



## Indian Perspective on Tiger as a Tourism Product

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### ABSTRACT

*In India and world over, tiger as an animal has fascinated humans more than any other wild animal. Tiger is mentioned in the holy Indian scriptures of both Ramayana and Mahabharata. The biggest tiger population is still found on the Indian sub-continent though the tiger number was 40,000 in 1930. This decline indicates lack of comprehensive approach, which takes into account all the stakeholders' concerned. As tiger became one of the biggest tourist attractions of modern times and a huge revenue earner for India, it is worthwhile to approach this declining potential resource of tourism in a tailor made manner. The present work is an attempt to focus on irresponsible tiger tourism practices in India through specific cases. It further suggests complementary steps which if applied in tiger management will remove the IUCN endangered status of tiger by 2030.*

**KEYWORDS :** comprehensive approach, irresponsible tiger tourism

### Introduction

"Do not cut down the forest with its tigers and do not banish the tigers from the forest. The tiger perishes without the forest and the forest perishes without its tigers" (Udyogaparva-Mahabharata-400 BC). The narrative shows that a long time ago, our ancestors knew that all life was interconnected and interrelated. Tiger is mentioned both in the scriptures of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Tiger is often referred as 'man-eater' in India. Survival of the tiger is an important yardstick to measure the existence of a healthy forest ecosystem. The biggest tiger population is still found on the Indian sub-continent, followed by Southeast Asia and the Russian Far East (Strategy 2010). Gone are the days when tiger used to operate in fully natural setting such as jungles which was most ideal for the animal. The times we live in, especially with India alone having approximately 1700 tigers in the reserves, tiger tourism is hot proposition, a tourism product that brings in huge revenues both from domestic and foreign clientele. Even as tiger numbers declined drastically, there was a marked increase in demand for tourism in the tiger reserves, not just by Westerners, but also by growing numbers of middle-class Indians (Cohen 2012).

### Status Report of Tiger in India

Tigers in India operate primarily in two scenarios firstly in partly-natural settings such as national parks, tiger reserves and wildlife sanctuaries and secondly in partly-contrived settings such as zoos. Tiger Tourism happens with the former, here tigers are regulated but they remain unrestrained within their context. The anti to this is that wild tigers' grow submission to sighting or watching by humans. They become habituated to human presence; get stressed by the visiting tours, but undeniably it is one of the most popular leisure activities worldwide. With a number of tigers in India dipping to 2000 in the year 2010, which used to be 40,000 in 1930 despite all our efforts. India needs a tailor made approach to address the issue of Tiger. The main reasons for that rapid decline are poaching for the tiger's skin and body parts, used in traditional Asian medicine, habitat loss, reduction in prey species and range fragmentation (Damania et al. 2008). To add further the decline also indicates lack of comprehensive approach, which takes into account all the stakeholders' concerned be it tiger, the local community residing in reserves, citizens of the country specifically the youth, wildlife activists, service providers offering tiger tourism, government by way of forest department and lastly the political class of India to address the issue. Therefore survival of Tiger, firstly as a citizen of India is needed because, it is the national animal of an aspiring superpower, tiger presence restores nature balance, it ensures our ecological security; as a researcher of tourism because tiger is an irreplaceable extremely fascinating tourism resource and area of study.

### Methodology and Objective

Present study is descriptive in form more leaning towards the qualitative work while quantitative approach providing support. It is based on secondary and tertiary resources. It is based upon consultation of journals, magazines, CD, books, travelogues. Ample amount of work

has been done on issues related to tiger. Wildlife management and conservation have also been dealt in detail both in India and abroad. The present paper is an attempt to place tiger tourism in Indian perspective with an objective to propose a tailor made solution/areas of concern specific to India in order to ensure that such a treasured possession, as once quoted by Jim Corbett "I am convinced that all sportsmen... will agree with me... that a tiger is a large-hearted gentleman", stands restored and simultaneously can be offered as a tourism product for the generations to come. The paper also highlights the cases of tiger tourism in India which are utterly irresponsible.

### Rethinking Tourism-Cases of Irresponsible Tiger Tourism

The manner in which tiger tourism is being practiced in 41 tiger reserves of India invokes concern. Even the supreme court of India, many at times has shared this plight. Following are some examples of famous reserves of India stating the mismanagement:

1. Estimated annual turnover of elite hotels in Ranthambore is about Rs 22 crore, which can be compared to Rs 30 crore spent on the park by the government in the last 30 years. The tourism only gives a pittance to the park, in the form of gate receipts. This creates hostility in the minds of locals ([Narain 2010](#))
2. Since tiger is the crowd-puller, resort owners at times try unethical ways of entertaining the tourists who do not get the chance to go inside the forest. Till recently, many resorts offered DJ nights, rain dance and discs to the tourists. This so-called 'eco-tourism' in tiger reserves took many forms: 'Activities include driving up to and approaching habituated tigers on elephant back, adventure tourism activities such as rafting or trekking, camping in the forest [and] driving vehicles cross country' (Karanth et al. 2010). Tourism is also contributing to tiger attacks by blocking wildlife corridors. Corbett is getting crowded from all sides.
3. As tiger became the biggest tourist attraction of modern times, Kanha, like other tiger reserves, saw an unprecedented growth in tourism. The number of visitors increased from 106,000 in 2006-07 to 175,000 in 2010-11—a growth of over 60 per cent. During the period, the numbers of hotels increased from 30 to 62. Kanha allows 280 vehicles a day. The National Tiger Conservation Authority estimates that Kanha can sustain 40-55 tourist vehicles per day. This is highly unsustainable.
4. Tourism in tiger reserve is demand-driven. Tourists want air-conditioners and swimming pools. None of the hotels uses renewable energy sources. In 2009, 48 resorts in Kanha extracted 540,000 litres of groundwater per day. That year the hotels consumed 302 tonnes of firewood, 42 per cent of which came from forests in the buffer zone. Around 40 per cent of hotels in Kanha used wood-based boilers that year. Tourist facilities are often located near villages where people have limited drinking water facilities and grow rain-fed crops. While the resorts make good profits consuming the local resources, they hardly share the profit with the communities. (Sambhav 2012)

The four points are a mere representation of the fact that the picture happens to get bleaker because of existing practices of tourism.

### Suggestions for Tiger Management-Macro Level

Corrections in the way tourism is being practiced won't solve the problem; it has to be supplemented with the following macro initiatives:

1. Justified and inclusive nature management- Holistic approach both for 'endangered' species and subsequently endangered humans/locals is required. Tiger becomes vulnerable when locals blame the animal for killing their cattle. Generous and speedy payment for crops destroyed or cattle killed can reduce this resentment level. Tigers and the local tribes have to co-exist, and the latter that are making space for the tiger, to ensure their uninterrupted habitat need to be given a good deal for displacement, not marginal forestland which would make them more destitute. Displacement should be combined with alternative livelihood.
2. Participative wildlife conservation- Creating an incentive to conserve is the need of hour. Benefits of tourism should also go back to the region as in Africa. Prefer locals for jobs to protect, they must want to protect the tiger. This can be achieved by making them partners, owners and earners from tiger tourism. Hotels and resorts on the periphery must contribute a portion of their turnover to the communities and the reserve management. The future of people and forests is entwined. The key is in building vibrant relationships with local people as the custodians of parks. Our forests are not wilderness areas, like the US, where large areas can be fenced off and protected for a single conservation objective. Our forests are habitats and therefore, wildlife strategies will never work without the involvement of communities who co-habit these lands.(Narain 2003)
3. Citizen awareness and youth involvement –School, college and university students need to be involved in awareness campaigns. NDTV Aircel Save the Tiger Campaign has done a commendable work; more efforts on similar lines are required. Demographic dividend of India is considered to be one of its strongest assets. Statistics show that India is climbing up in the ladder of tourism expenditure which makes it even more important to reach out to this potential tiger tourist (middle class/youth) and address the issues of tiger vulnerability. Lack of consistency in political will which has often been sighted as a threat to tiger rejuvenation can only be achieved if the middle class having the purchasing and voting power make tiger issues an agenda to vote. Representatives should be rated on their efforts to save the national animal. Changing policies is not easy, but we can start with changing people who drive policy. Conserving and protecting this rich biosphere is important.

4. Effective law enforcement- India has some of the strongest wildlife laws of any country, but extremely poor enforcement. The tiger is protected under the Wild Life (Protection) Act and killing one (except in a clear case of self defense) is punishable with a maximum penalty of 7 years in prison and a fine of over Rs.10,000. Anybody who tries to encroach the habitat of the tiger by altering the boundary of a tiger reserve faces a similar penalty. However, few people are caught and even fewer are successfully prosecuted and convicted. Amendment the criminal provisions of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, so that the poacher can actually be convicted will prove to be deterrent.

### Conclusion

The cases mentioned above are enough to conclude that tiger tourism seems to be, in its present form, is more detrimental than beneficial for the survival of wild tigers. It would be totally unjustified to banish the entire phenomenon in totality. The objective of achieving a tiger population of 10,000 by 2035 cannot be achieved without responsible tourism coupled with a focus on macro items mentioned above. Padma Bhushan (Late) Billy Arjan Singh who is often referred as the Indian grand old man of tiger conservation once said "The air we breathe and the water we drink stem from the biodiversity of the universal environment and its economics. The tiger is at the centre of this truth. If it goes, we go". A totality in our approach can ensure the removal of the IUCN 'endangered' status of tiger by 2030.

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