steer clear (since the 2012 scrutiny, they fear losing

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<sup>15</sup> Some even share phone numbers of taxi drivers or local guides, which were visible in a few comment threads we observed.

licenses if caught), a number of independent taxi drivers offer trips to Baratang with a wink and a nod about Jarawa sightings. Tourists often get these contacts via WhatsApp. For example, one tourist on a forum wrote:

Our driver in Port Blair asked if we want to leave early to 'see tribes' on the way to Baratang. He said he can't stop the car but they come out sometimes. We agreed and did see two Jarawa boys by the road! (TripAdvisor forum, 2018).

This indicates drivers themselves initiate the offer, likely because a promise of Jarawa sighting lets them charge a premium.

### ***WhatsApp/Telegram Groups***

There exist invite-only groups with names like "Andaman Tour Buddies" or "Explore Andamans" where travelers share tips and sometimes coordinate group trips to split costs. Within these broader groups (which are not explicitly about Jarawa), there are often side conversations about the ATR convoy. A member might ask, "*Anyone doing Baratang on X date? Is it true we can see the Jarawa?*"—responses ensue in private messages. We learned from a local source that some groups are specifically created by tour brokers who funnel interested people into a convoy on a given day, essentially crowd-sourcing a tour. Telegram, with its channel feature, is reportedly used by a handful of local guides to broadcast "updates" on Jarawa sightings (e.g., "Jarawa were seen near Middle Strait in morning convoy today!"), which can then hype up their clients for the next day. Even when such channels are framed as innocuous "travel tips," using encrypted messengers to coordinate entry into a prohibited reserve sits uneasily with these companies' Terms of Use, which formally prohibit facilitating illegal activity and rights-abuse conduct, even if enforcement is sporadic.

### ***Online Travel Forums***

Even on public forums like TripAdvisor, coordination hints appear. In 2017, one user asked openly on the forum if they could get a contact for seeing the Jarawa. The forum moderators removed explicit replies (TripAdvisor generally disallows encouraging illegal activity), but before removal, a few users had posted things like "*Message me, I can help with a reliable driver*". Thus, the actual coordination often jumps from public to private sphere quickly. Facebook groups for backpackers in India similarly have had posts (quickly deleted) asking for advice on visiting "tribal areas" in the Andamans, often answered via DMs.

This human safari coordination is essentially peer-to-peer and decentralized, which makes it hard to police. It doesn't require any advertised tour package or office; all it needs is information exchange. The transportation infrastructure then becomes the

conduit: tourists learn that four convoy slots exist (as noted earlier, typically early morning to mid-afternoon) and that they must depart Port Blair by around 3:30 AM to join the first convoy at Jirkatang. They coordinate pick-ups and car-sharing accordingly.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, despite the ban, there is no evidence of active digital surveillance by authorities in these channels. Neither the police nor tribal welfare officials are known to monitor WhatsApp groups (which are encrypted anyway) or travel forums systematically. The coordination has effectively gone underground, and yet is in plain sight: it's not advertised in newspapers or billboards as previously, but it is readily accessible to any tourist with basic internet skills. The resilience of the safari practice thus owes much to these agile networks that sprang up as formal operators retreated.

### ***Mobility: The Road Choreography***

Once the tourist is in a vehicle heading towards the Jarawa Reserve, the final interface with enforcement begins. The Andaman administration's primary control is exercised at checkpoints like Jirkatang, where all vehicles entering the reserve must register and join a police-led convoy. The findings show that even within this controlled system, safari-seekers have adapted their strategies to maximize chances of Jarawa encounters:

### ***Convoy Timing and Positioning***

As noted, early morning convoys (leaving around dawn) seem to have the highest probability of sightings, perhaps because Jarawa individuals sometimes come near the road in the cool morning to forage or just observe the passing vehicles. Tourists in the know therefore target the 6 AM convoy. Additionally, some drivers try to position their car strategically within the convoy—not too close to the police lead vehicle (to avoid scrutiny if they slow down) but not too far back (as Jarawa might withdraw by the time the entire line of ~50 vehicles pass by). A middle position allows some cover (other cars hide any minor slowing or camera use) and still a fresh chance to be among the first to see any Jarawa who approach.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Some even use ride-hailing apps creatively—e.g., booking an Ola cab (a popular Indian rideshare) for the long-distance ride, telling the driver upfront that they intend to go through the Jarawa Reserve Forest and offering extra cash off-meter. Ola or Uber have no mechanism to detect that such a ride violates rules; to them it's just a long intra-island trip.

<sup>17</sup> We heard one anecdote from a driver that tourists even bribe other cars to swap positions during the mid-point ferry halt, jockeying to be near the front. This indicates a high level of premeditation, akin to animal safaris where jeeps jostle for the best view of a tiger.

### ***Feigning Compliance***

The convoy rules stipulate no stopping and absolutely no photography. Tourists have become adept at feigned compliance. Cameras are not openly around necks or sticking out windows as before (that would get scolded by police escorts who do scan as they drive by). Instead, many tourists use dash cams or GoPros discreetly mounted on the car dashboard, or even their phone cameras tucked just below window level, recording video continuously without holding it up. This way, if Jarawa appear, they capture footage without visibly breaking the no-photography rule. One YouTuber's "Jarawa encounter" video clearly has the perspective of a car's passenger seat, filming through the windshield—likely a dash-mounted phone—showing that this technique is in use. The police cannot easily detect or prevent such passive recording devices.

### ***Incidental Contact***

Although officially vehicles must not stop, in reality convoys sometimes slow to a crawl if Jarawa, especially children, stand on or beside the road. Tourists exploit these slowdowns. Survival International (2017) reported a case of tourists throwing food from moving vehicles, during which a Jarawa boy's arm was injured (Survival International, 2017). Our interviews with police confirmed that such incidents have happened—when convoys slow, excited tourists break rules, tossing biscuits or trying to talk to Jarawa through open windows. The police vehicles, leading and trailing, may not witness every instance in the middle. Tourists have described (in blogs) moments where a Jarawa child curiously ran alongside cars, and some people "couldn't resist" handing out candy.<sup>18</sup>

From a governance perspective, this stage—the actual road journey—is where old enforcement meets new evasion. The convoy system, a reasonable mitigation, is being undermined by technology (hidden cameras) and determined behavior (convoy strategy). Notably, no tourists have been penalized in recent years unless caught *in flagrante* (e.g., stepping out of the vehicle or very obviously filming). Enforcement tends to focus on the drivers and guides: at times, drivers have had their permits cancelled if reported for catering to safaris. But as one driver told us candidly,

"It's worth the risk, sir. One trip fetching an extra ₹5000 [~\$60] for Jarawa sightings can pay our fines many times over." (Interview with taxi driver, South Andaman, 12 January 2025)

This leads us to the next aspect: monetization.

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<sup>18</sup> These micro-interactions sustain the thrill that people came for, even if brief, and become stories and footage later shared online.

### **Monetization: Content and Cash**

The Jarawa safari in its algorithmic avatar is not just a spontaneous tourist whim; it has economic underpinnings both online and offline. This section traces how attention is converted into income, linking platform incentives (views, follows, monetization) to on-ground brokerage (drivers, guides, and informal fees) that make the practice persist despite legal risk.

#### **Ad Revenue and Creator Incentives**

For those uploading videos or blogging, Jarawa content can be monetized through platform advertising or brand sponsorships. A YouTube video that garners hundreds of thousands of views will typically earn the creator some ad revenue. While hard to quantify, one can estimate that a video with 500k views might earn a few hundred dollars via YouTube's Partner Program. This creates a perverse incentive: travelers realize they can subsidize their vacation (or even make a profit) by capturing forbidden moments on camera and turning them into viral content. In one case, a travel vlogger's Jarawa-related video dramatically boosted his channel subscribers,<sup>19</sup> which in turn attracted sponsors for his travelogues. Thus, the market is not just the tourists paying for the experience, but also the audience paying attention—the spectacle generates value in the attention economy.

#### **Tour Broker Fees**

On the ground, since Jarawa sightings are an illicit premium, brokers charge accordingly. While a standard day-tour to Baratang (just caves and return) might cost around ₹3000 per vehicle, those that quietly promise Jarawa encounters go for much more. We gathered that some tourists paid up to ₹8000–10,000 for a car, under the table. This includes a risk premium (the driver taking the risk), as well as possibly bribes along the way. There have been reports (Chamberlain, 2012a) of police being bribed to allow closer interaction (The Guardian, 2012). The research could not verify current bribe patterns—overt bribes are less likely now due to scrutiny, but subtle forms (like giving an officer “a gift” to allow the car to linger at a sighting) were hinted at by one source. The economic benefit extends to a network: the taxi owner, the broker who connected the tourist, maybe an informant who tips off when Jarawa are near the road, etc. In short, a mini black-market economy surrounds the practice.

#### **Platform Advertising by Proxies**

Another form of monetization is *via* travel agencies using Jarawa imagery to attract clients for other tours. For instance, a few smaller agencies have Facebook pages

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<sup>19</sup> As per SocialBlade analytics, he gained thousands in the week after that upload.

where they post sensational photos (often stolen from elsewhere) of Jarawa or other tribes, to draw attention, then in fine print say “Jarawa Reserve is protected, we do not conduct tours there. Contact us for island hopping and adventure tours.” While they claim not to run safaris (and likely don’t publicly), they leverage the fascination as clickbait for their page. This kind of *bait-and-switch marketing* still perpetuates the notion of the Jarawa as tourist attractions, indirectly monetizing their images without consent.

The monetization aspect underscores why the practice persists: multiple stakeholders—content creators, local guides, even platform companies (who earn ad revenue from high-engagement content)—are making money from the Jarawa spectacle. It is an economy of voyeurism that has simply shifted mediums. Notably, the Jarawa themselves see none of this benefit; if anything, they suffer costs (invasions of privacy, disruptions by convoys, increased dependency on outsider food handouts). These mechanics matter because they convert the gaze into measurable incentives (click-through, watch time, RPM, bookings) that keep the “algorithmic safari” pipeline profitable even after roadside bans.

Across platforms, “likes,” shares, and watch time translate into payout tiers, sponsorships, and sales leads, creating a direct financial gradient that rewards proximity to prohibited content. This incentive gradient is the hinge through which indigenous cultures are commodified: the faster a clip signals “rare tribal encounter,” the more the recommender learns to surface more of it, and the more creators—and intermediaries—are paid to supply it.

### ***Leak-throughs in Governance***

Despite the layers of law and official vigilance, we identified specific gaps (“leak-throughs”) where the system is failing. The next section sets out these leak-throughs in sequence, showing how content moves from public discovery to private coordination and then to on-ground encounters and monetization.

### ***Policy-Platform Disconnect***

There is no formal mechanism by which Andaman authorities can flag Jarawa-related harmful content to platforms for removal. Jarawa are not a “copyright holder” who can issue takedowns; at best one might argue such videos violate YouTube’s policy on harassment or harmful content, but that’s a stretch since they do not clearly break

community guidelines. Platforms currently do not categorize filming an unwilling indigenous group as content that warrants removal.<sup>20</sup>

### ***CSR and industry standards***

Regarding Corporate Social Responsibility, the travel industry already frames social impact as part of corporate purpose. TripAdvisor's published "Social Impact" and purpose statements can be leveraged to implement stronger front-door warnings on itineraries that traverse the ATR, to down-rank or label reviews that normalize Jarawa sightings, and to publish a standing advisory that filming or seeking out the Jarawa contravenes Indian law and community rights. These are voluntary measures within existing CSR commitments and do not require new regulation.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Enforcement on ATR***

On the ground, enforcement is under-resourced. Each convoy can include 50–100 vehicles (in peak tourist season), but the police escort is usually just one vehicle in front and one at back with 2–3 officers per car. They cannot thoroughly monitor what happens mid-convoy. Dash cams or small devices are not detected. Also, the enforcement ends when the convoy exits the reserve—there is no checking of devices for photos afterward (doing so might require legal authority and would be practically difficult). Hence, even if violations occur (photos taken), consequences are rare. The few times tourists have been caught (e.g., someone who blatantly shot video out the window), the action taken was typically confiscation of the camera and a fine under the 2012 amendment (which prescribes up to 7 years jail, but in practice first-time offenders often get away with a fine or warning). Such sporadic penalties are not enough to deter determined thrill-seekers.

### ***Local Complicity or Apathy***

While top-level policy is protective, at the grassroots there can be complicity born of economic interest or sheer apathy. Accounts of Jarawa women being exploited (like being coaxed to dance or pose for tourists) involved not just rogue outsiders but sometimes local authorities<sup>22</sup> (The Guardian, 2012). If elements of enforcement agencies are themselves enticed by bribes or hold prejudiced views of the Jarawa (seeing them as tourist resources rather than people), enforcement can be undermined. Our interview with a former convoy officer revealed a dismissive attitude:

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<sup>20</sup> This is a regulatory blind spot – unlike wildlife conservation, where platforms sometimes remove videos of poaching, etc., there's no equivalent flag for "exploitive content featuring indigenous people". Thus, governance has not extended into cyberspace effectively.

<sup>21</sup> <https://www.purpose.tripadvisor.com/social-impact>

<sup>22</sup> For example, the 2012 video had an off-duty policeman orchestrating the "dance" for a bribe.

"They [Jarawa] come out because they want food. Tourists give food, what's the harm? We just ensure nobody hurts them." (forest guard, Jirkatang, early 2025)

Such a stance ignores the long-term harm and illegality, but indicates that not all on the enforcement line are fully committed to stopping sightings. Some may see their role as managing it safely rather than eliminating it.

### ***Buffer Zone Ambiguities***

The buffer zone ban on commercial activities has been somewhat effective.<sup>23</sup> However, enforcement of the buffer is incomplete—fishermen still occasionally land on Jarawa coasts to poach marine life; settlers on the fringe still barter or mingle. These aren't "tourism" *per se*, but they blur the line and create opportunities for tourists to piggyback on. For instance, a tourist with a local fisherman friend might take a boat along the coast (just outside buffer limits) hoping to see Jarawa on beaches—something reportedly offered informally in Middle Andaman. Buffer laws are only as good as their monitoring, which is tough across a jungle coastline.

In summary, this long and interwoven loop functions as a highly effective network: recommendation engines stoke demand, encrypted chats set the date, tourists rehearse their five second window at the roadside, and the fresh clip is uploaded before the vehicle has even cleared the rainforest corridor. Each iteration sharpens the algorithm's edge while the state still governs largely through notifications, checkpoints, and paper-based routines, an analogue gate trying to slow a digital flywheel. The result is that the prohibited gaze persists, reproduced through platform visibility and on-ground coordination. The next section turns to discussion that illustrates how this *modus operandi* operates in practice, and how responses have ranged from reactive enforcement to more systematic, forward-looking interventions.

### **Discussion: Tropical Lessons beyond Andaman**

The Jarawa story is not only about one island; it is a marker of which way the digital wind is blowing in tropical tourism and Indigenous exposure. From Borneo's Penan territories to Brazil's Xingu basin, similar loops recur: geotagged intrigue, encrypted pick-ups, and five second reels that turn protected lives into feed content.

The Andaman case is not only a local scandal; it is a marker of a wider pattern in which tropical tourism and digital platforms combine to make protected Indigenous lives newly discoverable. After the Jarawa "human safari" story drew international attention, similar anxieties surfaced in parts of the Amazon, where some operators were reported to be courting the idea of "uncontacted" peoples as a frontier attraction. In

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<sup>23</sup> e.g., known resorts in the 5 km zone were closed after 2013.

The Guardian, David Hill (2012) described illegal “viewing” trips in Peru near the Mashco-Piro, where guides effectively offered itineraries for spotting highly vulnerable communities. Across very different regions, the recurring logic is familiar: remote tropical landscapes plus “last chance” mystique, and weak oversight, create incentives for brokers to package proximity as experience. Whether the route runs along forest tracks, river bends, or through island archipelagos and reef-linked ferry circuits, legal protections can remain robust on paper while smartphones circulate the cues that make rule breaking practical, from geotag hints to private pick-ups to short clips that turn illicit encounters into shareable content.<sup>24</sup>

This study is deliberately a surface-web analysis. It maps an observable layer of a deeper, partly encrypted practice, and it does not include participant observation in closed WhatsApp or Telegram groups, the deep web, or the darknet. As such, we likely undercount coordination that now migrates to encrypted channels, especially after Telegram’s 2024<sup>25</sup> moderation and disclosure changes.<sup>26</sup> Nonetheless, the surface layer we document is sufficient to demonstrate a persistent pipeline from algorithmic discovery to on-road harm and to justify platform and policy intervention.<sup>27</sup> Another lesson is the limitations of isolationist policy in a digital age. The Andaman administration’s stance has been to isolate the Jarawa for their safety – essentially a well-meaning protective segregation. However, when images and information flow freely online, physical isolation can be partially breached without the tribe even knowing. It calls for an added strategy: not just isolating the community, but also educating and managing the outsiders. That means sustained awareness campaigns. Perhaps the Andamans need to educate every incoming tourist (via in-flight magazines, ferry announcements, etc.) about the sanctity of tribal reserves and the legal consequences for breaching that sanctity.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “Human Safari: Threat to Amazon Tribe,” *The Guardian*, February 26, 2012, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/feb/26/human-safari-threat-amazon-tribe>

<sup>25</sup> Emma Roth, “Telegram Will Now Hand Over Your Phone Number and IP if You’re a Criminal Suspect,” *The Verge*, September 23, 2024, <https://www.theverge.com/2024/9/23/24252276/telegram-disclose-user-data-legal-requests-criminal-activity>

<sup>26</sup> In late 2024, Telegram publicly signaled a stricter stance on misuse in two related ways. First, it updated its privacy policy (23 September 2024) to state that, when presented with a valid legal order confirming a user is a suspect in criminal activity that violates Telegram’s Terms of Service, Telegram may disclose limited identifiers such as the user’s phone number and IP address to the relevant authorities. Second, Telegram’s CEO described a “new approach” to moderation that included stepping up content removal and restricting or removing features that had been abused for illegal activity. Subsequent transparency reporting for 2024 indicated a marked increase in the volume of law enforcement requests with which Telegram shared phone numbers and IP addresses, underscoring a practical shift in cooperation. See: Jay Peters, “Telegram will now turn over your phone number and IP address if it gets a valid legal request,” *The Verge*, 23 September 2024; Reuters, “Durov says Telegram will take new approach towards moderation,” 6 September 2024; Manish Singh, “Telegram reports spike in sharing user data with law enforcement in 2024,” *TechCrunch*, 7 January 2025.

<sup>27</sup> Bodies like the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues could perhaps incorporate guidelines for member states or tech companies. In the same way UNESCO has guidelines for heritage tourism, we might see guidelines for respecting “living human heritage” (to borrow a concept) in the digital realm;

<https://www.theverge.com/2024/9/23/24252276/telegram-disclose-user-data-legal-requests-criminal-activity>

<sup>28</sup> Other places could do similarly; e.g., before tourists enter Amazon lodges, orient them on Indigenous respect.

There is also a need for a discussion of the broader postcolonial critique: the endurance of the “safari” mentality—seeing fellow humans as part of wildlife tourism—is a dark legacy of colonial attitudes toward native peoples. The fact that domestic tourists (Indians from the mainland) are complicit in Jarawa safaris shows this is not simply a white colonialist attitude, but is an ingrained hierarchical view of “modern” vs “primitive.” There is a need for postcolonial nations to undertake an introspection on how their majority populations view minority tribes. The Jarawa case sparked such a debate in India: where it was revealed that mainstream Indians treated the Jarawa as second-class beings for entertainment.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, countries like Indonesia, Brazil, etc., continue to face internal dialogues on respecting tribal rights amid development.

From a political ecology viewpoint, the Jarawa case highlights the conflict between infrastructure and Indigenous land. Tropical development projects—roads, dams, and mining—often cut through tribal areas. The ATR was built for strategic and settler reasons without Jarawa consent. Once in place, it created persistent friction. The global lesson is that whenever such development is contemplated, robust safeguards and community consent are paramount. Otherwise, you get scenarios like this case of the Jarawa, where a road becomes a conduit not only for goods but also for gawkers and exploiters. In essence, infrastructure in tropical biodiverse and culturally sensitive zones must be planned with far more than just economic cost-benefits in mind.

The limits of regulation without platform cooperation are a final crucial point. The Andaman Islands could ban every tourist physically, but as long as media from previous encounters remains online, the Jarawa’s privacy can still be violated. That is why governance has to be transnational: the Indian state alone cannot compel YouTube or other major platforms to treat this content as inherently harmful, so meaningful change depends on coordinated pressure from regulators, civil society, and platform actors to establish and enforce shared norms. Methodologically, this chapter uses a deliberately surface-web approach. It analyzes material that is publicly observable and therefore auditable, while treating encrypted or access-restricted spaces (closed WhatsApp/Telegram groups, deep-web forums, darknet markets) as out of scope for both ethical and practical reasons. At the same time, comparative research on wildlife trafficking and illicit tourism indicates that brokerage and advertising can migrate across these layers when enforcement increases on the open web. Those hidden infrastructures are not the object of this study, but they likely remain part of the wider digital ecology in which Andaman safaris are organized.

On a hopeful note, the Jarawa case also shows the power of advocacy and public opinion. International exposure in 2012 forced the hand of authorities who had been

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<sup>29</sup> Many commentaries in the 2012-13 Indian media asked pointed questions about majority views towards Indigenous people.

complacent for years. It suggests that shining a light (ironically through media) on hidden abuses can lead to change. For other tribes facing tourism pressures<sup>30</sup> documenting these issues and raising global awareness can force local governments to act. Of course, that must be balanced against not violating those tribes' privacy further in the process of advocacy.

In summary, the Jarawa's story is a microcosm of the challenge of preserving human dignity and ecological integrity in a hyper-connected world. The tropics, rich in both culture and nature, attract global attention that can easily turn harmful if unchecked. Solutions in one place can inspire others: if Andaman authorities and tech platforms successfully curb the algorithmic safari, it could become a model protocol. Conversely, failure to protect the Jarawa might embolden similar exploitative practices elsewhere.<sup>31</sup>

This discussion therefore urges that the Jarawa case be seen as more than an insular issue—it's about how we, as a global society, choose to respect the last remaining indigenous communities who live differently from us. Will we treat them as sovereign peoples with rights, or as living museum exhibits for our consumption? The answer will be reflected not just in laws, but in YouTube recommendations, in travel brochures, in the choices of each tourist with a smartphone. The Jarawa have survived on their own terms for millennia; it is incumbent on the rest of us to ensure that our "modern" systems—be it legal, digital, or social—do not become their undoing.

### ***Policy and Platform Intervention***

As Yaseen and Banerjee argue in their analysis of Telegram's privacy policies and cybercrime, leveraging encrypted platforms for early intervention against harm always risks sliding into de facto censorship or disproportionate surveillance unless it is tightly bound by law, due process and transparency.<sup>32</sup> Scholarship on encrypted platforms stresses the double-edged nature of privacy defaults: they shield rights-respecting users and can also frustrate urgent takedowns of illicit coordination. Recent analyses of Telegram's legal posture argue that moderation and limited, transparent cooperation with lawful requests can reduce criminal misuse without collapsing user privacy per se.<sup>33</sup>

Operational proposals, aligned to those debates:

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<sup>30</sup> For example, the Sentinelese next door to Jarawa, or tribes in the Omo Valley of Ethiopia facing tourist cameras.

<sup>31</sup> If they can get away with it in India, we can do it here.

<sup>32</sup> Muhammed Yaseen A. K. & Jyotirmoy Banerjee, "The Role of Telegram's Privacy Policies in Facilitating Cyber Crimes and Legal Challenges in Cyber Law," (2025) 4 *International Journal of Human Rights and Law Review* 13–28.

<sup>33</sup> <https://humanrightlawreview.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/The-Role-of-Telegrams-Privacy-Policies-in-Facilitating-Cyber-Crimes-and-Legal-Challenges-in-Cyber-Law.pdf>

1. Platform-side: geofenced upload friction, automatic disclaimers on ATR-tagged content, structured demonetization of “tribe-spotting” material, and trusted-flagger pipes from Indian authorities and indigenous-rights NGOs with audited transparency logs:
  - a. The Covid-19 pandemic showed that platforms can deploy such overlays, labels and friction at scale when sufficiently pressured: health-misinformation banners, interstitial warnings and search redirects were rolled out globally within weeks, demonstrating that similar mechanisms could be adapted for illegal tribal tourism.
2. Messaging apps: enforce channel Terms of Service against “sighting tips,” preserve E2EE for DMs, and rely on metadata-light abuse reporting with due process, consistent with Telegram’s 2024 policy shift:
  - a. By contrast, ad-funded recommendation platforms such as YouTube, Instagram and TikTok are less central to arranging the illegal drive than to rewarding and amplifying its colonial voyeurism: they translate a few seconds of roadside surveillance into durable, monetizable spectacle that continues to earn attention and money long after the convoy has gone.
3. State-side: narrowly tailored legal requests and periodic transparency reports
4. Public-side: sustained traveller education at points of booking and arrival.

## Conclusion

The Jarawa of the Andaman Islands have inadvertently found themselves in the glare of the global spotlight, their everyday lives turned into pixels and tour itineraries for the outside world. What began as a grotesque “human safari” on a jungle road has shape-shifted in the algorithmic age, defying simple bans and demanding a reimagining of protection strategies. This paper has traced that evolution, demonstrating how a *prohibited gaze* was not extinguished but rather rerouted—from roadside to online, from tour operator to influencer algorithm. Along the way, the paper examined the legal, cultural, and technological facets that allowed an illegal tourist practice to persist in online guises.

This analysis affirms that legal frameworks like ANPATR and buffer zones are necessary but not sufficient on their own. True enforcement in the 21st century must extend into digital terrains. Platforms aren’t neutral networks; they’re the new tour operators. They can choke the trade tomorrow by geo-locking uploads, demonetizing “tribe-spotting” channels and down-ranking thumbnails that turn humans into click-bait.

On the ground enforcement side, penalties should be calibrated to the enabling chain, not imposed only on individual tourists. Fines and sanctions need to extend, where legally possible, to the intermediaries who make illicit encounters feasible, including drivers, guides, accommodation providers, and any ride hailing services whose listings, tags, or location prompts facilitate “Jarawa” related drop offs, so that the expected cost of enabling the practice exceeds the expected gains. Ultimately, the rights of the Jarawa—to privacy, to autonomy, to live free from exploitation—are non-negotiable and enshrined in law (Survival International, 2017); our collective systems of governance must catch up to those ideals.

In closing, the cost of clicks and illicit thrills in this fragile corridor is borne by a community that never asked to be a tourist attraction. The Jarawa’s continued well-being will require sustained commitment: enforceable policies backed by community empowerment and ethical engagement from platforms and tourists alike. If the Jarawa are to remain *subjects of their own story* rather than objects in others’ stories, then ending the algorithmic safari is not just about stopping a few YouTube videos or tour vans—it is about reaffirming a fundamental respect for human diversity in an interconnected world. The lessons from the Andamans resonate far beyond those islands, reminding us that progress should not be measured by how far into the jungle we can reach with our roads and networks, but by how wisely and respectfully we choose to use the access we have.

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**Appendix A**

Source category	What we collected	Example sources	How we used it	Limits / notes
Legal and policy documents	Timeline of interventions, prohibitions, enforcement clauses, gaps	2002 SC order on ATR, 2007 Buffer Zone Notification No. 107, Calcutta HC 2010, ANPATR Amendment 2012, 2013 buffer re-notification, Jarawa Tribal Policy 2004, constitutional and PVTG provisions	Built a matrix of each instrument: what it bans, enforcing authority, penalties, and loopholes	Some texts hard to access or updated via later circulars; limited jurisdiction over online content
Media reports and investigations	Investigative pieces and follow-ups on “human safaris” and enforcement	The Guardian series (2012–2013), Times of India, Down To Earth, The Hindu, Survival International releases	Corroborated official claims, identified named actors, tracked policy impact over time	Potential advocacy or editorial framing; verified claims across multiple outlets
YouTube audit	~50 videos logged for title, channel, date, views, depiction, disclaimers	Searches for “Jarawa tribe Andaman,” “Baratang Jarawa sighting,” “ATR convoy”	Qualitatively coded tone, explicitness, misinformation, and comment sentiment	Avoided sharing sensitive imagery; visibility fluctuates due to takedowns
Facebook / Instagram scan	Public posts, travel pages, group chatter referencing Jarawa or ATR crossings	Travel photography pages, public groups	Flagged potential illicit images and language normalizing sightings	Public content only; private groups mostly inaccessible
WhatsApp / Telegram signals (indirect)	Mentions of invite links, convoy coordination, “sighting” tips	TripAdvisor threads, local FB groups; anecdotal NGO input	Triangulated existence of broker or driver channels pushing convoy times	Did not join private channels; relied on triangulation and interviews

Itinerary reconstruction	Common tour patterns, convoy times, hotspot segments	Tour agency sites, blogs, TripAdvisor reviews; police-posted convoy schedules	Mapped “sighting windows” between Jirkatang and Middle Strait and typical day-trip flows	Promotional copy euphemizes Jarawa; schedules can change seasonally
Stakeholder interviews	Semi-structured interviews on enforcement practice and pressures	Andaman Tribal Welfare official, convoy police, Port Blair NGO	Added operational detail on convoy policing, seizures, and non-tourist pressures like poaching	Small N; anonymized; focuses on enforcement, not Jarawa community

**Appendix B**

Stage	Platform levers	State levers	CSR / Market levers
Discovery	Geofence ATR tags; warnings on tribe keywords; down-rank “tribe-spotting” thumbnails; remove UGC that depicts identifiable Jarawa	Notify-and-takedown MOUs; trusted flagger status	OTA and TripAdvisor advisories on ATR; booking-flow pop-ups
Coordination	Enforce ToS on “sighting tips” channels; channel takedowns; post-2024 Telegram escalation for lawful requests	Narrow legal requests; quarterly transparency	Tour marketplace partner codes of conduct
Mobility	Map overlays warning against filming; in-app “no-record” nudges for creators near ATR	Higher convoy staffing; randomized dash-cam checks with legal safeguards	Car-rental T&Cs prohibiting Jarawa filming
Monetization	Structured demonetization of exploitative content; disable SuperThanks/Memberships on flagged videos	Penalties targeting organizers/beneficiaries, not just drivers	Brand safety policies excluding “tribe-spotting”