

# Joining the dots...


Culture, Community, Environment



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indian responsible  
tourism awards  
2016





# OUTLOOK TRAVELLER RESPONSIBLE TOURISM SUMMIT 2017 & INDIAN RESPONSIBLE TOURISM AWARDS

January 19, 2017  
The Grand New Delhi

# CONTENTS

- 02** WHO ARE WE?
- 04** SUMMIT 2017  
The Agenda
- 08** KEYNOTE SPEECH  
Amitav Ghosh
- 14** EXPERT SPEAK  
What they said
- 22** THE CHALLENGES  
(and solutions)
  - Digital issues
  - Certification gap
  - Overtourism
  - Weekday slump
  - Sustainability
  - Connecting with the community
- 34** THE INDIAN  
RESPONSIBLE  
TOURISM AWARDS
- 42** TRENDS
- 44** THE WAY FORWARD



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CONTACT  
Soity Banerjee  
soity@outlookindia.com  
Neha Dara  
neha@outlookindia.com  
Pavan Jain  
pavan@outlookindia.com

HEAD OFFICE  
AB-10, S.J. Enclave, New Delhi 110029  
Tel: 33505500; Fax: 26191420  
outlook@outlookindia.com

OTHER OFFICES  
MUMBAI Tel: 33545000; Fax: 33545100  
KOLKATA Tel: 33545400; Fax: 24650145  
CHENNAI Tel: 42615224, 42615225  
Fax: 42615095  
BENGALURU Tel: 45236100; Fax: 45236105



In keeping with the spirit of  
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group

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## THE OUTLOOK TRAVELLER RESPONSIBLE TOURISM INITIATIVE

FOR 16-odd years, *Outlook Traveller* has endorsed slow, green travel as a matter of course, and encouraged best practices in India before ‘responsible tourism’ became a bona fide global movement. But about a year ago, we decided to formalise our commitment to the local communities and to the environment by creating a platform for conversations on ethical travel.

On January 19, 2017, at the second edition of the Outlook Traveller Responsible Tourism Summit at The Grand, New Delhi, we walked further down that road to raise more uncomfortable questions, to forge more connections, and to build and celebrate a community of travel operators and public officials, hotel and homestay owners, travel writers and research scholars in this country, who believe that the future is conscious travel. A future that the United Nations—which declared 2017 as the year for Sustainable Tourism for Development—is working towards as well.

It’s time to bring responsible tourism out of the margins, and to secure India’s position as a natural leader in this space.

### THE PIT STOPS SO FAR...

- Hosted **two major summits** in the Capital to connect and celebrate the fraternity
- Mapped responsible tourism practitioners in every state to create an **exhaustive database**
- Constantly working towards **gathering and disseminating knowledge** through our website, social media channels, and annual reports (free to download from our website).
- Felicitated best practices in India and gave them **national and international exposure** through the Indian Responsible Tourism Awards, a regional partner of the World Responsible Tourism Awards, held at the World Travel Market, London. Winners were selected by an eminent 13-member jury over five months; they automatically qualify to compete at the international level.
- Published **two annual collectors’ issues** on responsible tourism, and several stories on the subject throughout the year in *Outlook Traveller*
- **Engaged with and amplified the work** of several practitioners across categories through our magazine, websites and social media handles
- Currently **revamping** [responsibletourismindia.com](http://responsibletourismindia.com) to make it easier for readers/travellers to find the best Indian operators and accommodations in the responsible tourism space in India
- **Curating workshops** for states using a timeline-based, problem-solving approach
- Connecting with the best responsible tourism **practitioners in South Asia**—from Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar and Maldives, among others—to expand our knowledge base at the Responsible Tourism Summit 2018



# Summit 2017

## Real Impact

Home to 3,000 folk musicians and dancers, originally from the states of Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra, Kathputli Colony in New Delhi is the largest settlement of street performers anywhere in the world.

We invited puppeteers from the Colony to narrate the story of Kuldeep Gadhvi of Kutch Adventures, who dreamt of making the harsh desert country a beautiful, responsible destination. Presented with the help of Open Eyes Project and Mixed Route Juice, Delhi.



### Keynote Speech AMITAV GHOSH

Author of *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable*

*The impact of climate change on tourism, and tourism on climate change*

**Interaction:** With author and journalist Raghu Karnad



### Industry Insight DR VENU VASUDEVAN

Principal Secretary, Kerala Tourism

*Mainstreaming responsible tourism, and the role of the state tourism boards*



### The Insider DR HAROLD GOODWIN

Director, International Responsible Tourism Centre, MD, Responsible Tourism Partnership, & RT advisor, WTM, London

*The real challenges of responsible tourism across continents*



### Research & Advocacy ANANYA DASGUPTA

EQUATIONS

*Sustainability from the people's perspective*



### Case Study AMITAVA GHOSH

Founder, Amadubi Rural Tourism, Jharkhand

*Tribal tourism is an ethical minefield. Is it possible to build a self-sufficient, equitable tribal tourism model?*



### Case Study INIR PINHEIRO

Founder, Grassroutes Journeys, Maharashtra

*Experiments in responsible tourism... How simple, powerful ideas can change the landscape of domestic tourism*



### Cross-Pollination ANAND MOHAN JHA

Skill India Team, National Skill Development Corporation

*Addressing the skill gap in responsible tourism communities*



### India Unseen

A performance of Choliya, a Kumaoni folk dance performed at weddings in Uttarakhand. Choliya borrows from the martial heritage of the region and can be traced back to over 1,000 years!





## Mainstreaming Responsible Tourism

The business case for moving towards conscious tourism worldwide



**GARRY WILSON**

Managing Director, Product & Purchasing, TUI Group



**NIKHIL GANJU**

Country Manager, TripAdvisor, India



**DR HAROLD GOODWIN**

Director, International Responsible Tourism Centre, MD, Responsible Tourism Partnership, & RT advisor, WTM, London



**BELINDA WRIGHT**

Moderator: Executive Director, Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI), and Proprietor, Kipling Camp

## 10 Minutes 10 Slides

Innovative responsible tourism projects from the states of Kerala, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra



**RUPESHKUMAR K & SAROOP RAY**

Kerala Tourism



**VIJENDRA SHEKHAWAT**

Jaipur Elephant Paper



**SANJAY SINGH**

Chhattisgarh Tourism



**PANDURANG TAWARE**

Agri-tourism Development Company, Maharashtra



## Balancing Cultural Credit

Is it possible to make culture more attractive and accessible to tourists, while controlling or minimising negative impact



**JAYA JAITLEY**

Founder, Dastkari Haat Samiti



**GOPINATH PARAYIL**

Founder, The Blue Yonder



**CHIRAG MUNJANI**

Founder, Rural Pleasure



**ISHITA KHANNA**

Founder, Spiti Ecosphere



**CB RAMKUMAR**

Moderator: Board Member, Global Sustainable Tourism Council, and Founder, Our Native Village

## Bonfires

Focus groups

### How to make digital marketing tools work for you?

Social media, apps, B2B networks, web interface, search engine optimisation... How to ensure that a responsible tourism business — irrespective of scale and size — is in step with, or ahead of, a rapidly changing online universe



Moderator: **SHUBHO SENGUPTA**

Social media and mobile marketing expert, Delhi

### How to expand the domestic tourist base for responsible tourism?

There's strength in numbers. But how does one wean domestic tourists away from the LED TVs and swimming pools without too many compromises? How does one incentivise them to make responsible choices?



Moderator: **INIR PINHEIRO**

Founder, Grassroutes Journeys, Maharashtra

### How to tap the international responsible tourism market better?

Conversations on resources and networks to explore economic regions and countries more likely to travel to India for responsible holidays in the next few years. Also, what are the most popular holiday formats for inbound tourists; basic expectations, incentives and experiences?



Moderator: **SUMESH MANGLASSERY**

Founder, Kabini Community Tourism & Service, Kerala



# Circle of Unreason

*Author Amitav Ghosh spoke on the impact of tourism on climate change and the impact of climate change on tourism*

I love to travel. I've written a great deal about travel. I've been travelling all my life. I enjoy fine hotels and good travel destinations and so on. So, being familiar with the tourism and travel industries, I know that these industries care a lot about perception. Tourism is in many ways about feeling good, creating positive impressions, about making oneself feel good, and I'm sure making customers and clients feel good. In light of that, some of you may find what I'm going to say rather jarring. Please don't, however, interpret what I'm going to say as a criticism directed towards anyone in particular. That is not my intention at all. What I hope to do is to convey a realistic impression of the situation that we are all in, in relation to tourism, the climate and much else. Let me say also that much of what I'm going to say is supported by tourism industry analysts and specialists. There's been the Djerba Declaration by tourism industry professionals in 2003; there was the Davos Declaration in 2006. **Both these declarations accept that climate change is happening, it's manmade and that it's the greatest challenge humanity has ever faced.** And climate change and human activity are inseparable, especially industrial and economic activity. So let's ask, what is the tourism industry's contribution to global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions?

Tourism is a very big industry. Some people say that it is the world's biggest industry. It commands 10.4% of the world economy; 73.7 million jobs worldwide depend on tourism—2.8% of total world employment. India has a very small part of this. Total arrivals in India in 2013 were about 7 million people. The Louvre Museum had 8.5 million and the Eiffel Tower had as much as India. Venice had 9.8 million arrivals. In 2006, the number of international tourist arrivals was 846 million, spending \$500 billion; 54% of this was

in Europe and 52% of all the receipts stayed in Europe. So, as we can see, India's share in this is very, very small.

Now, tourism contributes 5% of the global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions; 75% of this is because of transport, of which 40% is mainly because of aviation. This strikes me as something curious because in India we have a very long coastline and wonderful rivers, yet so little is invested in sailing, which is one of the most environmentally friendly forms of transport.

**If tourism were a country, it would be the fifth largest on a country-wise list of emissions.** Tourism emissions are a very big part of the global GHG emission scenario. The founder of *Rough Guides* actually says now that "flying is killing the planet". **But tourism sector emissions will still grow 152% over the next two decades.** The growth we are speaking of will make a huge impact on the climate change scenario. It's wonderful to think of small sustainable tourism facilities, but if the person who's going to make use of those facilities is going to take an airplane to travel there, then the footprint of the traveller is huge.

Of course, the scale makes a difference. Large hotels pollute more than those on the smaller scale. And, of course, luxury again means more emissions. We like to think efficiency will help and that more efficient uses of energy will make the world a better place. Unfortunately, this is not the case. One thing proven by one of the earliest energy economists in the mid 19th century, a man called Stanley Jevons, was the Jevons paradox, which states that greater efficiency leads to more emissions. It's not counterintuitive that if you have a light bulb that takes less energy, you're tempted to put in more light bulbs. That's basically the way it's gone. As fuel efficiency in cars has increased, cars have grown bigger.

We cannot be complacent about that. Energy efficiency is not going to solve this problem for us. Stopping all such

emissions today will make very little difference. A huge inertia is built into this system. **Today we're seeing the impact of GHG emissions that occurred 20 years ago.** So, emissions of today will impact world climate 20 years from now. Even if the whole world system would stop today, the breakup of Antarctic ice sheets would continue, Arctic collapse would continue. So, that's one aspect of it, the way tourism is impacting climate change. But what about the other way round?

To many, it's surprising that this is possible at all, because we tend to see climate change as affecting polar bears and fishermen and not tourism. **But tourism is a profoundly climate dependent industry, in the sense, it is no different from agriculture.** Why? Because tourists like good weather. No one will spend money to be uncomfortable. Studies have shown that 70-80% European tourists cite a desire for better weather as the chief reason for tourism. And think of arrivals in India, which are extremely concentrated in winters—entirely climate dependent.

So let's think of some of the ways ongoing climate change is affecting weather-related tourism. One sector that's directly affected is skiing. Europe has over 600 alpine resorts generating €50 billion per annum. Austria's mountain tourism accounts for 4.5% of their GDP. But many European and American ski resorts don't get enough snow anymore; they have to manufacture artificial snow. With a 2% temperature rise, which now seems almost inevitable, the Alps will lose 40 days of snow cover. Germany will lose 60% of its winter sports potential. Generally speaking, the Mediterranean coast will be the worst hit because with rising temperatures, tourism will shift towards the poles; further north in the northern hemisphere and vice versa. So Patagonia, Tasmania and Russia will have better climate, and these places are going to be more important. In Asia, in these adverse weather conditions, Tajikistan is really going to flourish.



**AMITAV GHOSH**  
Author of *The Great Derangement: Climate Change & the Unthinkable*



Other than skiing, beach resorts will suffer terribly. We already see erosion in many parts of the world—rising sea levels mean beachfronts are being eaten away. But one thing we aren't paying more attention to is the changing sea fauna, on which overfishing and rising oceanic temperatures have catastrophic results. We're seeing more jellyfish, huge blooms of green algae. In the Caribbean and Jamaica last year, beaches were covered with green algae and jellyfish.

One thing that we in India don't pay attention to is that we are a subcontinent jutting out into the sea, with one of the world's longest shorelines. **However, on both sides, huge dead zones have appeared, which are anaerobic zones where water has too little oxygen to support any life at all.** It's in both the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal. In the latter, a 60,000 sq km dead zone was identified by scientists in December 2016. It's a vast area and spreading very fast. It's actually going to lead to a lot of perturbations. One of the things it's going to do is reduce fish catches, but it's also going to drive all sea creatures into strange new habitats. A naturalist friend of mine has actually documented huge numbers of moray eels moving very close to the beach in Goa because they're escaping their usual habitats and moving closer to the shore to find oxygenated water. And in beaches like Calangute, now you have enormous specimens of these eels congregating in a way unheard of. Already in Goa there are huge jellyfish blooms. During the BRICS summit, the whole beach was plastered with jellyfish. So the entire business of sea tourism is going to be affected in multiple ways.

**Another climate change aftermath is rain bomb events.** These are huge unprecedented rainfall events. Since cities create their own microclimates, these are concentrated over them. So we saw the 2005 Mumbai rains, Chennai floods in 2016, Houston 2016-17. These phenomena will affect tourism in very unpredictable ways. As you saw in Uttarakhand, the rain bomb event killed so many people and wiped out an

entire landscape. Another thing these events will create is massive landslides. In places like Sikkim and Darjeeling, all through the mountains, you'll see an increase in these.

A rise in sea levels, again, will have multiple impacts—it's absolutely one of the certain climate change effects. We just don't know how much it could be; it could be 2 or 3 metres.

**So many Pacific and Caribbean islands will disappear.** One thing we Indians don't take into account is the Laccadive chain, which will almost certainly disappear. Large parts of the Indian coast will disappear. To this day, it horrifies me when I drive around Goa's coast and see all these buildings that are going up right on the coast—all of this will disappear. So Goa and Mumbai and all major Indian cities will be very badly affected by sea level rise. Miami is soon going to be over, we already see flooding along the beach. The only way to deal with this is managed retreats. Some countries are doing so, but we seem to have no plan of following suit.

Another thing—coral reefs are being bleached globally. The Great Barrier Reef in Australia is badly hit; 80% of it is badly bleached. **In Bay of Bengal and Arabian Sea, the bleaching is accelerating at a terrific rate.** Last year I went to one of the remoter parts of the Bay of Bengal, the Mergui Archipelago in Tenasserim in Burma. This was once said to be one of the most pristine reefs in the world. I can't tell you how badly it's devastated. Wild populations are gone, it's overfished using dynamite and cyanide. The only healthy reefs are in Indonesia, as the seas around it are deep. So you have upwellings of cold water that counter the bleaching.

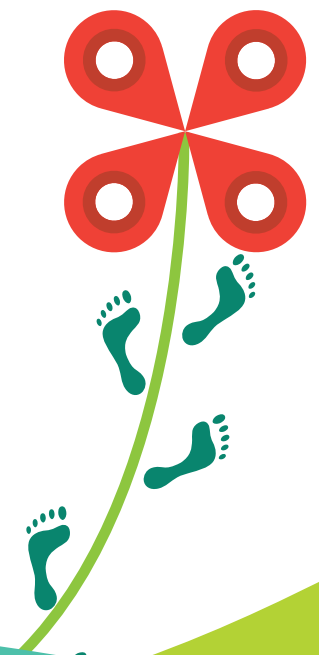
Another impact we will see is glacial retreat. The Glacier National Park in the US will be glacier-free in the foreseeable future. **Gangotri Glacier has been retreating for years, as you know. Tibet could be glacier-free quite soon.** But one aspect of the glacier collapse scenario that we don't talk about is the collapse of glacier lakes. Glaciers create lakes, which are blocked by moraines. But these moraines soon break, lakes overflow and deluges come up. In Bhutan

alone, 50 sites could have this collapse. Though thanks to the last king there, great attention has been paid to climate change and preparations are underway. In Uttarakhand and Nepal, we can be sure there will be glacial lake collapses and disasters accompanying them.

**We're living through the sixth great extinction in geological history; 40% of lifeforms could go extinct in the next 20 years.** Already, in Africa, huge decreases in wildlife population have been detected. Along with wildlife, one of the major impacts we will see is desertification. Huge numbers of lakes around the world are drying up. Forest cover is disappearing. India is particularly water stressed. From the tourism point of view, the most visited areas are the most water stressed—Rajasthan, Gujarat, Hampi, which is completely dependent on the tiny Tungabhadra. So long-term tourism in these areas is really open to question. **Will it really be possible to bring tourists to water-stressed areas, such as Jaisalmer, indefinitely in the future?** In Europe, there was a heat wave in 2005, which was centred in many big tourist destinations. It took 46,000 lives. How will tourists cope with such a situation? In Delhi and central India, we had a 50°C heat wave. In the Persian Gulf, Dubai and the Emirates, the heat index rating was at 75°C, which includes humidity count and so on. These areas will not be habitable soon, unless we use ACs, but ACs contribute so much greenhouse gas.

But this is just the direct impact. What about climate change's indirect impact? For example, as a driver of conflict. In the Mediterranean, there's a 1,000-year drought that has impacted the place in many unpredictable ways. It is one of the drivers of the Syrian conflict. Syria, which used to be a tourist hub, won't have tourists going there anytime soon. Egypt is a country I've known well—I wrote my PhD on it. But it's a collapsing state. There's sea-level infusion, the Nile Delta is sinking fast and the sea is coming further in. And Egypt is fed by one river, the Nile. When I lived there in the 1980s, the population was 40 million. Today, it's 95. And it's

In India,  
we have a very long  
**coastline and**  
wonderful **rivers**, yet  
so little is invested in  
**sailing**, which is one of  
the most **environment-**  
**friendly forms**  
**of transport**



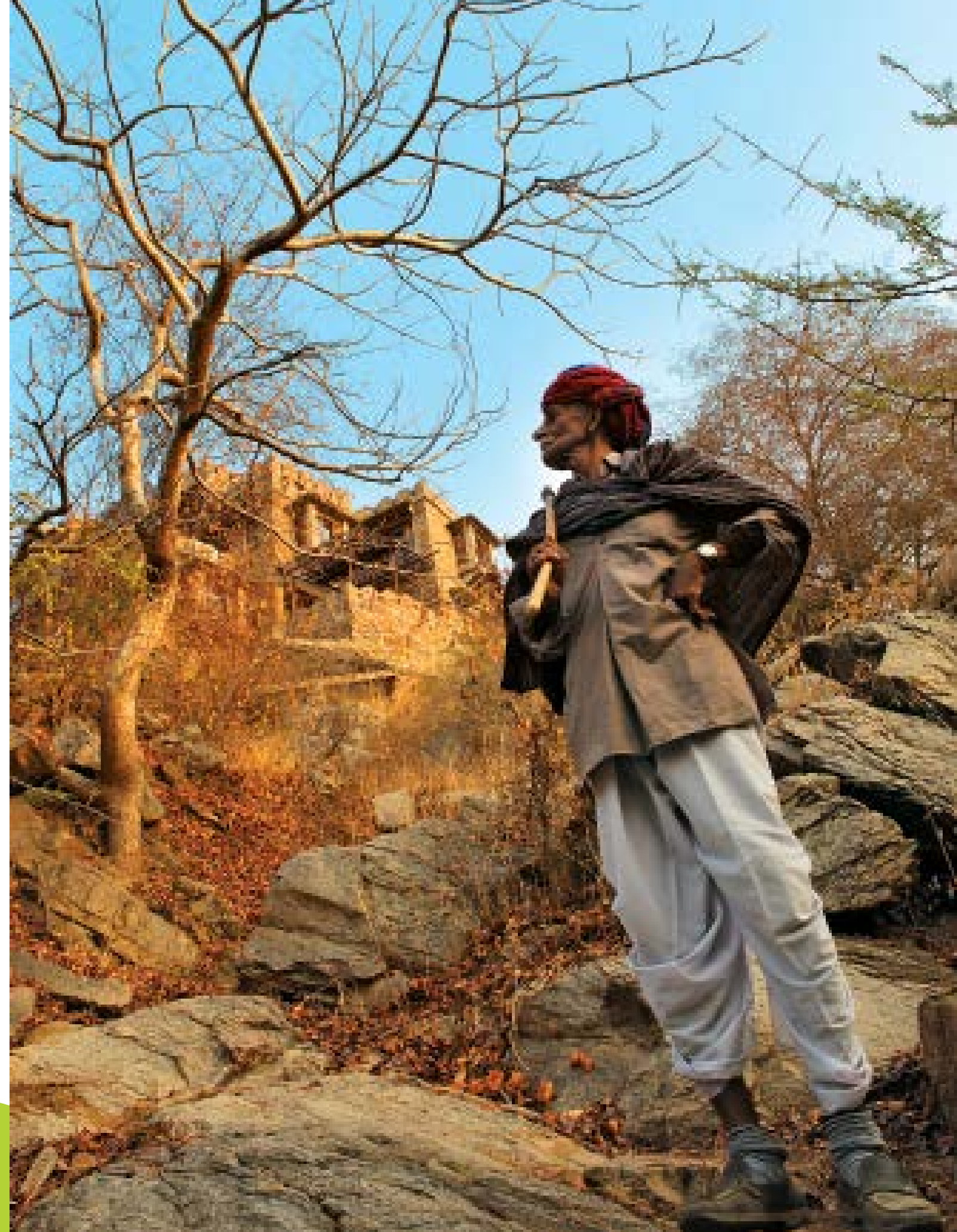
this one river supporting all of it. It's clearly unsustainable.

**All the refugee flows are also climate-driven... so many refugees going across the Mediterranean are from Darfur and Mali, where agriculture has collapsed due to climate impacts.** As an Indian tourist, would you be advised to go to Sicily or Lampedusa? I don't think so. Because what these events are also doing is creating huge amounts of racism inside Europe.

Lastly, indirectly driven by all these is an increase in terrorism. Of course, you can't say terrorism is climate-driven, but there is a certain aspect of it that is related to climate. One thing that we see about contemporary terrorism is that it's specifically targeting world tourism. Think of the Bataclan attack in Paris; the murders at the temples of Hatshepsut in Luxor; attacks on air transport in the Red Sea region. I think this is something we're going to see escalate in the years to come. After all, the Taj Mahal Hotel too was chosen because it's symbolic as a tourist centre.

If I were in the tourism industry, the things I would really think about are not just sustainability, but basics such as insurance—**how much longer is insurance going to be available to people in vulnerable conditions?** In Miami, for example, they have trouble insuring their hotels. This will be the case in many beach areas. The second thing I'd think about is safety. **How do you guarantee your guests' safety from extreme events such as wildfires?** Look at the way those are breaking out these days. They broke out in Indonesia to such a degree that it impacted Singapore, Malaysia, and brought tourism to a halt in those countries. So I think these are really the issues that one needs to confront. I'm sorry for the really grim picture, but once you really start looking into climate change you realise the impact you're looking at in the immediate future is really frightening and there's no way to make this look positive.

**If tourism were  
a country,  
it would be the **fifth  
largest** on a country-  
wise list of emissions.  
Tourism  
emissions are a very  
big part of the  
**global greenhouse  
gas emission** scenario**





## It is

important for us to create mechanisms through which destinations can move towards responsibility. We have to look at partnerships where businesses are encouraged, **peers encourage peers to adopt more responsible practices...**

An isolated attempt at practicing responsibility is just not enough.

Responsible tourism should be adopted by mainstream businesses

**DR VENU VASUDEVAN**

Principal Secretary,  
Kerala Tourism

## Overtourism

is what happens when tourism in destinations causes changes that are unacceptable, and when **guests and hosts begin to challenge the authenticity of the destination.** And that's an increasing problem.

I've seen it this year in Seoul, in Venice, in Barcelona, obviously, in the Welsh Uplands... It's happening in lots and lots of places. I think this is going to be one of the biggest challenges we have to face; people rebelling against being overvisited by too

many tourists

**DR HAROLD**

**GOODWIN**

Director, International Responsible Tourism Centre, MD, Responsible Tourism Partnership, & RT advisor, WTM, London

## We are

the people who make makers in India... We touch the lives of people who are not captured by the formal education system or vocational training system there. So people who are on the margins, who are left out from the ecosystem of the education. We want to bring them into the mainstream...

You [as responsible tourism practitioners] can **set up multiple skill-training centres...** We can also support in funding them. You can set up tourism-centric labs...

For responsible tourism, a lab is actually out there, down there [in the audience]

**ANAND MOHAN JHA**

National Skill Development Corporation, India

## Tourism

is not a holiday only. Today, **tourism is transforming my home, my backyard into a destination.** It is converting local communities into 'host communities'. Do I want to be a host? Do I have the right to say no?

We don't have a framework in this country, whether we call it responsible tourism or sustainable tourism... It is left to be interpreted and applied as per what people think suits their needs

**ANANYA DASGUPTA**

EQUATIONS, Karnataka

## Stories

are what people actually want when they are on a holiday... And **villages are the perfect ecosystem for story creation.** Villages offer so many platforms, be it food, landscapes, culture, biodiversity.

As practitioners who are involved in sustainable tourism or responsible tourism, we tend to be very overprotective of the communities that we work with

**INIR PINHEIRO**

Founder, Grassroutes Journeys, Maharashtra

## The main

thing was **keeping traditional heritage alive and unchanged...** We realised that sustainability can be achieved only through community participation, and preserving local culture, heritage and pride

**AMITAVA GHOSH**

Founder, Amadubi Rural Tourism, Jharkhand



## We don't believe

sustainability is a differentiator, it's a hygiene factor. And rather than being rewarded for adopting sustainable practices, **in the very, very near future, we think that we will be punished for not adopting sustainable practices.**

[Apart from the benefits for the local communities] if people working in hotels are not happy, not being paid their salaries and given the required living conditions, then customers aren't going to go back because they are not going to be happy... If you have an environmental policy, an economic policy, a social policy, then all of these go towards creating stronger hotels from an operational, performance and profit point of view

**GARRY WILSON**

Managing Director, Product & Purchasing, TUI Group

## At TripAdvisor,

we've done a couple of things recently that can be considered significant initiatives in the space of responsible tourism... Essentially, they are in the space of **promoting animal welfare standards in the global industry**, and the other set of initiatives is towards promoting sustainable accommodation, so we have a global programme that identifies and makes it easier for travellers to find accommodations that are practicing such tourism

**NIKHIL GANJU**

Country Manager,  
TripAdvisor

## In India,

frankly, I don't think the benchmark [for certification] is high enough. **You know there are grey areas... like water, for instance.** When you talk about areas where there are water shortages, shouldn't you talk to your members about swimming pools and formal gardens?

Wood collection is another thing, where it's illegal wood, so they're actually taking the wood from protected national parks and tiger reserves. And I think if people do that, they shouldn't be certified

**BELINDA WRIGHT**

Executive Director,  
Wildlife Protection Society of India  
(WPSI), and Proprietor, Kipling  
Camp, Madhya Pradesh

## We developed

something called the Kerala responsible tourism classification criteria, which is based on the global sustainable tourism criteria... Our tourism policy says that **we will now be linking all the incentives given to the accommodation sector based on responsible tourism classifications**, so that the industry will own it. Surprisingly, the industry is already owning it

**SAROOP ROY**

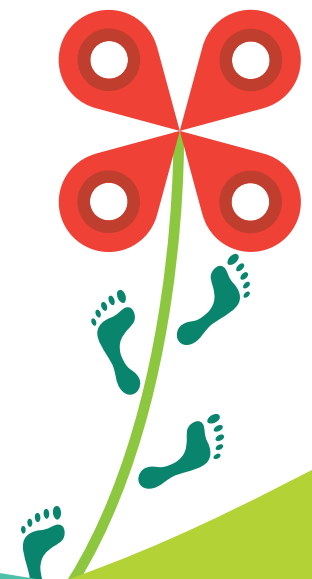
Assistant Professor, Kerala Institute of Tourism & Travel Studies  
(KIITS)

## We're

looking at cultural tourism, but the tourists only want to see certain aspects of culture, like the way people live, or farming. **But there's more to culture... It's a way of life.** And if we're only going to accept some aspects of culture and shun the rest, then I think tourism becomes a double-edged sword

**ISHITA KHANNA**

Founder, Spiti Ecosphere





### I would like

to see culture as a luxury, which you present within its whole context. I think that is what makes the whole package presentable. It's like the experience I've had when I organise a handicrafts haat. With the craftspeople working, demonstrating their skills, in the middle of a garden full of trees, I don't need fancy packaging. I can tell them to wrap their products in the local newspaper, but the whole atmosphere becomes the 'packaging'...

I think **we have to find a way of selling what we think are our negatives as positives** that are answers for tomorrow's world

**JAYA JAITLEY**

Founder and President, Dastkari Haat Samiti

### Kerala's

responsible tourism initiative is the result of **agitation by the local community against unethical and unscientific development of tourism...** Before starting the responsible tourism initiative, there was no link between the industry and the community. The industry was not ready to engage local community in the tourism sector.

**RUPESHKUMAR K**

State-level Responsible Tourism  
Coordinator, Kerala

### Last year,

7 lakh tourists generated 18 crore rupees of business for 328 families. What does this mean? It means that the next generation of farmers in these families are staying on the farm, they are getting interested in the farm, because after all, we want **to keep the farm in the family, and family in the farm**

**PANDURANG TAWARE**

Managing Director, Agri Tourism  
Development Company Pvt Ltd,  
Maharashtra

### The first thing

which we started, the problem that we worked on, was solar energy. Solar energy, because you can't have electricity everywhere in the jungles. So that was the first initiative we took, and **every property of the tourism board has got solar energy.** One or two properties which were started with 20 kilowatts, now have 100 kilowatts. All the resorts that we run, are manned by local people... like in Chitrakoot, we have the Dandami Maria people working with us

**SANJAY SINGH**

General Manager, Chhattisgarh  
Tourism Board

### Earlier,

we used to talk a lot about responsible tourism, and I realised I am actually pushing people away from my business. So I don't talk about it. **I talk about authentic experiences, I talk about cultural immersion...** In our marketing tools, we talk about meaningful experiences

**GOPINATH PARAYIL**

Founder, The Blue Yonder, Kerala



**We are making handmade paper out of elephant dung.** This venture supports our animals, environment and society. We are employing women from their doorsteps in the villages. We do not cut trees for paper making like regular paper mills. Mills are cutting around 467 trees for a tonne of paper. In this way, we are conserving forests as well as other natural resources

**VIJENDRA SHEKHAWAT**

Founder, Jaipur Elephant Paper, Rajasthan

### I think the best way

to 'package' [responsible tourism] is to use it as a means of providing education. These days, **travellers are looking for experiences clubbed with education.** You should be targeting your product not just at another traveller, but someone who is looking for experiences with learning

**CHIRAG MUNJANI**

Founder, Rural Pleasure

### Culture in itself

is not enough. We need to ensure that the **local people are also exposed to their own culture,** as much as we expose the tourists to it — that's when the entire experience becomes interesting

**CB RAMKUMAR**

Board Member, Global Sustainable Tourism Council, and Founder-MD, Our Native Village





# The digital black hole

*The internet can be a fickle, if friendly, means to an end. It changes the dos of digital marketing so frequently that 'keeping pace' becomes an entirely futile exercise—a Sisyphean task. And yet, there are a few things that responsible tourism practitioners can do—right now—to grow their businesses with the help of a few digital tools and lots of ingenuity*



TAKE 5

Tell a good story—storytelling is a powerful device on social media—and focus on building a **community of ambassadors** or virtual volunteers for your business. Newsletters may be old-fashioned, but they are still one of the most effective arrows in the quiver. WhatsApp is a good place to share them too. Yes, Instagram is quite likely to replace Facebook as the most popular social media site. Get on it. Make the most of it. Find the **hashtags** that are trending when you post—since the top hashtags keep changing every few hours. Pick the most popular travel hashtags—streamline by looking for travel in India or along the coast, or beach travel, and so on. Google is not the only **search engine**; in fact YouTube has a far larger reach in India right now. Everything from Instagram to Facebook are searchable too; use that to target potential customers.

## BATTLING POOR INTERNET CONNECTIVITY

For responsible tourism businesses at remote locations across India, internet connectivity and speed are major roadblocks. Often, running campaigns on social media and uploading videos become impossible. How does one get around it?

**Get someone based off-site**—at a location with better connectivity—to join the team or to volunteer for you. Let them manage your social media presence as far as possible. Yes, at times, the content may not be 'fresh' (because you sent it a month ago), or some of the things can be lost in translation when you're working with someone who is based elsewhere. But this way, your pages won't remain dormant for long spells.

**Connect with relevant bloggers** (see 'Getting the right support').

Encourage your guests to mention you on social media or to write blogs/reviews to get organic traction. **Build a community**—let your guests become the ambassadors of your work, your 'virtual volunteers'. Ask them to share your story. This is the best, most organic way of spreading the word virtually and otherwise.

**WhatsApp works even on weak connections. Create a group**—of guests who have visited you before and shared their contact details—and share newsletters with them on WhatsApp and email; even a **monthly newsletter** would work.

**Remember to reduce the size of your videos and images.**

## LOCATING THE RIGHT CUSTOMER ONLINE

In the vast unknown that is the digital universe, fishing for responsible tourists can be overwhelming. How can businesses—especially smaller businesses—reach out to such customers. Or should the focus be on creating such an audience, and not finding it?

**Know your product, and know your current and potential customer—create a persona for her/him. Take a cue from those following your page already and create ads for interest targeting. Most social media platforms offer refined options to target people in a certain age bracket, from a particular city or locality (like south Delhi), and with specific interests. So find prospective customers interested in travelling to Kashmir, or in hiking. Budgets can be minimal, even Rs1,500 a month is good to start with. Remember organic growth can be slower, but more effective than paid growth.**

Spend time studying say, the Advertiser Help Centre on Facebook. **Experiment**, play around with the combinations. There's always a 'spillover' (irrelevant impressions), but by spending a lot of money without thought or research, you run the risk of higher spillovers.

**Since everything—not just Google—is now a search engine, look for say, Tarkarli lake in Maharashtra, to spot all groups/clubs that have had conversations on it. Find the ones with big numbers: for example, 'Girls Love Travel' has 70,000 followers, others like the Himalayan Club have over a lakh! Join them. You may not be able to market a product, but share stories and photos. When you post something on groups on FB, members get notified—it's better than an update on your webpage.**

Sites like TripAdvisor don't allow you to share a product, but you can **post about a place** (monastery, museum, etc) or activity. ClearTrip Experiences now lets you list a weeklong or weekend activity that might pop up in a search for experiences around Mumbai or Delhi. AirBnB is expanding its footprint in India too.

## GETTING THE RIGHT SUPPORT

Even if you're familiar with the term 'influencer marketing', or have kept a tab on how travel bloggers—and there are so many in India now—are changing the rules of online communication, do you know how and who to reach out to? Should you even bother?

Apart from tapping resources in the mainstream media, and using one's own social media channels to communicate with an existing and potential audience, it might be worth your while to identify **travel bloggers** who appear to echo the values/ethos of your business/brand. If you can't afford to pay for the more established bloggers with larger followings and high SEO values, start with those lower in the value chain. But know that even the most successful bloggers may be willing to reconsider costs, if you offer a compelling story/pitch. They might be just as passionate about responsible tourism as you.

**If you like, through social media invite volunteers and interns—budding travel bloggers or photographers—to create content in the form of photo essays, videos...**

Whether you're looking for influencers, or the right kind of travellers or volunteers, it's important to **look at the entire funnel**—at the top is everyone who uses the internet and is interested in travel; next, those interested in travel but not necessarily looking for immersive culture experiences; and finally, those actually aware and interested in connecting with locals and exploring their culture. It's best to target people at the narrowest end. This also applies to social media influencers.

**Choose the right influencer. Do your homework. Figure out if they are a good fit in terms of style and profile of followers (demographic, interests). Ask as many questions as you like before you narrow down your choices.**

If you have the resources and/or the goodwill, **create a campaign** and a hashtag for it, and then engage 20-50 different influencers to use it.

# Certification: the big gap

*Responsible tourism... Whose responsibility is it anyway? Does the answer lie in a uniform, pan-Indian certification system? Is it even possible to create a watertight framework in a country as diverse and unpredictable as India? These are just some of the many questions that invariably punctuate conversations on the future of ethical and sustainable tourism in India. There are no easy answers, of course*



## FUNDAMENTAL ISSUES

India has no mandatory national policy framework or certification system dedicated to responsible tourism as yet. Considering the sheer size of our country and the largely disorganised nature of the industry, we must pause to reflect on a few key questions first

The process of penalisation for businesses that breach some of the existing laws are **not entirely transparent** either.

**Should the system be created by public or private stakeholders? If it is created by more than one private entity (because it can be a profitable business by itself—there are several global examples), will the competition help the industry?**

**Who will monitor the quality of auditing, and the frequency of repeat audits, to ensure that the standards are maintained year on year? Also, a sizeable number of responsible tourism outfits operate in remote locations.**

**Will such an audit have room for nuances? Will it be able to do more than say, star systems that don't make it immediately apparent if a hotel in a water-stressed area has the best water sustainability policies, especially if they have gardens and pools? Or if a wildlife lodge indirectly or directly encourages the sale of illegal wood, for instance?**

**Will it also address issues that are rarely discussed in our country—such as light pollution?**

## THE WAY FORWARD

Despite the roadblocks, most experts agree that it is imperative to set a national-level tourism strategy and policy. Once it is set, benefits can trickle down and support those who are trying to run their businesses responsibly at a local level

The **state governments and trade bodies** must further integrate sustainable measurement and management policies within their destinations.

**The laws and policies must be allowed to have enough teeth to be effective in the long run.**

Whether or not we eventually create a certification system/s that is equitable and acceptable to all the stakeholders, the need of the hour is to encourage **more transparent reporting**—by the owners of the properties and tour operations themselves.

**Journalists and travellers can also contribute... In the tourism industry, in order to consume the 'product', a tourist has to travel to the 'factory'.**

Therefore, he/she is closer to the 'producers' and 'workers', and can see the conditions they work in. It is very different, for example, in the garment industry, or in agriculture, where, the end consumer rarely sees the conditions of work of the people working in the industry. **This knowledge can be harnessed and used better, perhaps through alternative or parallel 'rating' systems that are closely monitored. In this age of information, crowdsourcing data is not new—it's about how you use and process it.**



# Overtourism—the big bad wolf!

*From one intrepid traveller to a busload of tourists... The distance between discovering a destination and overrunning it can be frightfully short. With the entire premise of responsible tourism hinging on showcasing and protecting local cultures, communities and ecology, success can be a slippery slope—threatening to irrevocably alter the idea of what is authentic both for the guests and the hosts*



## TACKLING THE PROBLEM OF PLENTY

With more tourists come more tourist dollars/rupees, along with more pressure on natural and manmade resources, more garbage, more money mindedness, more cultural damage. Hijacked by the requests of the most demanding tourists, often the traditional livelihood patterns change, and the local economy becomes completely dependent on tourism

India is all about big numbers, and domestic tourism is no different. Is **putting a cap on the number of tourists**—domestic or otherwise—a practical, future-forward solution?

**Should we rely on the local government alone to drive change? With so many private entrepreneurs making a living off tourism, it is only fair that they look for solutions together, create local pressure groups, and implement them as a matter of course.**

The problem is not always obvious or one-dimensional. Practitioners from Ladakh for instance, reported a steep rise in domestic tourism over the last few years, which also appears to have corresponded with the dip in the interest of inbound tourists. Some see it as a direct fallout of the arrival of packs of noisy, unthinking Indian customers. Others, including some international travellers, suspect it's a reflection on the growing money-mindedness of the hosts as well. It's probably a combination of both, and several other factors besides. A **long-term awareness campaign** for guests and hosts could be a good place to start reversing the damage. Experiments in a few Ladakhi villages, for instance—to protect the snow leopard, or to deal

with litter/garbage by placing dustbins and educating locals, including children—have reportedly seen considerable success so far.

**Don't discount the power of the individual.** A practitioner from Maharashtra cited an example of a hotel owner in Dapoli, which is known for 'majjaa tourism'—where groups of men/boys drive out from the nearest city for a weekend of binge drinking and noisy fun. The owner turned down all groups, except those with at least one woman in them—effectively only allowing families to board and lodge in his property. As word spread that his hotel was quieter than the rest, it began to do brisk business again. While his method may be considered somewhat radical, he led by example and inspired others to do so too. Not only does tourism often push the local community to transform their traditional livelihood patterns to become completely dependent on tourism, forces of commerce can also mutate the patterns of tourism. And practitioners can and must intervene.

Jost Krippendorf, who first came up with the concept of responsible tourism, pinned his hopes on "rebellious tourists and rebellious locals" to bring in change. Prohibitory or punitive measures/policies alone can't be the antidote to overtourism. The communal voice of dissent must be amplified too.

**As an industry, one must also eschew the promotion of popular destinations, or new tourism 'hotspots'.** Annual where-to-go lists of unexplored, virginal places—no matter how sustainable and authentic—defeat the very purpose of responsible tourism.

Micro-tourism, or exploring destinations within a short radius, or even neighbourhoods, could offer a rich experience—if only we'd look harder. These experiences can be enjoyed equally by domestic and international tourists as well as the local population, which may have taken it for granted, or discounted it, merely because it is accessible.



## Weekdays: no reservations

*How do we sell our weekday inventory? Why can't we make our weeks as busy as the weekends? If we had a penny for the number of times these questions were asked, we'd have enough to host yet another summit!*



### LOOKING FOR NEW MODELS

Six-day weeks and the work culture in this country can make it quite a challenge for tour operators and hotel/homestay owners to attract business during the week. That many of them operate at remote locations (making accessibility an issue), plus the seasonality of tourist traffic, make it harder still to balance the balance sheets. But some are trying new models and ideas...

It's early days yet, but GreenPeople from Uttarakhand have had some success with experimenting with a **Pay What You Like** model during the week. They don't offer any suggestive pricing because they believe it creates pressure to at least match that figure—although their website mentions the standard weekend tariff anyway. Originally used as a tool to determine the right price point for farm retreats in a particular market—a simple calculation of total collection divided by the number of guests—the model has apparently paid off for them (up to 70% growth in the weekdays). They do, however, vet visitors by asking them to fill out a questionnaire, share a valid ID and sign a terms and conditions form in advance.

**Taking a cue from other models in Bhuj, Jharkhand's Amadubi Rural Tourism Centre—an accommodation managed by the local tribes, using the community's existing social structure, including the headman, his deputy, the local priest and so on—they have set up small dairy and block printing units, among other co-ops to help tide over the low tourist weekdays/seasons. School and college groups are also encouraged to visit to fill up the weekday inventory.**

Grassroutes Journeys in Maharashtra also invites schools and colleges during lean periods. The organisation takes it a step further by including some **corporate teams as well**—so far a taboo in the responsible tourism

fraternity. They don't believe in **overprotecting communities** or driving away opportunities to generate income for the locals by turning away mainstream guests without even trying to open up the portfolio in intelligent and effective ways that they believe won't damage the existing social fabric of the villages. Gauging from their interaction with the Taj Group of Hotels, they learnt that only 25-30% of the inventory is bought by tourists, the rest is covered by MICE, conferences, incentive trips and events. They are working on creating balanced models.

They also realise that to generate this kind of B2B income, they need to make a sales push, and not rely on the marketing-led approach that they use to attract regular travellers. Since they work in rural districts, they find that **villagers are very resourceful and can adapt well to new models, if need be.**

**Grassroutes has also begun working on a local market-specific model for tourism spots. Since more and more tourists are travelling from small towns across India—with budgets that may be as little as Rs200 per night for stay—they must also be directed towards village tourism, especially near popular tourist spots, to create new markets and volume through the year. Will it make the communities more vulnerable to cultural corruption though? It will depend on the strength of the models, and checks and balances.**

The seasonality of a place—when the regular tourists have 'been there and done that' and are looking for newer experiences—is often the impetus to expand operations. This might not entirely address the weekday slump, but the novelty may be a great incentive for some to take a week off from work. Grassroutes chose to also expand for similar reasons with the help of the **existing NGO networks** in Maharashtra. They also relied on the residents of the first few villages they worked in to become **mastertrainers**, who in turn could train people at the new locations using their experience in rural tourism so far; villagers trust other villagers more quickly than they do city-bred operators, no matter how well meaning. This also creates better systems within a limited time frame. Using the **catchment areas around the main cities** of Mumbai and Pune to set up a network of villages also addressed proximity, and therefore, weekday occupancy, issues. Tapping the areas close to famous tourist sites was another well considered move.



# Sustainability— the way forward

*Is sustainable tourism an oxymoron? With the airlines and cruise liners yet to find alternative fuels, and tourism continuing to be the fifth-largest contributor of global emissions—75% from transport, 40% of which is contributed by aviation—how can we reverse the damage, or limit it?*



## GO LOCAL—TRULY!

With the impact of climate change and overtourism intensifying, there might come a time when the air ticket prices will see a sharp rise to reflect the real environmental costs of flying, and there may even be a kind of air travel rationing, according to author Amitav Ghosh

This might lead to a trend that is already taking root in some parts of the world: The trend of travelling shorter distances, or better still, enjoying one's own immediate environment. A sort of **neighbourhood tourism** that leads you discover what you may have missed earlier, instead of burning millions of carbon miles in search of offbeat destinations that may or may not be responsible. The Enjoy Every Minute campaign by Visit England, for instance, drew attention to the fact that the local commuter, the domestic tourist and the international tourists all have access to the same experiences—it's up to the locals to explore and engage with them. Many have also created opportunities to visit and absorb the culture in areas that have a significant migrant population; to encourage locals to seek the 'exotic' at their own doorstep.

**Travellers should also be encouraged and incentivised to choose rail transport and sailing over other means of transport, whenever possible—especially in countries like India, which have a vast rail network and a long, beautiful coastline.**

## THE HYGIENE FACTOR

Scale makes a difference too. If sustainability is a hygiene factor and not a differentiator for all hotels across price categories, as one of our international delegates suggested, it could lead to competitiveness of the responsible kind

Eventually, hotels of all sizes/price points should feel obliged to have **fewer keys**, apart from a strong social, economic and environmental policy. In TUI Group's Garry Wilson's experience, hotels that showcase world-class sustainability have higher customer and staff satisfaction, and repeat rates.

**Luxury usually means more emissions. So whether through policies/laws or market forces—since well-heeled, evolved travellers will expect sustainability—luxury hotels and travel operators will have to be made more accountable. The days of the 10 cards around the room—to not wash towels or take shorter showers—are long gone. It should now be part of the DNA of an establishment.**

**Technology** is the handmaiden of sustainability, and properties, especially those in the luxury bracket ought to adopt its best, most unobtrusive yet effective examples. Think sustainable shower-fittings that use less water without altering the experience of a rainshower, or sensors to turn off ACs when they detect no human movement in the room.

**Often, visitors are accepting of the changes you've already incorporated. Consumers today are used to receiving information of all kinds at say, grocery stores, and on digital devices, so they expect to know where the food has been sourced from and what the work culture is like 'below deck'.**



# Connecting with the community

*The words conflict and community are never too far from each other. And no matter how noble the intentions are, and how responsible a business plan is, if the community doesn't put its weight behind it, no enterprise can hope to succeed. Is there an easy formula to foster harmony? Not really. And every community is different. But here's what we gleaned from the experiences of some practitioners.*



## BRICK BY BRICK

What are the first few steps for setting up a new destination? How does one co-create a product and grow together with the community? How does one encourage ownership and pride?

The first bit of advice is to **rely on the existing formal and informal structures** within the community. To reach out to the members of the *gram sabha* or village council, for instance, and seek their opinion on everything from designing trips to determining the extent of tourism, how to dispose waste, and payment rates. The idea is to foster a **sense of ownership right from the start**, while tapping local knowledge and networks. In some situations (when local body leaders are too set in their ways, for example), it might serve to employ the same model but with influential members of the community who have specific strengths driving it, rather than the members of the local bodies.

**It can be useful to tap the area's NGO network.** Their experience, goodwill and knowledge about the strengths and shortcomings of the community can help prevent typical teething troubles.

**Plan for inconsistencies in human resources** as these are inevitable given the demands of rural life. With seasonal needs like harvests and festivals, and personal agendas like weddings, it can be a challenge to ensure that there's a reliable workforce available to take care of the tourists whenever they arrive. Grassroutes Journeys borrowed the principles of an NGO they were working with, and set up

collectives, where individuals were rostered as housekeepers, guides, cooks, and so on. When one person is not available, somebody else on the roster steps in.

**At the risk of endorsing stereotypes, many practitioners agree that women and youth tend to be more enterprising.** In Kerala, women who started earning through Blue Yonder tours faced less domestic abuse. Thanks to private fellowships and the extra income generated through tourism, the younger generation in the villages is also reconsidering learning and practising traditional crafts.

Focus on fostering pride and repairing the self-esteem of villagers, not only to stop migration but to also work towards reverse migration. Celebration is a powerful tool in conservation—celebrate and safeguard local culture, crafts, languages, heirloom crops, biodiversity, and **knowledge systems**, which touch upon everything from medicinal plants and traditional architecture to predicting or managing natural disasters. Highlight the most unique aspects of a culture—like the Creole Portuguese, a mix of Hindi, Marathi and Portuguese, that a few households in Korlai, Maharashtra, still speak in.

**Most communities are inherently hospitable.** All they really need, if at all, is a little refinement in the way they showcase their way of life and culture to city-bred visitors, and perhaps, a few pointers on hospitality and hygiene-related expectations of travellers. Interventions should be minor, and not too many.

It's advisable not to rush to identify and solve the problems of a community without taking the time to **understand the nature and extent of an issue**. This results in innovative solutions: Hide Out in Maharashtra, for instance, created a campaign called "The Bicycle Project"—they collected and repaired bicycles that were lying unused in city homes, and gave those to village children who would otherwise walk 7-10km to school every day.







Winners of the first Indian Responsible Tourism Awards, who were chosen after a long, arduous process by 13 eminent members of our jury.

# Indian Responsible Tourism Awards 2016



# Indian Responsible Tourism Awards 2016

THIS year, we also gave away the first Indian Responsible Tourism Awards (IRTA), in association with the World Responsible Tourism Awards (WRTA) at the World Travel Market (WTM), London. Founded in 2004 by Responsible Travel, the WRTA has established itself as a global touchstone of responsible tourism. It has chapters in Ireland, Africa, and now, in India. In keeping with the international standards, the judging process for IRTA was intensive and rigorous, and spread over months... And the winners were chosen by a formidable jury of not 1 or 2, but 13 experts!

## THE JURY



**Dr HAROLD  
Goodwin**

(CHAIR OF THE PANEL),  
DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL  
CENTRE FOR RESPONSIBLE  
TOURISM; MD, RESPONSIBLE  
TOURISM PARTNERSHIP, AND  
RT ADVISOR, WTM LONDON



**AKHIL  
Kapoor,**

CONVIVUM LEADER,  
SLOW FOOD INDIA  
(DELHI CHAPTER)



**ANANDA  
Banerjee**

AUTHOR AND  
AWARD-WINNING WILDLIFE  
CONSERVATION JOURNALIST



**CB  
Ramkumar**

BOARD MEMBER, GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE  
TOURISM COUNCIL, AND FOUNDER-MD,  
OUR NATIVE VILLAGE



**JAYA  
Jaitly**

FOUNDER-PRESIDENT,  
DASTKARI HAAT SAMITI



**SHEEMA  
Mookherjee**

FORMER PUBLISHER LONELY  
PLANET (INDIA), AND PROPRIETOR,  
SALBAN — THE KANHA HOMESTAY



**SUMAN  
Billa**

JOINT SECRETARY,  
MINISTRY OF TOURISM



**AMAN  
Nath,**

FOUNDER-CHAIRMAN,  
NEEMRANA HOTELS



**BELINDA  
Wright**

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, WILDLIFE  
PROTECTION SOCIETY OF INDIA (WPSI)  
AND PROPRIETOR, KIPLING CAMP



**EMMA  
Horne**

FOUNDER,  
EMMA HORNE TRAVEL



**RATISH  
Nanda**

PROJECTS DIRECTOR,  
AGA KHAN TRUST FOR  
CULTURE, INDIA



**STEVE  
Borgia**

HONORARY PRESIDENT,  
ECO-TOURISM SOCIETY  
OF INDIA



**Dr VENU  
Vasudevan**

PRINCIPLE SECRETARY,  
KERALA TOURISM

## THE CRITERIA

THE ambition of the Awards is to **surprise and inspire the tourism industry and tourists** by highlighting what can be achieved with responsible tourism. We also want to challenge the sector, the competitors and the winners to do more—competition can drive the adoption of better practices. The judging criteria are common across the whole family of Awards.

### QUANTIFYING ACHIEVEMENTS

- Quantification is a priority
- Also, to look for clear methodologies for measurement and improvement

### BEING A GOOD INFLUENCE

- Must do good work themselves and use their influence to ensure that their suppliers do so too

### PREVIOUS WINNERS

- Have real improvements on previous years been made?
- Progress is essential to ensure the Awards are dynamic

### NEW AND INNOVATIVE

- Is there genuinely a new approach or something different?
- Does it stand out from the crowd?

### REAL IMPACT ON POVERTY REDUCTION

- Ensure better quality of life overall
- Linkages with community members

### SUSTAINABILITY OF ENTERPRISE/INITIATIVE

- Longevity and sustainability of the project
- Replicability

### CUSTOMER SERVICE EXPERIENCE

- Delivers excellent customer service, with educational opportunities to learn about the destination, its people and the local environment
- Responsible tourism ethos and achievements communicated clearly, and easily accessible via website and social media channels

### REFERENCES

- Minimum two independent references
- Gives evidence in support of an application for a specific category
- Is written by a range of credible referees
- Vary in length



## THE WINNERS

### OVERALL WINNERS

Snow Leopard Conservancy — India Trust  
Planet Abled

### BEST RESPONSIBLE TOURISM PROPERTY

**GOLD:** Farm of Happiness

**SILVER:** Dewalokam

**SILVER:** Atali Ganga

### BEST CONTRIBUTION TO WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

**GOLD:** Snow Leopard Conservancy —  
India Trust

**SILVER:** Madras Crocodile Bank Trust &  
Centre for Herpetology

### BEST FOR CULTURAL IMMERSION

**GOLD:** The Blue Yonder

**SILVER:** Rural Pleasure

### BEST COMMUNITY-BASED HOMESTAY PROJECT

**GOLD:** Biksthang Heritage Farmhouse

**SILVER:** Kabani Community Tourism &  
Service

**SILVER:** Daragaon Village Retreat  
(Gurung Homestay)

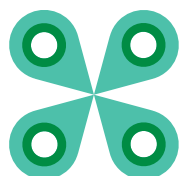
### BEST INNOVATION BY A TOUR OPERATOR

**GOLD:** Planet Abled

**SILVER:** Grassroutes Journeys

### BEST BUILT-HERITAGE CONSERVATION

**GOLD:** Arco Iris



## Best RESPONSIBLE TOURISM PROPERTY

### GOLD

**Farm of Happiness**

[www.farmofhappiness.com](http://www.farmofhappiness.com)

Farm of Happiness is a homestay on a 20-acre organic farm. Tourism is an additional revenue stream, and a way to draw attention and some glamour to agriculture. A stay at the farm gives guests an authentic taste of rural life, and serves as an introduction to the concepts of natural farming and eating consciously. The judges were impressed by the way in which the ethic of responsibility informs all practices at the property, and by its impact on urban and local youth, who see a more promising future in agritourism and organic farming. The farm's organic practices, traditional structure, and focus on local cuisine are all steps towards using tourism to encourage locals and tourists alike to be guardians of their environment and culture.

## Best RESPONSIBLE TOURISM PROPERTY

### SILVER

**Dewalokam**

[www.dewalokam.in](http://www.dewalokam.in)

Dewalokam is an organic, self-reliant farm in the Idukki district, which also offers interactions with the local community. The staff here — 15 men and 10 women employed directly, and just as many employed indirectly — belong to the village, which benefits from the enterprise. For a relatively small, family run property, it ticks all the big boxes, such as equitable employment, gender balance, sustainability, and promotion of local food and culture. With consistently good feedback, at Dewalokam the emphasis is not on what guests want, but on what it can provide as a matter of course.

## Best RESPONSIBLE TOURISM PROPERTY

### SILVER

**Atali Ganga**

[www.ataliganga.com](http://www.ataliganga.com)

The Aqua Terra Alternative Lifestyle Initiative or ATALI Ganga, near Rishikesh, combines smart accommodation with safe adventure. A viable model built in an overstretched, touristy area, it sources locally, minimises water use, carefully manages waste, contributes to local schools, and provides guests with pre-arrival guidelines. Built using local stones, Atali leads by example and its impact on the surrounding ecology is impressive, especially in the light of the new rafting and camping policies in the state.

## Best CONTRIBUTION TO WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

### GOLD & JOINT OVERALL WINNER

**Snow Leopard Conservancy—India Trust**

[www.snowleopardindia.org](http://www.snowleopardindia.org)

The Snow Leopard Conservancy—India Trust works to protect (among other animals) the snow leopard—a globally endangered species with only 200 to 600 individuals left in the higher reaches of the Himalayas. The judges were impressed by the conservancy's Himalayan Homestay initiative, which creates livelihoods for local people, offsetting and compensating livestock losses, increasing the stake of local people in conserving wildlife through wildlife tourism, reducing human wildlife conflict, and helping reverse a centuries old tradition of hunting snow leopards and wolves. Since 2002, over 130 families have been trained to offer 165 homestays in 40 villages across Ladakh—10 per cent of all homestay income is invested in village conservation. The Trust has sought to maintain traditional Ladakhi values, by housing guests in existing traditional rooms and serving Ladakhi food. The model is being considered for replication in five countries.

## Best CONTRIBUTION TO WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

### SILVER

**Madras Crocodile Bank Trust & Centre  
for Herpetology**

[www.madrascrocodilebank.org](http://www.madrascrocodilebank.org)

Chennai's MCBT celebrates its 40th anniversary this year, and for most of those 40 years, it has played a crucial role in raising awareness and conserving reptiles and amphibians, including crocodiles and snakes. It has worked with snake catchers of the Irula tribe, and its anti-venom research has been crucial in India where several people are affected by snakebites. Although its reptile park in Chennai is a crucial source of funds, the MCBT's research footprints can be found in more than one region—including central India, the Western Ghats, and the Andaman and Nicobar islands.

## Best CULTURAL IMMERSION

### GOLD

**The Blue Yonder**

[www.theblueyonder.com](http://www.theblueyonder.com)

The Blue Yonder started in 2004 with the goal of conserving and promoting the River Nila in Kerala. They used tourism to solve an existing problem, highlighting the area's rich cultural heritage to draw visitors. They celebrated the river, enhancing local pride in it, and helped create sustainable livelihoods—not entirely dependent on tourism—to check migration, revive crafts and cultural activities. For instance, a musical trail that they started 12 years ago with four beneficiaries, now supports about 850 students and 15 teachers. Although the Nila has been Blue Yonder's focal point, its footprints can be found across India and its neighbouring countries. The travel experiences offered by them are developed through community consultation and co-creation, and are both replicable and scalable.

## Best CULTURAL IMMERSION

### SILVER

**Rural Pleasure**

[www.ruralpleasure.com](http://www.ruralpleasure.com)

Rural Pleasure is a social enterprise primarily operating in southern Gujarat, where tourism is still finding its feet. The outfit encourages visitors to participate in the chores of villagers, thus gaining insight into their lives. Villagers have gained alternative sources of income in providing lodging and board, guiding visitors, housekeeping, performances by local artists, and the sale of art, craft, and agricultural produce. Warli art was on a decline in the Dang district, but now many young people find value in practicing it. Although Rural Pleasure only operates in a single state and its numbers are humble—seven houses have been decorated with Warli art, about 750 travellers have been immersed in cultural activity, and the tribes have earned close to Rs98,000—the outfit is reaching out to otherwise untouched communities and attempting to highlight tribal culture sensitively.



*Best*  
COMMUNITY-BASED  
HOMESTAY PROJECT

**GOLD**  
**Biksthang Heritage Farmhouse**

[www.biksthang.com](http://www.biksthang.com)

Biksthang is an ancestral 18th-century house, which has been developed by the family into a 'destination', bringing tourists to a relatively remote and undeveloped village. The aim is to preserve the legacy, restore the dying agricultural heritage and give visitors a genuinely authentic experience of the rich culture, tradition, history and cuisine of west Sikkim. Biksthang is leveraging the cultural assets of the village and the countryside to create sustainable livelihoods through local sourcing for the homestay, handicraft sales to tourists, guiding and transport services. The ambition is to encourage young people to stay in the village and to see that there are opportunities for them when they return—much like the owner of Biksthang, Deyki Gyatso. This is a fine example of an individual attempting to affect real change.

*Best*  
COMMUNITY-BASED  
HOMESTAY PROJECT

**SILVER**  
**Kabani Community Tourism**

[www.kabanitour.com](http://www.kabanitour.com)

Since 2005, Kabani Community Tourism and Services has been promoting a model that benefits local communities and reduces the negative impact of tourism. The Kerala based non-profit association promoted community tourism initiatives to create additional incomes for farmers to help reduce farmer suicides. The judges were impressed by the way in which Kabani has worked with farmers, fisher folk, and women entrepreneurs to create B&Bs in eight villages, involving 450 villagers. They have understood and utilised the local panchayat system to their advantage.

*Best*  
COMMUNITY-BASED  
HOMESTAY PROJECT

**SILVER**  
**Daragaon Village Retreat,  
Gurung Homestay**

[www.sikkimvillagehomestay.com](http://www.sikkimvillagehomestay.com)

Daragaon is a family run homestay with seven rooms in a relatively remote Sikkimese village called Darap—home to the Limbu people, originally from Tibet. The judges were impressed by the way in which the opening of this homestay, which offers rural and birdwatching experiences, has resulted in the formation of an association and spawned more locally owned homestays. This has created additional income for the village, raised living standards, and inspired local youth to reconsider farming as a profession.

*Best*  
BUILT HERITAGE  
CONSERVATION

**GOLD**  
**Arco Iris**

[www.arcoiris.in](http://www.arcoiris.in)

Arco Iris is a 200-year-old colonial Portuguese manor that was abandoned for nearly 40 years until it was restored by a family from Bengaluru. Arco Iris highlights the best of Goa's rural, agrarian side, showing visitors sights away from the overstretched, oft-visited beaches. The judges were impressed by the way the house was restored to create a sustainable boutique homestay. The restoration was done sensitively, using local knowledge and materials. The family lives in house and welcomes guests personally, instead of using the property as a holiday home.

*Best*  
INNOVATION BY A TOUR  
OPERATOR

**GOLD & JOINT  
OVERALL WINNER**

**Planet Abled**

[www.planetabled.com](http://www.planetabled.com)

Planet Abled organises trips for mixed groups of people facing a range of challenges, and enables them to travel with friends and family. They work to provide mainstream itineraries and avoid the ghettoisation of travel for specially abled travellers.

They spread awareness of this inclusive tourism amongst volunteers who then become ambassadors for inclusion and accessibility in their respective communities. The organisation also discourages china doll treatment and differential pricing for its patrons. Although they mostly operate in north India, their model is replicable and scalable. It's early days yet for accessible holidays in India, therefore the judges felt that such inclusive, mixed group, equitable trips are truly innovative.

*Best*  
INNOVATION BY A TOUR  
OPERATOR

**SILVER**  
**Grassroutes Journeys**

[www.grassroutes.co.in](http://www.grassroutes.co.in)

Grassroutes Journeys offers off-the-grid, rustic, and authentic holidays with rural communities and tribes. Their objective is to reduce rural migration to cities, conserve biodiversity, revive local arts and craft, and change the aspirations of both villagers and guests. They work with 500 families in 10 villages and report a 30 per cent increase in average annual household income for those families. They work with simple, replicable and innovative concepts, such as firefly tours and rice harvesting tours.



Handcrafted by the Tambat metal artisans of Maharashtra and hand-painted by Patachitra artists from West Bengal, the award was made with the help of the All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association (AIACA), New Delhi





First: the good news. Globally, sustainability is a growing concern—even for large, mainstream tourism companies. It contributes as much as **40% to the bottom line of businesses in some markets of Europe**. Tourists have begun to expect and demand the basics in terms of natural resource management and carbon offsets. Towel tent cards in bathrooms don't really count anymore.

Many are experimenting with pricing, even opting for **Pay As You Like** models—rarely encouraged in India before.

**Newsletters** are still relevant. They are best disseminated through personal messengers like WhatsApp, which work well even in remote areas with patchy internet connections.

It is widely acknowledged now that waste management is a Sisyphean task, an oxymoron. **Reducing waste** is the only way forward. It is imperative for private stakeholders to work with other players and local authorities to ensure that the destination, and not just their properties, is dealing with waste wisely.

With less time to spare for holidays, there's an **experience inflation**. Travellers want more out of shorter breaks—richer experiences and better service.

Largely ignored so far, private and public stakeholders are beginning to combine forces to facilitate **accessible travel** in India.

Smaller operators and properties are **targeting interest groups** on social media, trying to harness the influence of **social influencers** and building a community of **virtual volunteers** online to attract the right kind of customers without spending a king's ransom on advertising.

Conservationists are revisiting the option of putting **a cap on tourist numbers in ecologically fragile areas**, or further reducing the number of jeeps used for safaris. **Walking safaris** are back in vogue. This is crucial also because there is increasing concern over the use of elephants for safaris (among others)—given the dubious processes involved in taming and maintaining them.

**Neighbourhood tourism** and **micro-travel** within a certain radius (aka burning fewer carbon miles) is on the rise. The idea is to encourage everyone to engage more deeply and intimately with their immediate surroundings, even in urban spaces. Many operators are focusing on smaller areas and micro-cultures to help travellers see the larger picture, to help them experience the local way of life as is.

Travel operators are now attempting to create responsible experiences that even **corporate tourists** might enjoy; once considered a taboo. This is another step towards mainstreaming, albeit a tricky one.

Consistent, equitable socio-economic growth for the community cannot be achieved by generating low-skilled jobs alone. If private and public stakeholders want their businesses to survive longer and the destination to thrive, they have to **work towards solving local employment issues**.

Although **voluntourism** has lost some of its charm in recent years—thanks to the rise of fly-by-night operators who offered superficial experiences and easy-to-earn certificates—it appears to be reclaiming its position now as a serious tool for learning and exchanging ideas.

Both in urban and rural settings, operators often appear to be designing tours around a single skill.

Although the term 'responsible tourism' has greater currency now than ever before, smarter businesses/entrepreneurs are steering clear of it. To avoid intimidating or pushing away travellers, especially those who are opting for such holidays for the first time, they are **designing their communication to reflect the value of immersive experiences**, instead of harping on responsibility towards community, culture and environment.

The call to shift the focus from star attractions—think tigers, snow leopards, rhinos or great Indian bustards—to other species in the forests, has reached its crescendo. Not only should a traveller be prompted to spot and appreciate birds, insects and smaller mammals, but also be encouraged to **value experience over numbers or species**.

Several hotel owners are beginning to see the advantage of interacting and learning from each other. **Cross-pollination, and not cannibalisation, ought to be encouraged.**

It is imperative now to **review definitions and guidelines for categories such as homestays and heritage, and create policy structures tailored specifically for them**. Is it a homestay if the hosts don't share the premises, for instance? Is it a heritage property if it was built recently, even if it's faithful to the architectural styles and traditions from a certain period in history?

Storytelling is encouraged. Moralising is not.

**Questionable practices by photographers**, especially in national parks and sanctuaries, are forcing authorities to consider implementing new rules to protect animals, especially in the nesting or mating season.

Some industry leaders and experts believe that new disruptive models are being created as we speak. The future is yours if you can work towards **removing as many (spatial) boundaries** as possible between local communities and travellers, wildlife and travellers, without significantly altering the local socio-cultural or ecological fabric.

# Onwards and upwards

*This year, we have a simple wish: to learn more and share more with the community. Although our annual Summit is a fantastic crucible of ideas and a great way to meet the others from the fraternity, we realise that we still have a long, exciting and challenging journey ahead.*

## SUMMIT

At the Responsible Tourism Summit 2018, we hope to connect with and learn from the best practitioners across South Asia—from Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar and Maldives, among others.

## WEBSITE

We are giving [responsibletourismindia.com](http://responsibletourismindia.com) a fresh, new look to make it easier for the best Indian operators/accommodations in the responsible tourism space to attract evolved travellers. It will help end-users find a diverse pool of experiences across India to choose from. The website will also be the primary vehicle for collecting and disseminating knowledge.

## AWARDS

We hope to continue to attract the best and the brightest in this field for the Indian Responsible Tourism Awards next year. Like an expert pointed out at the Summit in 2017: Getting an award is not about immodesty, but about “putting a light in the stairwell”. The world needs to know about Indian changemakers who are working against all odds in remote areas to make tourism a less despised word, and industry.

## CAMPAIGNS

To educate travellers who may not be familiar with responsible tourism through our print and digital channels. To tell them that it's easy, fun, and for everyone.



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