

Eco - Tourism Policy of Tripura-2004

Preamble

Tripura is endowed with splendid natural beauty. The state, an abode of rich floral and faunal biodiversity, treasure of plants, shrubs and herbs of medicinal value, unique ecosystems, wet lands, their grandeur and awe inspiring beauty are the source of perennial attraction. The verdure
expanse of undulating landscapes intermittently adorned with water bodies and rivers accommodates unique amalgamation of cultures of nineteen tribes. The state has over 68% is under protected areas in the form of four wildlife sanctuaries. Seven parallel hill ranges clothed with forests of varying density and nine major rivers occupying the valleys between two adjacent hill ranges dotted with tribal hamlets provide a perfect landscape for tourists with different preferences and tastes for the kind of recreation and enjoyment. Innumerable treks exist through the forests and traditionally and culturally rich hamlets, which have potential to provide a deep insight into the cultural and ecological diversity of the state. Marketing of landscape beauty could be a cottage industry in Tripura. Nature attracts tourist and tourists transform the economy. To realize this, an effort was made to link nature conservation with eco-tourism development in the state.

Eco-tourism is emerging as an important component of the Tripura tourist industry. The abundance of natural beauty and significant growth in nature tourism bear adequate testimony to this. Eco-tourism has been considered as a sustainable, equitable, community based endeavor for improving the living standards for indigenous host communities. Apart from these stakeholders, There is also a dire need to forge synergic partnership with the existing tourism industry of the state.

In pollution free environment, the tourist gets physically invigorated, mentally rejuvenated, culturally enriched and spiritually elevated. Eco-Tourism in wilderness areas has turned out to be one of the major economic activities globally. There is realization that vast pool of natural resource base can be conserved through adequate incentive mechanism. Eco-tourism provides the incentives to local people, entrepreneurs and governments. Eco-tourism is an activity, if properly managed, can give fairly sustainable economic incentives to the local people. Realizing the enormous economic, ecological, recreational and conservation potential and growing interest in eco-tourism, it is important to develop and promote the activity in the State of Tripura.

Eco - Tourism Defined

Eco-tourism is “sustainable, nature tourism” involving the indigenous stake holders, while forging synergic partnership with the existing tourism industry. The world Tourism Organization (WTO) defines Eco-tourism as “tourism that involves traveling to relatively undisturbed natural areas with the specified object of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals. as well as any existing cultural aspects (both of the past or the present) found in these areas”. Eco-tourism or Nature tourism is distinguished from resort tourism or mass tourism by requiring lesser infrastructure development and a lower impact on the environment.

The key elements of eco-tourism are

Existence of Sanctuary / natural environment as prime attraction.

It should be ecologically, socially, culturally and economically sustainable.

It should have participation of the local stake-holders (host community)
It should be capable of dovetailing in the existing tourism of the State.
It should accommodate education, awareness and recreation.

Vision

In tune with National Eco-tourism Policy & Guidelines (1998), the state has identified the following cardinal principles for the development of Eco-tourism :

It should involve the local community and lead to the overall economic development of the area.

It should identify the likely conflicts between resource use for tourism and the livelihood of local inhabitants and attempt to minimize such conflicts.

The type and scale of tourism development should be compatible with the environment and socio-cultural characteristics of the local community and

It should be planned as a part of the overall area development strategy, guided by an integrated land-use plan while avoiding inter-sectoral conflicts and ensuring sectoral integration, associated with commensurate expansion of public services.

The policy envisions to make Eco-tourism as major resource earner for Tripura in the span of 10 years.

Objective

Promote sustainable use and management of the natural forests and wildlife resources of the state.

Create self-employment opportunities for local people through purposeful participation in and management of eco-tourism for optimum economic benefits to them.

Help generate substantial revenue to the state exchequer and make arrangement for ploughing back of the same for maintenance and protection of the natural biodiversity resources of the state.

To step up measures and means to encourage responsible nature and adventure loving local, regional and international tourists to visit the state and thus broaden its tourist base and promote Tripura to firmly occupy a place as a desirable and potential tourist destination on the national and international tourism map.

Provide opportunities for the local youths to participate in activities related to nature and adventure tourism (trekking, biking etc.).

To encourage traditional artisans and artists by providing them opportunities to exhibit their culture and art to the outside tourists through tourism related activities and thus help preserve and enrich their rich cultural heritage in its various forms and manifestations.

To help bring socio-economic benefits to the local communities that would in the long run help state to improve its economy.

To help create suitable environment and infrastructure including communication and transportation links that would not only help the tourists, but also encourage the businessmen and industrialists to make investments for development of infrastructural facilities in the state.

To promote cohesion and integration amongst the geographically and culturally diverse communities through exchange of views while touring / visiting each other's domains.

To promote tourism in consonance with the well-established Rules, Acts, traditions, cultures and regulations relating to environmental protection.

To promote and provide special facilities to the nature, religion and culture based tourism in the state.

To encourage all the different stakeholders to participate in the eco-tourism related activities for synergism leading to maximum social, cultural and economic benefits to each other.

To ensure quality, time bound and environmentally friendly services to all domestic and international consumers to tourists and stakeholders.

To invent, expand, diversify, improve and develop ready markets for rich and varied handicrafts and local artisan based cottage industries products as tourism products for improved economy of the local people and the state.

To prepare and implement Master Plans for various travel circuits and diversification of tourist attractions with a view to increase tourist arrivals into the state.

Strategy Information (Soचना)

Visitor needs information & interpretation services (bilingual) covering "DOs" and "DON'Ts". Tourists need information regarding the best season to visit, what best areas to visit, where to get information, what are the facilities available and what clothing are required. Availability of hotels, food, transport and credible shopping areas the tourists look for. Where to get booking and who is the authority to issue permit. The requisite credible source of information serves the tourists in the best possible way. Information brochures, leaflets, guide service, visitor centers may be published for each area and tourist circuit.

Information Desk

An information desk or reception area can meet the requirements. It could be a counter at the visitor centre or simply a small building at the entrance. Good information can be crucially important to any visitor, and if it is offered in a timely and positive way it creates not only more enjoyable experiences but also good will towards the organization.

Written Material

Most visitors to PAs are curious about what they may see. Although, they are eager to learn more about the places they are visiting, too often there is no one to answer to their questions. Written material includes wayside signage (administrative and interpretive) and publications. Administrative signages include directional sign and maps which are crucial for visitor management.

By providing immediate information, wayside exhibits can make visitors' experiences more meaningful and much more rewarding. Wayside exhibits are effective for a number of reasons. They are always on duty, available to park visitors 24 hours a day, every day of the year after year. They provide information about park facilities, services management policies. They alert visitors to safety or management issues and help protect resources by establishing zone, Langur sighting zone, Elephant zone and related signage may induce excitement.

Directional signage's also have an importance within the PA as they would direct the visitors to different facilities and amenities. Maps too form part of the administrative sign. The visitor is inquisitive to know where he is at the moment and which are the areas and routes that are open to the visitor.

Publications

Everything with the name of the Government Department on it projects the image of the department. Whether it is a general brochure or a trail guide, an annual report or a simple newsletter, every publication should reinforce the image the department wants or needs. A successful publication is one that gets read, clearly communicates the message and enhances a public image. List of birds, list of last census of animals, list of migratory birds with photographs, list of medicinal plants, list of trees and endangered species shall enthuse the tourists. List of facilities created by ICAT department may also be publicized so as to reinforce the faith of tourists in existing infrastructure.

Awareness (Sachetanta)

The tourists are to be educated about their role in keeping the areas clean and worth visiting. The publicity drive has to be taken up aggressively.

Marketing

The visitation to the PAs and the utilization of the existing resources within the PA is very low. One of the reasons could be lack of publicity and marketing. Organization like ITDC can play an important role in attracting visitors to Tripura by including the focus on biodiversity of Tripura. Internet is now an important media for advertising and also a source for information. www.tripura.in/trishna and www.tripura.in/spahijala are two such websites giving information about the PAs in Tripura. A large number of tour operators catering to nature based tours or wildlife tours have websites. It is, therefore, suggested that a site on the natural heritage of Tripura should be hosted. Link with tour operators should be established to harness the potential on professional lines.

Education for the Visitors

The visitors should be educated to behave in desired manner through suitable means on the following issues.

Abiding by the code of conduct, "Dos" and "Don'ts", Helping conservation, apart from protecting any site natural or cultural, which may be adversely affected by tourism, Avoiding wastage of resources, Avoiding littering, carrying back all nondegradable litter, Leaving the camp sites clean before departing, Avoiding removal of plants, seeds, drift, wood from the site, Respecting local culture / customs, Respecting holy places, Strictly adhering to the safety precautions, avoid writing names on trees/ camp huts / toilets

Guidelines for visitor / staff behavior in PAs should be developed. Development of generic guidelines for environmentally acceptable & culturally appropriate behaviors on part of staff / visitors should be developed.

Education & Training for the Staff

Identification of training needs for PA staff & stakeholders shall be done. Periodic training programmes on eco-tourism should be conducted for tourism administration, planners, operators and general public. To meet the increasing demand for trained personnel institutions such as the ICAT should start training programmes and specialized courses for all categories of staff engaged in the tourism sector. The objectives of the training should be :

Prepare a cadre of manpower to cater to the visitors in consonance with management objectives

Prepare group of people as guides for conducting visitors

Promote conservation awareness.

Visitor management, identify opportunities

Collate visitation data for management

Training for the local communities

Local community involvement in managing eco-tourism would require imparting some basic skills even if the programme is under facilitation by the managers. The role of communities in this programme would be to manage the eco-tourism initially at the local and ultimately at the State level. For this local committees would need to be formed and imparted training in-group dynamics and its management, resource sharing, rights and responsibilities. The other level of community involvement in the programme would be by way of providing services to the tourists viz., guides, porters, forest rest house attendants, cooks hosts for paying guests, etc. All these categories would need training for their respective jobs. The local communities shall be trained in

Lodge ownership / management

Basic education & awareness

Health and sanitation

Skill development for preparation of local souvenirs as appropriate

Codes of conduct

Forest and Wildlife conservation

Litter control

Forging partnerships with tourists & tourism industry

Welcome (Swagat)

Effort shall be made to enhance the visitor's sense of being welcome. The way people help, conduct and react communicates the welcome message to the tourists. Signage, access, entry gates, ticket counters, parking places speak about inside management. Tourists form an opinion from the first step itself. Guide/local people/staff's conduct, courtesy, credibility, responsiveness, mannerism communicates an impression whether tourists are welcome or not. A tourist always moves out with pre-conceived image of the place. If the reality exceeds his imagination the repeat visits are certain. When the tourist starts his journey, he shall feel that someone is there to take care of him

Conducted Activity

Once the visitor reaches the tourist complex on the visitor centre they are made aware that there are conducted tours by trained guides. The importance of conducted tours is to show people things that they would otherwise not see or that the untrained eye probably would not notice. Conducted tours can have very specific purposes - showing the parts of an ecosystem, orienting visitors to an historic place, explaining a process or they may have more general purposes - creating awareness and building appreciation. It adds to the value, which a tourist looks for.

Security (Suraksha)

Tourists need tension free and secure environment safety measures during transit, boating, picnic, stay etc. are to be ensured. Protective Surveillance is required if not guarding. Safety measures display, whom to contact in distress, first aid facility, what to do while an encounter with wild animal, snake, wasp shall be properly displayed, organized and communicated. Anti venom injections are to be provided in all sanctuary areas. Prasad hygiene in temples, food hygiene in hotels and cleanliness in wayside amenities are to be ensured. Travel uncertainties are to be minimized through contingency plans. Nearest PHC, Hospital facilities with Police station shall be displayed at appropriate places.

Infrastructure Development (Suvidha-Samrachna)

This is the first most important prerequisite for the development of eco-tourism in the state and should aim at creation of adequate infrastructure in tune with nature.

Those, who make money from tourism want more tourists and those who have to manage for conservation will be happier with fewer tourists. This mindset is to change and balancing is to be done. The opportunities for recreation need to be defined. Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) exercise serves as logical framework in achieving carrying capacities through proactive management action. Diversity of recreational setting need to be defined, location specific resource capability analysis is to be done. The Potential users, their expectations & specific style of activities in which they wish to participate shall be understood. Alternative plan for resource allocations and management plan consistent with allocation need to be developed. More needs to be known about tourist's aspirations & range of opportunities, which they would find satisfying.

The state has an obligation to minimize physical and biological impacts and to maximize visitor satisfaction. In case of recreation, physical & biological carrying capacity is more likely to be concerned with the impacts of tourists on trail, on Wildlife population and of environmental degradations or overuse of resources. The limits of acceptable change (LAC) are to be drawn while extending facilities for tourists in ecologically sensitive zones. LAC exercise involves identification of areas of concern, define opportunity classes, inventorisation of resources holistically, specify standards for change, evolve alternatives, evaluate and select the options with least disturbance and implement and monitor conditions.

Accommodation

The existing Forest rest Houses can be taken as base for this purpose and their existing bed capacity and other facilities can be increased and upgraded to meet the tourist's needs. The existing tariff charged by the Forest Department for the rest houses is nominal. These facilities were never regarded as source of generating sizeable revenue that can be utilized for their maintenance and also due to the lack of provision for ploughing back of the revenue generated from tourism activities for the development of PA. Therefore, existing accommodations in the Forest Rest Houses can be renovated, toilet facilities improved and proper housekeeping to be ensured catering to the requirement of different class of tourist and the tariff revised accordingly. Temporary housing structures blending with the surrounding should be encouraged. Private sector investment for creating accommodation and upgrading the existing facilities would be explored.

The villagers, especially in the tribal hamlets, the local people may be encouraged to convert part of their houses as house-cum-tourist paying guesthouses. This arrangement, besides, providing good and viable source of income to the local people, shall provide the tourists an opportunity to appreciate the traditional culture systems of the given community. This arrangement shall also negate the necessity of creating more and more concrete buildings than destroying the natural ambience. Care would be taken to ensure that only such houses and facilities are identified and registered with the Department of Tourism who will serve the purpose and will offer adequate facilities to the tourist. Provisions for waste disposal, water and energy supplies would be ensured to avoid disruption of natural systems.

While all accommodations inside the PA would be built and maintained by the forest department, the initiatives outside the PA would be planned in collaborations with the private entrepreneurs with a well-defined code of conduct for these agencies. The State should endeavor to encourage more private investment in the hotel industry rather than engage itself in raising such infrastructure except in areas where private investment may not be forthcoming.

Communication

Leaving aside the city parks, most of the wilderness areas whether PA or forest areas outside PA are located at far off places from main cities and townships. Since it may not be possible to provide transport facilities to a large number of tourists within a PA, wherever feasible regulated entry of private vehicles should be allowed with a mandatory registered trained guide by the park management. Pollution free battery operated vehicles may be considered for PAs. Restrictions on the type of vehicle (diesel/petrol), size of the vehicle, number of visitors per vehicle, timings of entry and exit, adherence to specified tourist routes etc., are required to be enforced while allowing entry of private vehicles moving in the sanctuary. With the help of entrepreneurship shall be developed among the unemployed youth to provide transport service to the tourists.

Road Network

Access to Agartala from the mainland is either by Air or Road. The Air link is from Calcutta and Guwahati. Nearest Railhead is Kumarghat, which is 160 kms from

Agartala. From Guwahati to Agartala by road is 262 kms. The road distance between Agartala and Dhaka (Bangladesh) is 150 kms. Bus service between the two countries have begun and thus tourists from the neighboring country can also be attracted to visit the sites in the State. Main points to be considered for developing policies pertaining to public roads are :

The existing access should be analyzed as to whether or not it should be curtailed, expanded or supplemented. Before constructing or upgrading a road, it must be determined that access to the area is necessary, the road is the best alternative for necessary access, the resulting effects on the environment will be minimal and the road is intimately and harmoniously related to the landscape through which it passes

Development of Interpretation centers on site and off site

Interpretation is an approach to communication translating difficult and complex scientific language into simple easy to understand ideas and concepts through the use of original objects, by first hand experience and by illustrative media. Nature interpretation centers may be developed within PAs.

The objectives of interpretation are to help the visitors to develop awareness, appreciations of interpretation are to help the visitors to develop awareness, appreciation and understanding of the area being visited without compromising the objective of the visit i.e. recreation and enjoyment. Interpretation also aims at persuading the audience to understand the importance of the area being visited and eliciting their support for its protection.

Interpretation is challenging as it deals with an audience, which is noncaptive. The audience consist of a mixed group of people which may include literate, illiterate, young and old people and even handicapped. Interpretation therefore, should not be applied casually and uniformly to one and all. It is required to be tailor made and client driven.

Wayside Amenities

For tourists, public conveniences, garbage disposal facilities and its display, observation towers with telescopes and binoculars, adequate signage, way side exhibits shall be developed in order to facilitate sense of care and value for money. Structures with an exotic look causing visual pollution and noncompatible and unaesthetic architectures should be avoided. Environmental, physical & social carrying capacities to limit the various developmental activities in the fringe area to be identified for eco-tourism

Co-ordination (Samanvaya)

Promotion of eco-tourism need not remain the exclusive domain of the forest department and a multi-sectoral approach with the involvement of all the participating agencies, departments and sectors is inevitable.

The state level Community Based Participatory Eco-tourism strategy should incorporate elements of local participation, sound environmental designs, visitor management, marketing, conservation education, training, financial sustainability & monitoring and evaluation. Inter agency coordination is required to provide synergic outputs. The following stakeholders are to be given priority while planning, deciding, executing, monitoring and evaluation of the event specific or related works.

Government departments including ICAT department

Local people

Tour operators

Schools/ College/ Eco-clubs

Public representatives

They may provide institutional support in planning, implementation and monitoring the progress.

An eco-tourism cell may be established in the forest department.

Income Opportunities For Indigenous Host Communities

For providing income opportunities the efforts of government departments / Private entrepreneurs are to be harmonized for creation & management of low cost accommodation for tourists, providing guide service to visitors for jungle excursions, providing sale outlets for local herbal medicine, management of eco-tourism inputs e.g. canoeing / boating, angling, cafeteria, souvenir making & sale, organizing folk dance, picnic spots, Elephant rides, nature trail, cycle trail, organizing visit to a typical host community village & exposure to country culture, organizing bird club.

Segment Conscious Development (Samvedansheelta)

Tourists need adventure, excitement, novelty, satisfaction and value for money through new experience in the ecosystems. Their needs differ depending upon their segment.

The segments may be as under

Pilgrims/ aged people

College/ School going youngsters seeking fun

Newly wed couples seeking solitude

Families looking for safe picnic spots

Office groups/ Picknickers for safety and facilities

Adventure seekers, Border area tourists seeking variety

Nature lovers, bird watchers, wildlife watchers for guidance

Physically handicapped tourists

Tourists looking for low cost facilities / high cost facilities

People keen to enjoy river view, lake view, village hamlet view, train view

People keen to learn traditions and culture of tribals

People keen to visit at convenient times without wait

Local tourists, domestic tourists or regional tourists

National/ International tourists

While developing amenities, the segment conscious development has to be taken up.

Financial Support

Revenue Generation and Provision for its ploughing back :

All activities related to promotion and development of wildlife tourism / nature tourism protected areas need not only be economically viable but should also be profitable as well, in order to sustain the activities so initiated. The State Govt. may not be in a position to provide for all the projected funding requirements for promotion of wildlife tourism and there will be sizeable gap between the projected requirements and actual placement of funds. Realizing this, there has to be a mechanism for generation of viable revenue by the PA authorities to bridge this financial gap to the extent possible. This source for revenue generation for the PA manager can be through the following means :

. Entry fee for the visitors (with differential rates for adults, children student groups, nature camp organizations, foreigners, etc.)
Camera fee (with specified rates for still and video cameras, use of tripods, professional photography, film making, etc.)
Vehicle entry fee (with specified rates for two wheelers, cars, medium motor vehicle, bus, etc.)
. Tickets for bus safari/boat rides
Fees for parking of vehicles / lease rent for the parking lot from the lessee
Pay toilet facilities for day visitors
. Lease rent from the cafeteria lessee
Lease rent from the kiosks lessee
Tariff for boarding and lodging facilities (with differential rates for different class of accommodation)
Charges for any other activities considered fit to be levied by the protected area management.

It is recommended that tariff/fee structure should be differential, based on status of the PA, its floral and faunal diversity and richness, extent of tourism activities available, visitation and visitors profile. The revenue currently being generated goes back to the state treasury and the park management does not have the option to plough it back for furthering the development of the PA under the existing financial rules. The state government may approve provisions for ploughing back the revenues generated for PA's development. The department may also consider to keep this revenue as corpus fund and make provisions for its ploughing back to the PAs, nature reserves and city parks as per the assessed and approved requirements.

Funds Mobilisation

In addition to this, the forest department can also consider to create a Foundation Society under its administrative control, registered with the Registrar of Societies as a mechanism to receive donations/contributions nationally as well as internationally. There are a number of conservation conscious agencies, organizations and individuals who would like to send donation for conservation of particular species, ecosystem, efforts and initiatives being undertaken by the local people or even for overall initiatives taken in the conservation of our natural resources. This foundation society should obtain clearance under Foreign Currency Regulation Act (FCRA) to receive donations from abroad.

Government Support

The host community would be provided financial support mainly through soft loans from Community Credit Programme / Special Trust Funds / Special Central Assistance / Developmental Schemes of Tribal Department / District level Integrated Developmental Programme, ensure their participation as stake holders for promoting eco-tourism.

The general development of the Protected Area including Eco-tourist facilities, Interpretation Centres, Literature and the like would continue with funding support under the Centrally Sponsored Schemes, based on site specific proposals received from States.

Generating resources by inviting private entrepreneurs to develop sitespecific packages by providing appropriate incentives. Identification of potential activities or modification of existing practices to ensure financial sustainability should be taken up. Providing soft

loans from specially created Trust Funds based on recycled park gate receipts / Community Credit Programmes to identified beneficiaries may be explored.

Institutional Support

The planning should be flexible, site-specific & participatory, and should form part of a larger eco-development / eco-development / eco-regional plan for the area, within the normative standards of a Landscape Code. Assessment of existing infrastructure, surface transportation, air service, road, electricity, water supply, law and order situation shall be done. It is necessary to assess the existing tourism situation & potential and identification of appropriate institutional / organizational structures or participatory management of eco-tourism. The structural mechanisms to ensure long term local participation in benefit sharing & decision making processes are to be established.

Creating of village level micro-institutions (JEM Committee / Forest protection Committee / Eco-Development Committee / Self help groups) as per the resolution of the State Forest Department, and formulation of site - specific eco-tourism plans with indigenous participatory planning are required.

Development of state level legal framework for eco-tourism activities viz., delineation of "fringe areas" around PA, legal provisions for benefit sharing, normative code of conduct and participatory structures of Eco-Development Committees shall be made.

Infrastructure development as per LAC guidelines may be done as envisaged in the infrastructure development of state level coordination Committee, with Chief Secretary as Chaiman. This arrangement shall ensure that the infrastructure development is undertaken on a holistic programme of the state rather than as individual target oriented programmes of different participatory government departments. The Master Plan can be split into time bound activities. Several Annual Action Plans against which financial assistance can easily be sought for from Central government and other suitable external agencies can be developed.

During formative years, the Forest department of the State should be the main implementing agency. However, at a later stage this should be entrusted to the Confederation of Eco-development Committees, with State Tourism Development Corporation / Tourism Department, and Forest Department of States assuring supporting and supervisory roles.

Role of partners : A large number of agencies are working in the field of wildlife tourism both private and government. The need of the hour is to have an integrated approach towards development of eco-tourism.

At the state - level : Tourism Department & Tripura TDC, State Board of wildlife, Forest Department, PWD, State Electricity Board, Water / Irrigation Department, Private entrepreneurs e.g. Tour Operators, Hoteliers

At the District - level : Local district administration, Panchayats, EDCs, Municipal Corporations, PA's managers (local units of forest department)

Monitoring Mechanism

The monitoring structure are to be put in place to assess the ecological impacts of eco-tourism, enforce guidelines and codes of conduct for culturally appropriate behavior. Monitoring & evaluation criteria and indices to assess local participation & benefit sharing shall be evolved. Monitoring of visitation data for management shall be ensured. The role of State Board of Wild life shall be enlarged to cover the eco-tourism aspects and related developments in and around PA.