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# Bringing Reality T.V. into the Classroom

## *A Semester-Long Amazing Race*

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### **Abstract**

In developing a more student centered and engaging approach to teaching an introductory tourism course, the reality television show *The Amazing Race* was incorporated into the curriculum. Students integrate book chapters and class lectures into researching how locations create tourism destinations through a series of ten weekly assignments. The weekly detours allow students to connect book chapter information to real world destinations. They gain a deeper knowledge of how tourism destinations market, create policies, enhance communities, and benefit tourism areas socially and economically. These weekly assignments are treated as check-in points during the race where students compete with other groups to win. This semester-long race allows students to learn about new destinations while integrating chapter topics and real world tourism strategies into weekly “legs of the race.”

KEYWORDS: *Student Centered Learning, Student Learning Activity, Tourism*

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## **Introduction**

Increasingly, reality programming is taking more air time on our television networks than any other type of program. In fact, 50% of all television viewers in the United States tune in regularly to watch *American Idol*. Reality television consistently beats our popular prime time shows in the same time slots (Hill, 2005). Our students are target consumers, with the young viewers watching the most reality television.

In developing a more student-centered and engaging approach to teaching an introductory tourism course, the reality television show *The Amazing Race* was incorporated into the curriculum. This semester-long race allows students to learn about new destinations while integrating chapter topics and real world tourism strategies into weekly “legs of the race.”

### **What is *The Amazing Race*?**

*The Amazing Race* is a reality television game show in which teams of two people who have some form of a preexisting personal relationship race around the world in competition with other teams. Contestants strive to arrive first at “pit stops” at the end of each leg of the race to win prizes and to avoid coming in last, which carries the possibility of elimination or a significant disadvantage in the following leg. Contestants travel to and within multiple countries in a variety of transportation modes, including planes, balloons, helicopters, trucks, bicycles, taxis, rental cars, trains, buses, boats, and by foot. The clues in each leg lead the teams to perform a task and then direct them to the next destination. These challenges are related in some manner to the country or culture where they are located. Teams are progressively eliminated until three are left; at that point, the team that arrives first in the final leg is awarded a grand prize of \$1 million.

### **Description of the Activity**

Students complete 10 weekly detours (assignments) over the course of a semester in coordination with book chapter readings and lectures. Students first create teams of three to five and select a destination where information can be found in English. Size of city is not of great importance; however, larger cities or popular tourism destinations are more likely to have tourism information available and policies in place. International locations are not used for this assignment due to information gathering difficulty and language barriers. Weekly detours are no more than two pages in length and include the following topics: destination description, motivations for travel, sociology of tourism, hospitality and related services, passenger transportation, attractions, recreation, and entertainment, organizations, and tourism economic impacts. Questions regarding these topics are created from the end of chapter book questions and related classroom readings and discussions. This activity is set up for a MWF course schedule.

**Table 1***Example Detours (Assignments)*

<b>Assignment Topic</b>	<b>Questions to Answer</b>
Destination Description	Describe your destination and why you choose it. Include location, population and demographics, major tourist attractions, natural and built environments, transportation, and culture.
Motivations for Travel	Identify five motivations for travelers coming to your destination. Describe a travel experience or product that would match each of the five motivations below (using your destination). Rest/Relaxation Natural environment Wildlife Nightlife and entertainment Adventure Shopping and Restaurants How important are a variety of available experiences at your destination? Explain the relationship of customer (tourist) satisfaction and travel motivation. Why is it important for you (your destination) to have a good understanding of travel motivations?
Sociology of Tourism	How does travel to your city affect the individual, family, and society? Describe this relationship from a tourist perspective and the host city perspective. Give at least five examples of how your city and tourism suppliers accommodate travelers with disabilities. What holidays, national days off, etc. do employees in the city receive and how does the tourism industry capitalize? Are there specific festivals to the region that your city hosts and has a long standing tradition?

**Table 1 (cont.)**

Hospitality and Related Services	<p>Examine and provide a summary of the lodging industry in your city. (i.e., chain hotels, private hotels, bed &amp; breakfasts, youth hostels, and camp grounds).</p> <p>What type of meeting and convention centers does the city offer? How do they advertise for these services? (How would you find information if you wanted book a convention, conference, or event?)</p> <p>What type of government/tourism related organizations exist in your city that promotes tourism? (i.e., Chamber of Commerce, Visitor Centers, etc.)</p> <p>What are the different categories of tourism jobs available in your city? (Spend no more than a paragraph)</p>
Attractions, Recreation, and Entertainment	<p>List and discuss the following for your city:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cultural Attractions</li> <li>Natural Attractions</li> <li>Events</li> <li>Recreation</li> <li>Entertainment Attractions</li> </ul> <p>Discuss three reasons why attractions and entertainment places are enjoying growing popularity (refer back to previous chapters).</p> <p>Is gaming legal (gambling) in your state/city? If not, would you consider it as an option for economic revenue during this recession? If yes, how does your state/city use those gaming funds?</p>

\*Questions Adapted from Goeldner, C. R., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (2003). *Tourism: Principles, Practices, Philosophies* (9th ed.) Hoboken, New Jersey.

The weekly team detours are given on Monday in class and due on Fridays between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. Assignments are uploaded to an online grade book program by one team member on Friday where the time of upload is documented. Team members who do not participate in that week's detour receive a zero and other team members will not be punished. This is based on the honor system where students discuss their absence with the team and me if they are unable to participate. Detours are graded and returned Mondays in class.

Teams must upload their assignment to the university's online grade book/assignment program between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. on Fridays. The time of upload submission is documented in the program and can be viewed by the instructor. Any student in the group can upload the assignment. Time is cumulative and kept throughout the course of the semester by minutes past 8 a.m. (check-in time).

### **References**

- Goeldner, C. R., & Ritchie, J. R. B. (2003). *Tourism: Principles, practices, philosophies* (9th ed.) Hoboken, New Jersey.
- Hill, A. (2005). *Reality TV: Audiences and popular factual television*. New York: Routledge.