Guidelines for dealing with visitors in Eco-tourism Areas

PREAMBLE
Healthy natural ecosystems are critical to the ecological well-being of all living entities, and especially for the economic security of people. Ecotourism has the potential to enhance wilderness protection and wildlife conservation, while providing nature-compatible livelihoods and greater incomes for a large number of people living around natural ecosystems. This can help to contribute directly to the protection of wildlife or forest areas, while making the local community stakeholders and owners in the process. This document lays out a detailed set of framework guidelines on the regulation of behaviour of tourists, service providers and all stakeholders. Roles and responsibilities are enumerated for different stakeholder i.e. State Governments, Protected Area management, tourist facilities/tour operators, local communities, temple Boards and general public.

THE NEED FOR ECOTOURISM GUIDELINES

- Ecotourism is defined as 'responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people. Such tourism is low impact, educational, and conserves the environment while directly benefiting the economic development of local communities.
- Most wilderness areas across India are fragile ecosystems that provide a whole host of ecosystem services to local residents and people living downstream; and continue to remain important tourist attractions. However, unplanned tourism in such landscapes can destroy the very environment that attracts such tourism in the first place. Hence, there is a need to move towards a model of tourism that is compatible with these fragile landscapes.
- Ecotourism, when practiced correctly, is an important economic and educational activity. It has the scope to link to a wider constituency and build conservation support while raising awareness about the worth and fragility of such ecosystems in the public at large. It also promotes the non-consumptive use of wilderness areas, for the benefit of local communities living around, and dependent on these fragile landscapes.
- These directives and guidelines for ecotourism are applicable to any Eco-park area, Protected Areas including National Parks, Wildlife Sanctuaries, community reserves, conservation reserves, sacred groves, or pilgrimage spots located within protected areas and forested areas.

PRINCIPLES OF ECOTOURISM

- Those who implement and participate in ecotourism activities should practice the following:
  - Adopt low-impact tourism that protects ecological integrity of wilderness areas, secures wildlife values of the destination and its surrounding areas
  - Highlight the heritage value of India’s wilderness and protected areas
  - Build environmental and cultural awareness and respect it.
Facilitate the sustainability of ecotourism enterprises and activities
Provide livelihood opportunities to local communities
Use indigenous, locally produced and ecologically sustainable materials for tourism activities

GUIDELINES FOR ECOTOURISM
It is important to involve all stakeholders in implementing ecotourism guidelines. Synergy and collaboration amongst the Central Government, State Governments, hospitality sector, State Forest Departments, Protected Area managements, local communities and civil society institutions is vital for ensuring successful implementation of the guidelines.

State Government
- The State Government must develop a State-level Ecotourism Strategy - a comprehensive plan to ensure, inter alia:
  - Wilderness conservation in ecologically sensitive landscapes
  - Local community participation and benefit-sharing
  - Sound environmental design and use of locally produced and sustainable materials
  - Conservation education and training
  - Adequate monitoring and evaluation of the impact of ecotourism activities
  - Capacity building of local communities in planning, providing and managing ecotourism facilities
- Adequate provisions must be made to ensure that ecotourism does not get relegated to purely high-end, exclusive tourism, leaving out local communities.
  Relevant modifications in State rules and regulations must be carried out in order to ensure adherence to these standards by tourist developers and operators.
- Tripura should notify the State level tourism Policy encompassing eco-tourism Strategy by December 31, 2018, and put the same in the public domain, in the local language also.
- The State Government must develop a system by which gate receipts from Protected Areas should be collected by the Protected Area management, and not go as revenue to the State Exchequer. This will ensure that resources generated from tourism can be earmarked for protection, conservation and local livelihood development.
- The State Forest Department should be the arbiter in case of any dispute regarding the ecological advisability of any tourism plans, whether Protected Area Management, private entity, temple board or community, as the welfare of wildlife and Protected Areas/ biodiversity takes precedence over tourism.
- The Chief Wildlife Warden (CWLW) of the State shall develop a monitoring mechanism, delineate tourism zones, and decide the area open to tourism on the basis of objective, scientific criteria.
- A State Level Steering Committee should be constituted under the chairmanship of the Chief Minister for quarterly review vis-à-vis the recommendations contained in the State-level Ecotourism Strategy. The Chief Wildlife Warden of the State shall be the Member Convener of the said committee. The State Government will decide its composition and rules of procedure in due course. The Committee should have
ii) Assess carrying capacity of the Protected Area, at three levels: physical, real and effective/permissible carrying capacity of visitors and vehicles.

iii) Set a ceiling level on number of visitors allowed to enter a Protected Area at any given time, based on the carrying capacity of the habitat.

iv) Indicate the area open to tourism in the reserves to be designated as 'ecotourism zone'.

v) Develop a participatory community-based tourism strategy, in collaboration with local communities, to ensure long-term local-community benefit-sharing and promotion of activities run by local communities.

vi) Develop codes and standards for privately-operated tourist facilities located in the vicinity of core/critical wildlife habitats, eco-sensitive zones or buffer areas, with a view to, inter alia, ensure benefit and income to local communities.

vii) Develop monitoring mechanisms to assess impact of tourism activities.

viii) Develop generic guidelines for environmentally acceptable and culturally appropriate practices, and for all new constructions.

ix) Do's and Don'ts for visitors (see Annexure I)

- All ecotourism activities should take place only in delineated 'ecotourism zones' delineated in the ecotourism plan.

- Given that traditional tourism has been happening in national parks/sanctuaries; many of which now form part of core/critical tiger habitat or critical wildlife habitat, and also taking note of the need to implement the provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the following norms maybe be adhered to in the context of ecological-tourism activities, and included in the ecotourism plan of the Protected Area. For critical wildlife habitats of national parks/sanctuaries and for core, 15% of such areas may be permitted for regulated ecotourism access, subject to the condition that 20% of the surrounding buffer/fringe area should be restored as a wildlife habitat in 5 years.

- Tourism infrastructure must conform to environment-friendly, low-impact architecture, including solar energy, waste recycling, rainwater harvesting, natural cross-ventilation, reduced use of asbestos, controlled sewage disposal, and merging with the surrounding habitat.

- Protected Area authorities must ensure that all facilities within a 5 km radius of core/critical wildlife habitats/PAs/reserves must adhere to all environmental clearances, noise pollution norms, and are non-polluting, blending in with surroundings. Severe penalties must be imposed for non-compliance.

- There shall be a complete ban on burying, burning or otherwise disposing non-biodegradable or toxic waste in the tourism area.

- In the case of number of visitors/vehicles exceeding carrying capacity, establish an advance booking system to control tourist and vehicle numbers. Rules of booking must be transparent, and vehicles must strictly maintain a distance of 15 m from one another when stationary. Violators must be penalized, since congestion and overcrowding in this manner causes undue disturbance to wild animals that are being observed.

- Protected Area authorities must delineate a minimum area for the visitor facility, which should be in a site-specific manner.
Residential tourist facilities (number of beds) should be in conformity with the carrying capacity of the PA. Night stay in the eco-lodges should be provided only for package tour booked through Tourism/Forest Department.

Vegetarian meal will be served and allowed in the Protected Areas in order to check any likelihood of spreading zoonotic & viral diseases.

**Tourist facilities/ Tour operators**

- Tourism infrastructure must conform to environment-friendly, low-impact architecture; renewables including solar energy, waste recycling, rainwater harvesting, natural cross-ventilation, no use of asbestos, controlled sewage disposal, and merging with the surrounding landscape.
- All tourist facilities falling within 5 km of a protected area must be reviewed regularly by the Local Advisory Committee vis-à-vis environmental clearance, area of coverage, ownership, type of construction, number of employees, etc, for suggesting mitigation/retrofitting measures if needed.
- All tourist facilities, old and new must aim to generate at least 50% of their total energy and fuel requirements from alternate energy sources that may include wind, solar and biogas.
- There shall be a complete ban on burning or disposing non-biodegradable waste within the Protected Area or in surrounding eco-sensitive zone or buffer area.
- The use of wood as fuel shall be prohibited, except for campfires for which wood must be procured from State Forest Department/Forest Development Corporation depots.
- In order to allow free passage to wildlife, development should be sensitive to the conservation of flora and fauna, and the corridor value of the area.
- Tourist facilities/tour operators must not cause disturbance to animals while taking visitors on nature trails.
- While checking in the disclosure of identity proof i.e Voter ID / Aadhaar Card / Passport is mandatory by the tourists at the time of registration. Disclosure of Marriage Certificate is mandatory at the time of registration for couples. Disclosure regarding contagious diseases, if any is mandatory at the time of registration. No extra guests will be allowed inside the facility.
- Booking will be done online / offline at the designated e-mail / telephone number. Booking will be done on first come first serve basis subject to fulfilment of the required conditions. Reservation / booking may be cancelled without assigning any reasons in case of emergency. Request for cancellation of reservation / booking should reach the authority in writing at least 15 (fifteen) days before the actual date of occupation, in case if such is desired by the tourist / visitor. Payment as per the existing rate should be made in full during the time of booking / reservation. Additional payment if any should be made before check out.
- Marketing of handloom/handicraft/orchids/plants shall be done in attractive packings through eco-tourists lodges/ Airports so as to enable tourists to pick up “Ready to carry items”
**Temple/Pilgrimage Boards**
- While developing facilities the provisions of Forest Conservation Act, 1980, the Environment Protection Act, 1986 and AMASR Act 1958 need to be respected.
- All transit camps and places of stay for such pilgrimage must be restricted to nominated days in a year.
- All rules that apply to tourism facilities including noise, building design, use of alternate energy and free passage to wildlife will apply to such pilgrim facilities.
- Temple boards must negotiate terms of revenue sharing with local communities, and channel a minimum of five percent of gross revenue collected into development of local communities through the Panchayat and Gram Sabha.

**Local Communities**
- The first benefit from ecotourism must go to the local people, and in the long-run, capacity-building should be carried out to forge a sustainable partnership between the forest department, tourism professionals and local communities.
- Soft loans may be provided for Community Credit Programme/Special Trust Funds/Special Central Assistance/ Developmental Schemes of Tribal Department/District level Integrated Developmental Programme/ to pre-identified local-community/beneficiaries for promoting ecotourism for developing home stay facilities as well as local bakery, photography, entertainment related activities etc.
- Local communities extending home stay / B&B facilities may be certified as per HS/B&B policy of GOI.

**Public / Visitors**
- Public / Visitors must abide by the code of conduct, and ‘Do’s and Don’t’s.’ Model “Do’s and Don’t’s” are detailed in Annexure I.
Annex-I

DO's and Don’t of Eco-tourism in Tripura

**DOs**

- Observe sanctity of Eco-parks, holy sites / temples and local culture
- Maintain silence, minimize noise pollution, Chat within sound limits without disturbing others
- Respect people’s privacy while taking photographs
- Seek prior permission of people covered in the frame before taking photograph
- Dispose off waste responsibly. Carry back all non degradable litter such as bottles, tins, plastic bags and dispose at designated place in municipal dustbins only
- Defecate only in designated places
- Follow check out timings
- Adhere to timings of Breakfast, Lunch and dinner. No servings may be possible beyond declared hours.
- Adhere to the menu prescribed by Home stay owner/ caterer.
- Move in battery operated vehicles only (preferably)
- Polythene bags are banned in the state. Please use alternatives
- Respect local traditions
- Please ensure full charge of your mobiles before start of trek
- Be in proper attire to complete the tasks/ treks/board walks. Dress in colours that blend with the natural environment
- Use your own mats and towels for Ayurvedic massage
- Follow instructions of the authority/staff present in the facility
- Appreciate the colours and sounds of nature
- Treat the Protected Area/wilderness area with respect
- Take pictures, but without disturbing wildlife.
- Keep a reasonable distance from wild animals, and do not provoke them
- When in a vehicle, remember wild animals have right of way
- Keep to the speed limit, don’t use horn, and do not startle animals
- Follow the signage in the area and take safety measures during transit, boating, picnic and stay etc.

**Don’ts**
DON'T'S

- Don't blare aloud radios, speakers tape recorders and other electronic equipment in resorts, sanctuaries and National Park.
- Don't leave live cigarette butts or light fire except in designated areas.
- Don't smoke outside designated areas.
- Don't consume alcohol or any other intoxicants.
- Don't tempt locals especially children by offering them foodstuff or sweets.
- Don't use pollutants such as detergents in springs/streams.
- Don't take away flora and fauna in the form of cuttings, seeds and roots.
- Don't litter in open areas or water bodies even for feeding the fish or aquatic animals.
- Don't disturb wildlife or habitat or fellow visitors.
- Don't pluck flowers or medicinal plants.
- Don't forget to take water, first aid kit, specs and sun screen lotions.
- Don't forget to wear life jackets before boat ride. Please insist on life jackets.
- Don't pick up fight with anyone. Please report to co-ordinator. Have his phone number/Mobile.
- Don't forget to give feedback as it helps us in improving our services to the tourists.
- Water is precious, don't waste it.
- Don't do angling from non-designated platforms.
- Don't insist on incompatible food items during stay.
- Don't carry/store any weapons or fire arms. Carrying of guns/fire arms, inflammable materials are strictly prohibited, as per the provisions of the Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, and is punishable by law.
- Don't get out of the vehicle to approach wild animals.
- Don't approach animals closer than 15 m or disturb them while they are resting.
- Don't feed wild animals.