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STAYING AHEAD

Mapping the future of travel



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Outlook Responsible Tourism Summit & Awards 2018

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India & South Asia

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The Agenda Summit 2018



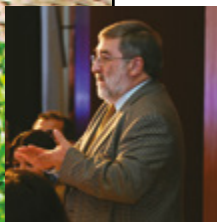
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Surmandal Artist*



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& the Global Environment,
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Responsible Tourism, and
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CEO, Outlook

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WHAT REALLY COUNTS

According to UNWTO, with

11% growth

in arrivals in South Asia (2017), it's the fastest growing sub-region in the world

In the Asia-Pacific region, **80%** of the travel is intra-regional

Tourism currently accounts for

1 in 11 jobs

worldwide. By 2027, it will be 1 in 9 jobs

According to a green economy report by the UNWTO, **52%** are more likely to choose a travel company that is environment-friendly, has good working conditions and supports local charities

The accessible travel market is valued at

\$120 billion worldwide

The new National Tourism Policy in India lays out an important goal, which is to increase the world tourists arrivals in the country from 0.7% to 1% by 2020 and

2% by 2025

India has over **400 million** millennials, many of whom are tech-savvy and travelling more and more every year



KEY WORDS

The focus of our entire strategy [for creating new tourism products in Kerala] was that whatever we do, we'll do it in keeping with the carrying capacity, and we'll not allow any construction to be higher than a coconut tree... We demonstrated that high value tourism, not mass tourism, gives higher returns, and what high value tourists want is great experiences, which are responsible in nature.

Amitabh Kant
CEO, Niti Aayog

Our motto is 'growth through quality', 'profit through quality', and the reason we're taking more time to draw up our policy is that we want to have all the stakeholders on board. Our emphasis is on small initiatives instead of huge tourism projects. Keep it small — eco-stays, farmstays homestays, jungle lodges, etc, the kind where you don't necessarily have 5,000 people coming into the property through the year; that's a lot of wear and tear. So keep it small, but make more of them, to go for the volumes.

Atri Bhattacharya
Principal Secretary, Home & Hill Affairs, & Tourism, West Bengal

The agenda has broadened in the recent years to cover things like child protection, orphanages and animal welfare. These are not traditionally the kind of things that environmentalists have been concerned about, but some of the biggest negative impacts of tourism can be seen in those social and ethical areas. We're beginning to see progress on that in some source markets.

Dr. Harold Goodwin
Director, International Centre for Responsible Tourism; & Emeritus Professor, Manchester Metropolitan University

I believe responsible tourism now needs to be converted into a movement [in India], which can become as big as some of the other initiatives undertaken by the government of India, such as the Swachh Bharat Abhiyan. I think that's what we all need to work towards.

Indranil Roy
CEO, Outlook Group

The UN Sustainable Development Goals is the next step forward from the Millennium Development Goals. They say they are based on accountability, monitoring and evaluation. To reach these goals, every business regardless of size, has to monitor their impacts. Without that, these goals won't be reached, so it's everybody's responsibility to monitor impact... It's the next step in sustainability.

Jenefer Bobbin
Founder, Yardstick, UK

More and more, the discerning traveller is looking for an experience that's not just material. It's clear now that luxury [travel] is changing its definition. Luxury could be anything: if you're in a hot country, rain or snow could be luxury; if you're from England, the sun could be a luxury. In a way, it's semantics. But beyond that, real changes are taking place, and it's up to us to provide that opportunity to those who would normally look just for the comforts, to connect more and appreciate more. It's now about reconnecting people who have urban lives to things that are there in nature.

Joanna van Gruisen
Proprietor, Sarai at Toria, Madhya Pradesh

We need to create more destinations! 65% of foreign travellers only visit six ASI monuments (I'm quoting data I've received from the industry.) We have about 3,000 monuments, of which at least 120 are equally deserving to be explored. Why do people only go to six? Why do certain destinations get tourists beyond their carrying capacity, while others are not seen at all? Is it a lack of awareness?

Is our promotion only focused on certain products? Or is the industry just promoting traditional products? Or is infrastructure and connectivity a problem? [Therefore,] 'Adopt a Heritage' is an important initiative, where we're requesting the private sector to partner with the government (central or state) and ASI to keep our heritage intact by looking after aspects such as cleanliness, signage, information... We're not expecting any money from it.

Meenakshi Sharma
Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India

The UNWTO data are strictly international statistics. So all the growth trends and statistics that are presented to you are for people who are travelling across borders. Now that does not include domestic tourism, and when you are talking about how do we manage destinations, you have to include domestic numbers, and those are not published in any one place.

Megan Epler Wood
Director, International Sustainable Tourism Initiative, Centre for Health & the Global Environment, Harvard University

Mass tourism is killing Leh. Imagine going from 2,000 to 20,000, and suddenly around 2010, to 2,00,000 people in a 5 sq km radius, concentrated in five summer months... We're now trying to take tourism beyond summer and beyond Leh to the village homes of Amalehs (mothers) trained to receive visitors, so both guests and hosts have an amazing experience. This will increase the carrying capacity from a 5 sq km town to the 45,000 sq km of Ladakh. Turns out, we can absorb 5,00,000 [tourists] more and the experience can still be very meaningful.

Sonam Wangchuk
Award-winning Innovator, & Founder of The Ice Stupa Project, Ladakh





PEOPLE FIRST

Involving the community

Tourism is about partnerships and complex chains of supply. In other words, it's about people and communities. So, anyone who hopes to build a successful, sustainable model must invest in both natural and social capital, which is not about doling out incentives alone. It's about sharing fundamental values with everyone around you and working towards a common goal.

The basics

Breaking ground

- As we know, a lot hinges on the location of a tourism project. Experts say — whether it's a community-based initiative, or a small, independent accommodation — it's a good idea to concentrate on **developing rural tourism in villages within the catchment area of major destinations**; ideally, in a 20-30km radius.
- Tourism mapping, especially in the early stages, is crucial. Figuring out what the main attractions and other additional activities could be in each village is the first step. Often a community is blind to its own assets and everyday charm, and it takes them for granted until travellers begin to value them. Identifying these strengths and reminding locals that all they need to do is take pride in what they already have, that **they are not expected to do anything 'extra' to attract guests**, can make it easier for them to decide if they want to be a host community to begin with.
- If they are open to hosting travellers, they should be motivated and mobilised, and the best way to do that is to show them how the benefits will be shared among them, **how duties will be rotated, how the entire village can profit from it**, and so on.

Creating a favourable ecosystem for all

- Although it may take a lot more effort and time, it's crucial to **involve the entire village or neighbourhood**, and not just a handful of families. Depending on their skills, different parts of the community can contribute in different ways.
- While some practitioners continue to support the idea of **working closely with local panchayats and tapping into the NGO network**, others report that they have had bad experiences with say, village headmen. So, they choose to **work with young people from the community** instead, and encourage them to invest some money or use their property for a project — that way, they see it as a business and take ownership of it. Involving the youth also has its challenges, of course, since many have urban aspirations. But having some skin in the game forces them to at least briefly consider a future in the village.
- Some experts say it's best to **draw up written agreements**, whenever possible. This could be a good exercise in identifying local value and common pressure points, but it would work only if a community is ready for it, and doesn't view documents with suspicion or distaste.
- Another recommendation is to **create more spaces and**

opportunities for meaningful interactions between the young and old, to encourage knowledge sharing and foster local pride.

Custom designs

- Before travellers arrive, they should be gently reminded that **they aren't visiting a museum**. If a weaver or a metal craftsman is working on a particular day, he/she can expect to see them. To avoid disappointment, some of the larger responsible operators have **online or other systems, which allow them to (roughly) keep a tab on the kind of activities that happen in each house or area at a specific time of the year**. They also crosscheck over the phone, if need be, before taking a tourist there. **The idea is not to disrupt life or encourage 'demonstrations'**, no matter who's visiting. Not respecting the privacy of the village will be counterproductive in the long run. At the same time, treating a traveller as an outsider won't help; so create an environment that supports **organic interactions with all the villagers and not just the trained guides**.
- Many experts also **discourage tipping as a policy**, and instead attempt to create more transparent systems that allow stakeholders in the community to know exactly where the money is going and how it's distributed.

In tandem

Taking the community along

For more advice on running a community-friendly operation, we turned to Manisha Pande, Managing Director, Village Ways.

1. How to identify an area for a community-based project?

- Focus on areas that are relatively less popular, but have tourism potential.
- Study the existing tourism activities in and around the area.
- Also consider the level of enthusiasm of the host community, their need for alternative livelihoods, and do an impact analysis.
- Keep in mind aspects of marketing, such as target audience and create suitable holiday products for them.

2. Usually, what are the most important areas in terms of training for the community?

For communities that are open to exploring tourism as an alternative source of livelihood, the most important areas for formal training are language, hygiene and sanitation, safety measures, housekeeping and accounting. The mobilisation work includes awareness about negative aspects of tourism, encouraging the participation of women and raising awareness about the environment.

3. What are the main challenges? How do you overcome them?

There are many challenges every day, but the most common are:

Overdependence on tourism: We try to ensure that the involvement of local people in running the enterprises is wider, and thus, there is no concentration of income in one or a handful of households. We encourage the village committees to adopt a rotation system to manage tourism enterprises, to ensure

each member gets some benefit. If the income remains supplementary, the communities will continue their traditional practices (usually, farming).

Marketing remains a challenge: For unusual holiday products, the marketing has to be creative and well planned, particularly when you take responsibility of its impact. **You're also responsible for delivering a good holiday experience to guests**, while ensuring that they are respectful towards the culture and traditions of the local communities.

Skilling may facilitate migration: With skill development, locals, especially guides, may get better work opportunities, and that might undermine the very aim of stopping out-migration. There is no specific solution to this, except to try and educate people of the benefits of living in their own areas or offering more permanent livelihood options. For example, in one of the four villages we work in, we appointed a village guide to work with us as a trainer. This helped us retain him in the village. We've also observed that **sometimes people return to their villages**. In a way, that is a good learning for the community. We also have a policy to train new members, and this ensures new people participate.

4. Attracting the right tourist...

Follow a few basic 'responsible' principles to run the businesses and work on products designed for travellers who are open to trying different kinds of experiences. **Pre-holiday communication describing the experience honestly**, focusing on information on local culture and traditions, also helps separate the grain from the chaff.

It's very important that guests are drawn towards the experience itself, and not just the social aspects of it. The latter should be a bonus. Of course, if he or she contributes to the local community and its economy, it will always be appreciated.

5. What about safety?

Concerns about safety are natural. One way to reassure guests is to ensure that all arrangements — from the moment they arrive in the country to when they leave — are either looked after by one company or through trusted partner agencies. There have been instances where travellers have booked a hotel online that they couldn't find on their arrival. A one-point contact can therefore, make all the difference. Also, can there be a better and safer way to visit an area than when you're being hosted by the local communities? The stress here should be on collective responsibility and involvement of the locals. If the benefits are shared widely, each stakeholder will take the responsibility, and the safety aspects will be looked after. **Clarity about dealing with potential medical emergencies, insurance, working mobile phones** and so on, can also make travellers feel safe.

6. How to control mass tourism in rural areas?

One way to do it is to develop different types of tourism products in different areas to suit different markets. Tourists have individual preferences, so this kind of diversification could prevent the concentration of tourism in a few places.

Another solution is to limit the capacity of each destination for hosting guests. For this to happen though, the government and private stakeholders have to co-operate and join forces.

Generally, in places that have strong market draws, such as spiritual centres, national parks, beaches, places of historical importance and so on, it can be a challenge to prevent mass tourism; government regulations and monitoring can be the only practical solution.

Research and analysis on why these places are popular can also help in developing alternatives to reduce the pressure on key tourist destinations.





What data can do for you

There are several chinks in the certification armour. Just ask the detractors! In fact, many in the industry now believe it's impossible to find a one-size-fits-all certification solution, no matter how earnestly the data is reported and analysed. Instead, business owners, especially smaller operators, are being encouraged to measure their impact, not only to reduce wastage and increase efficiency (and profits), but also to understand their businesses better. This could also be a wonderful way to celebrate and preserve the best assets of a company and to make more informed choices overall.

Certification challenges

- Certification programmes are rare in India. But in the international markets, many small businesses consider joining such schemes to earn a stamp of approval, as it were, and to monitor impact. **But there are several schemes, each with a different set of indicators, making it difficult to pick one.**
- In the global market, even in certification schemes where reporting systems and indicators are streamlined for audits, **it's near impossible for independent organisations to raise funds to verify all aspects.**
- Many businesses are intimidated by Excel sheets and data. **Experts suggest starting small and with a topic that's unique to the set up, or easy to do,** such as everyday operations or energy use — think electricity bills, fuel/gas/water meters, etc. Whether the data is collected and collated every week or month is up to you.
- But gathering data is one thing and making sense of it is quite another. That's where good tools (see box) help.
- Analysed data can be useful in tangible ways, such as reducing costs. **But they can also have intangible benefits.** Customers are likely to appreciate it, for instance, if a tent card in a hotel room about saving water by not changing sheets or towels is replaced by real data on how much water was saved in the past year because

of conscious guests. Such honesty can go a long way in building trust and loyalty.

- Analysed data can help communities too. Experts point out that transparent income distribution systems can not only help businesses, **but also address internal conflicts within communities.**
- For a financial impact study, **a transparent accounting system can form a good basis for data.** If the data is accurate, analysis will be easier and precise. For a social/cultural impact study, recording events over a period of time can be helpful. Environmental impacts are best reported by public agencies; ideally, they should be involved in evaluation.
- **Record the conditions when a project starts,** so one can observe, compare and evaluate changes over time.

Doing it yourself

- Self-monitoring — when it's transparent and inspires confidence in guests — can take one to the next rung.

Mapping data

Jenefer Bobbin, founder of Yardstick, UK, a data measurement platform, identifies four major aspects for mapping

Operations: To keep a tab on energy, water and waste in

order to increase efficiency, reduce costs and lower environmental impact.

Labour: To ensure that the staff is paid well and looked after, and the hiring mechanism is transparent, because the success and overall health of a business depends on how happy its work environment is.

Supply chain: To illustrate how the local economy benefits from the business, and how long-term relationships are forged with local suppliers.

Community: To know exactly how you're including the local community in your success, and giving back to them. This can be crucial to building trust.

Data for destinations

- As an industry, our focus has largely been on collecting consumer data, often used to market destinations. As for **self-monitored data collected by companies, it can only be of use when it reaches critical mass**, where several businesses in a region pool in data and findings.
- Meanwhile, in order to try and understand the global issues that face tourism today, **we need to start looking at harmonised big data.** What is the kind of revenue that is required to cover the cost of tourist infrastructure at a particular destination, for example? What needs to change? Expert Megan Epler Wood believes that we need a moonshot approach —

engaging the technical support of universities, using global IT systems and GIS software to make it feasible for us as a global community to build data to identify the root of problems and ways to address them. Harvard University's Graduate School of Design came up with the idea of Geo Design Hub, for instance, where students from all over the world get together to look at just one destination and how to manage its data.

- Often, at the destination level, people have trouble understanding how to properly use data to make good decisions, especially when it is about growth. But **by using data that works with maps and labels for destinations, it can be easier to visualise what**

might happen and make projections. If you're building on the coast, for instance, surely you'd want to know about the estimated sea level rise due to climate change. "Dozens of factors need to be considered as we build up on the environmental, social and cultural side. We can now use this kind of software to look at the ecological basis of our development, look at infrastructure analysis and create what is called **the multi-criteria plan analysis,**" says Megan. And with the invention of new tools like the one created at Harvard, it will soon be easy for anyone across the world to use data to their advantage and plan for the future.

Free tools to explore!

All businesses tend to collect data in some form anyway, whether it's done in the old-fashioned way on paper, on excel sheets, or by using other systems designed to keep track of inventory, staff and finances. What they need is an easy framework to analyse this data and turn it into learnings

that can be shared with people outside the business too.

Jenefer Bobbin lists a few options available:

a) JustReport's Yardstick helps small businesses measure, monitor and report their impact on the economy, community and environment. They have both free and paid services.

b) Envirocip is an Excel sheet designed for reporting against the GRI G4 Framework.

c) Measurabl has a freemium version available; it was first developed for the American real-estate industry.

d) Carbon Fund does what it says on the tin and only monitors carbon.



TRAVEL FOR ALL

Accessible travel is almost unheard of in India. But if the industry doesn't begin to take baby steps towards inclusion now, it stands to lose not just the goodwill but also the custom of a large group of domestic and international travellers. We asked Neha Arora, Founder, Planet Abled, joint Overall winner of the first Indian Responsible Tourism Award, to put a few things in perspective for us.

- Globally, the barrier-free tourism market accounts for around 600 to 900 million people, including senior citizens.
- It is valued at \$120 billion worldwide.
- Building a ramp or even ramps at the entrance and in a few rooms on the ground floor of a hotel, doesn't make it accessible. All common areas like restaurants, bars, swimming pools and gardens should be easy to navigate as well. Also, a wheelchair user should be able to use all the ramps independently.
- Accessible rooms are non-existent in the budget hotels category. Even in accommodations that have 4 stars (or more), often there's just a token accessible room for the sake of compliance.
- It should be mandatory for all hotels to have disabled-friendly rooms with bathrooms that apply universal design concepts. Also, hotels should have provisions not just for wheelchair users but for all disabilities.
- Disaster management and emergency evacuations are crucial not just for wheelchair users, but also for travellers who are blind, deaf, or with intellectual or cognitive disabilities.
- Properties should also introduce facilities for deaf travellers and appropriate communication channels.
- Monuments should be accessible for all, not just for wheelchair users. All destinations and attractions — or at least the major ones to begin with — should offer specialised services for people with other disabilities, so they can experience the place as well. Travel companies too should create experiences for everyone, including people with disabilities, especially since specialised consulting services are now available.
- But is it enough to make only the built environment accessible? In order to make the entire experience friendly, the staff at hotels and tourist destinations must be trained by experts to welcome guests with disabilities. They should be sensitised as a matter of course.
- Digital information should also be accessible to travellers of all disabilities, whether it's via a website, newsletters or documents.

The internet can be a great ally. But it's hard to keep up with all the apps and tools and search marketing advice. Daksh Sharma, Founder, TravHQ, identifies a few online solutions to address the pressure points, especially for small businesses.

- To create content for social media using mobile phones, smaller businesses need free or cheap tools. These apps, for example, can be used to make better videos:
 - a) *Splice & Quik*: These free apps by GoPro allow you to stitch a video together with background music and add text to it. All you have to do is make sure you take a stable video — shoot your videos in a horizontal format, unlike Facebook Live where the frames are vertical and often shaky as we tend to move along with the camera.
 - b) *iMovie*: iPhone users can use applications like iMovie, which allow you to add background music, text and other transitions to your videos. The videos can then be exported to your chosen file format or shared over your preferred social network.
- If you want to take your image/video taking ability to the next level, you can try using a 360 degree camera device, such as InstaNANO, which can be attached to phones (or even modern gadgets like Snapchat spectacles) to create good, interactive content.
- For targeted marketing, you could also try TweetDeck, a free app that lets you search for relevant conversations on Twitter and schedule your tweets. You can use this to give free travel advice, for instance, to people who are travelling to a particular city, such as Delhi or Mumbai. TweetDeck uses geo targeting to collect data about where the people are tweeting from. Using this, one can set up any number of columns, multiple search streams and save all your search streams; the next time you login, you can see how many people are tweeting from there.
- When it comes to social media influencers, don't get bedazzled by numbers. Keep in mind that:
 - a) Those with big numbers may also have a lot of bots as followers.
 - b) The right fit — in terms of profile and approach of the influencer — is more important than numbers. If you're trying to target a certain demographic, you need to find the people who appeal to that demographic and tell the right stories.
 - c) Work with influencers who create quality content and not with those who create predictable stories with near identical Instagram accounts.
- Whether you choose to work with famous influencers or micro-influencers (regular people who post about their travels on social media), remember that readers' trust is crucial and so is your brand identity — protect it as best as you can. Try to gauge if both the content and the audience response is genuine.
- In social media marketing, less is more. Overuse of social media can lead to the loss of control over the content that a brand puts out.
- When you create WhatsApp groups for your business, note that:
 - a) It only allows businesses to change the name once or not even that.
 - b) It is only available on Android and not on iPhone.
 - c) It allows one to set up automated messages: This can be a boon for small business owners who can't reply to enquiries all the time. Travel operators can also create standard responses and save them in drafts for say, a 2N/3D trip to Manali.
- Search Engine Optimisation (SEO)/Search Engine Marketing (SEM) attract people who are already looking for your product or service. Some of the tools that can be used are:
 - a) *Keyhole*: It's an easy but paid tool that businesses can use to keep track of keywords. One can gain a lot of information from it.
 - b) *Google Search Trends*: It tells you what people are searching for; it is not for tracking traffic, just for knowing what they are searching for.
 - c) *Yoast*: It's a free plugin on Wordpress.



INTERNET: THE GREAT EQUALISER

REBOOTING DESTINATIONS

Managing resources intelligently



What will tourism look like in a few years? We can only speculate. But the future may not be all doom and gloom, after all, if the funds are distributed properly, policies are restructured and communities are encouraged to adopt them. Besides, if we don't set aside money now to shore up resources at our national parks, beaches and monuments, for instance, how can we expect them to tackle the growing volumes of tourists? Is it the responsibility of the government alone to clean up the act? Can the communities and individuals in the business play a more significant role?

The big picture *Pressure points & ideas*

- The burden on local destinations — with combined domestic and international growth in tourism — has not been properly documented anywhere in the world. It's obvious that the infrastructural gap — including power, water, waste, waste water and so on — will widen with the arrival of tourists. How does one close that gap?
- Destinations, which are for the most part publicly owned, haven't worked in the costs of sustainability, for example, in terms of specific taxes or reinvestment in protected areas. Even if private players take responsibility of their own properties, these common costs need to be built in by the government to ease the management of each place.
- Despite the exponential growth of tourism, and the digital phenomena that is changing the rules of the business, it appears that not enough money is flowing back into the destinations globally. We need to ask if we're striking the right balance: how much of the funds are directed towards marketing versus the protection of a destination? In some cases, up to 80% of tourism taxes/funds are diverted towards promotion!
- Local governments can support small businesses, and focus on creating volumes in terms of the number of farmstays, homestays, jungle trails, eco lodges, and so on, without trying to bring in busloads of tourists at any one destination or property.
- The priority should be communication, education and motivation; policies will eventually evolve from what the industry wants.
- Policies are often formulated with the inbound tourists in mind. Domestic tourists, despite their staggering numbers, get short shrift. That needs to be corrected, especially since the holiday experience remains the same no matter who the tourist is — if it's subpar, it's subpar for both domestic and foreign guests. Besides, policymakers here must also account for the Indian diaspora, the world's largest; in other words, a large pool of potential travellers.
- Public-private partnerships, like the new 'Adopt a Heritage' initiative by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, are definitely the next frontier.
- Digitisation has reduced overhead costs, for example, in terms of the supply chain. Booking engines are on top of that chain, claiming the lion's share of the sum, but the benefits rarely trickle down to other stakeholders and to the destination itself. How can this be addressed? By whom?

The smaller picture *Private concerns & alternatives*

- At least at the conceptual level, we depend heavily on policy. But once it's ready, few take ownership of it. Since the private sector accounts for nearly 85% of the tourism industry in India, this is a huge hurdle. How can we ensure people- and planet-friendly policies are implemented on ground?
- In Kerala, tourism gram-sabhas are held at destinations to engage with the local stakeholders and to iron out last-mile problems of policy implementation. The government also works with tourism bodies or collectives of private players to aid the percolation of policies.
- We have to find a way to convey the simple message, down to the lowest common denominator, that the more you care for the environment, the longer your facility will survive.
- West Bengal is toying with the idea of using some of the government-owned properties for pilot projects. The aim is to demonstrate on ground for others, including private players, that it's possible to achieve the responsible tourism ideal of a triple bottomline, or at least come within a whisker of it.

Different strokes *Experiments and ideas*

Do travellers pay their dues to a destination? Does paying for a hotel and a souvenir or two cover all the 'costs'? Dr Harold Goodwin, MD, Responsible Tourism Partnership, explores a few innovative solutions:

- Sharing costs and responsibility can be done in different ways in different geographies and cultural contexts. A village just outside Hoi An, on the coast of Vietnam, for instance, had been drawing a large number of visitors because of the traditional tiles that are made here. But the tiles were too large to carry in the luggage, so few, if any tourists would buy them. Eventually, the village decided to charge an entry fee. This had two effects: one, it created a corpus to clear up the litter and manage tourism, and two, the tourists didn't feel pressured to buy things. A similar model was tried in Gambia too, but the intervention didn't work this time, since it was too late for the village. We are yet to see models where tourism businesses in a village have decided to impose their own local taxes.
- In India, where many travellers prefer to buy bottled water, especially on road trips, tour operators could consider fitting a water tank at the back of the car or coach. Anyway in recent years, it's been reported that harmful chemicals tend to leach into bottled water, especially when the weather's warm.
- Many are now sceptical about using incentive-based models, and with good reason. If we want to make large-scale impact, incentives can never be enough. We have to put regulations in place. In a water scarce destination, for example, the tourism industry should be expected to pay more towards the conservation of water.
- Major European tour operators are now committed to spreading the word about sustainability to their governments and customers. So the education process is being governed in part by large corporates, which is very important too.
- Back in 2007-08, the Kerala government recognised that one of the most pressing issues in the state was the degree to which local communities engaged with tourism and benefited from it. They experimented in four villages and developed a model based on producer groups selling to resorts and hotels, and village life experiences sold to domestic and international tourists. They drew, through the international responsible tourism movement, on experience in Gambia, South Africa, and elsewhere. Kerala's RT Mission has been recognised widely. On winning the Outstanding Achievement Award at the Indian Responsible Tourism Awards 2018, the judges commented: "Rarely are initiatives piloted, tested, assessed and fine-tuned and then rolled out at scale. This is an outstanding achievement and one that should be widely replicated."



DEEP DIVING

*Can we manage
marine tourism better?*

With a coastline that ribbons along 7,500 kilometres and more, India can hardly ignore its marine challenges – and yet, it does. Sure the rivers have been drawing some attention in recent years, but are the proposed interventions thought through or sufficient? What ‘tourism-friendly’ bogeys on a boat (or cruise ship) can we expect to encounter next? What about unregulated wildlife watching in places like Goa? Can we learn from the policies of other countries? Read on.

Surf, sand & regulation *Lessons from Goa*

- In India, Goa has drawn a lot of flak in recent years for unrestrained, ill-managed growth in tourism, leading to economic and social backlash. These ‘developments’ have also underlined just how ecologically vulnerable Goa is as a biodiversity hotspot in the Western Ghats. Thankfully, some **like-minded operators, who offer wildlife watching or adventure activities, are actively working to stop and/or undo some of the damage.** Among them is Puja Mitra of Terra Conscious, who raises a few crucial questions: **With just about 100km of coastline, can Goa afford to do all the things it’s hoping to do:** from mining and consolidating a coal corridor to creating a terminal for 100 cruise ships, even as it tries to sustain scuba diving, wildlife watching and so on? Shouldn’t the pressure be distributed and/or controlled? Can Goa (and its policymakers and tourism operators) look beyond its image as a place to party?

- One approach is to **educate and wean customers away from models that encourage partying on dolphin sighting boats,** for instance. Sensitising boatmen or operators by showing them the long-term benefits, and **partnering with communities that depend on the sea for their livelihood** can make a difference too.

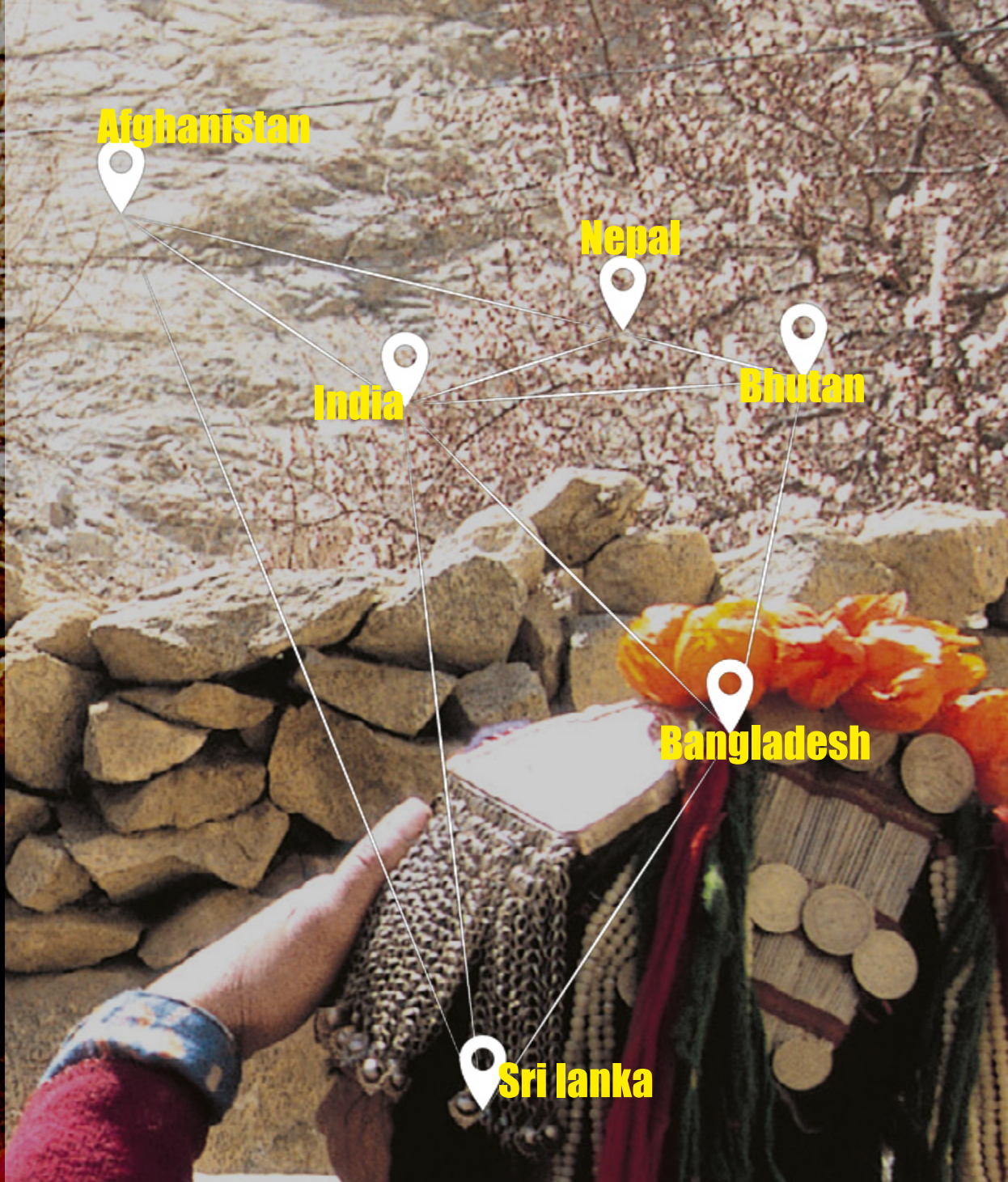
- For the dolphins, Schedule 1 species like the tigers, the situation is particularly grim at the moment. They spend 35-40 years within 2-3km of the coast — an area that sees the maximum amount of activity, especially by tourists. Besides, **wildlife watching is highly undervalued:** dolphin sighting trips can be done for as little as Rs300, where the travel agent keeps Rs200 and the boatman, Rs100. In most places across the world, tickets are priced at a minimum of \$80. If basic international guidelines—such as keeping the boats parallel, turning off engines, not chasing dolphins — are not enforced soon, the damage will be irreversible.
- With the gradual disappearance of apex predators like dolphins **due to unregulated growth of tourism, the entire ecosystem might collapse,** leading to the disappearance of other species, affecting, among other things, the source of Goa’s seafood and of course, wildlife tourism.

Cruise Control *Is India ready for cruises?*

- The cruise industry hasn’t quite arrived on Indian shores yet. But for a while now, experts have been predicting an invasion of Asia by cruise liners. They point out that in the Caribbean islands and Europe, **the policy environment for cruises is different from other forms of tourism.** In most cases, they are allowed to dump waste

outside a small radius, with huge implications for marine life. So while many regions are policing territorial waters, without collective will and action dumping will continue just outside the borders.

- The cruise industry is known to be a tough negotiator. Often cruise companies throw their weight around because cruises are one of the largest and fastest growing elements of the tourism economy. Since they bring in more tourist dollars, they negotiate hard with the port authorities, especially if it’s a new port keen on getting their business. Experts say, **cruise companies prefer smaller areas, where tourists can see a lot of sites within enclosed seas; those are very vulnerable.** At risk right now is the Adriatic Sea, for example — that’s where Venice is and Croatia; they don’t have adequate marine laws, especially in the latter.
- **Collaborative regional strategy is one way to control this power play.** Scandinavia is an example.
- In terms of social impact — like all destinations that face overtourism — **port cities end up with high real estate prices** that force their original inhabitants to move out.
- It’s early days yet for India and South Asia, so they could benefit from pre-emptive measures and strong policies based on the learnings from other countries, especially in Europe and the Caribbean.



CASE STUDIES



ROYAL SOCIETY FOR PROTECTION OF NATURE, BHUTAN

Bhutan is known as a country that values its natural wealth and has put environment-friendly policies in place. Formed in 1987, the **Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN)** has been helping protect and preserve Bhutan's biodiversity for 30 years. The society seeks to inspire individual responsibility and to actively involve citizens in conservation through research, education as well as through the creation of livelihood opportunities.

One of RSPN's pioneering projects is the conservation of Phobjikha Valley, a 2,227-hectare high-altitude wetland that is also a Ramsar site, and the development of a community-based sustainable tourism project in the area. Phobjikha is the largest wintering ground for the endangered black-necked cranes, about 500 of which migrate here each winter. Kinga Wangdi, Head of RSPN's Conservation and Sustainable Livelihood Division, spoke of some of the key highlights of the project initiated in 2003.

THE COMMUNITY'S ROLE

The Gangtey-Phobji Environment Management Committee is the custodian of all of Phobjikha Valley's social, cultural and ecological resources. **Nothing moves forward without the consent of this community-based group**, which works under the guidance of RSPN.

The community celebrates the **Annual Black-necked Crane Festival in November**. In 2017, Phobjikha received 700 international visitors for the single-day festival. And about 7,000 people visited

Phobjikha between the months of October and December.

CONSERVATION

There's a lot of respect for black-necked cranes in the local community, which works hard to prepare the wetland for the arrival of the birds in winter (October to March). In 2017, 504 of these majestic birds arrived in the valley.

The community is very involved in the conservation process.

They created designated routes on which tractors can ply, for instance, to avoid harming the wetland. They are also building as many wooden bridges as possible, so that the tractors do not traverse the wetland.

To reduce the impact of stray dogs on the cranes, they organised a sterilization campaign.

GROWTH FOR ALL

Development in the valley is environment friendly. For example, **when the villages were electrified, the cables were put underground** to ensure there is no threat to the birds, and the beauty of the valley is not marred. Until this could be done, the community relied on solar power only.

RSPN organises capacity-building programmes for the community, providing training for running homestays, working as guides and organising activities for visitors.

The community now offers learning activities, such as basket weaving, playing darts and archery, other than walking trails and bicycling trips. It also makes various souvenirs for visitors to take back with them.

A photograph showing several large, cylindrical objects, possibly baskets or containers, wrapped in vibrant red and yellow threads. They are hanging against a dark, textured background, possibly a wall or a piece of fabric.

AJIYER FAIR TRADE TOURISM, BANGLADESH

Founded in 2002 by Shahid Hussain Shahim, Ajiyer Fair Trade Tourism is a pioneer in community-based tourism in Bangladesh. The organisation focuses on working with communities to preserve textiles and local crafts, and has four major projects. Their goal is to create tours that have a positive impact, both for travellers and for the communities they visit.

Mithil Rafiqul Islam, the organisation's director, spoke about the project at Tangail district in central Bangladesh. It is a region rich in crafts – there is bamboo, clay, bell and brass metal work; there are silversmiths; and there are those who work the looms, creating *nakshibuti* and jacquard weaves. Ajiyer seeks to safeguard and celebrate the community's traditions, and help them protect these crafts and skills that have been handed down over generations.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
Work began with training the community in storytelling, so they could share their old ways of cooking, the life-saving knowledge of *dai mas*, their seed-keeping system – all intangible practices of value to visitors.

A Tourism Development Management Committee (TDMC) formed by members of the community received training on product development and was tasked with handling operational decisions, right from who will run the homestays to the itineraries, the menu and the activities that are offered.

Revenue shares are fixed to ensure the community is motivated to participate in the activities. So, 20% goes to the TDMC, 60% to the community, and the last 20% to Ajiyer for marketing and promotion.

Once the tourism project was established, it was used to address larger issues, like food, nutrition, security, women's empowerment, and preserving cultural heritage through research and knowledge sharing.

BETTER EXPERIENCES

All travellers receive pre-tour communication about local traditions and the recommended code of conduct in the villages.

All those who interact directly with travellers, from rickshaw pullers to taxi drivers, food vendors, local souvenir shop and tea shop owners, are also trained to create a friendly environment.

Experiences are organised in such a way that they don't disrupt the community's natural, everyday rhythm of life. Visitors see them go about their day, and occasionally, join in to learn an activity or two.

TEXTILE CONSERVATION

Ajiyer develops, promotes and popularises handwoven textile and handmade craft products within and outside Bangladesh, and inspires many young women artisans by creating opportunities for them.

Craftspeople are encouraged to preserve traditional motifs, and many have received awards for pieces created by them.

A photograph of a small, orange boat with two people inside, floating on a deep blue body of water. The boat is positioned near a rocky shoreline with some greenery. The water is calm, and the sky is not visible.

JETWING HOTELS, SRI LANKA

In 44 years, Jetwing Hotels has built 33 properties in Sri Lanka and established itself as a responsible tourism operator. Initiatives like using sustainable cinnamon wood and biomass boilers for hot water and as a heat source for vapour absorption chillers; solar installations; rainwater harvesting; wastewater treatment; organic water management and biogas digesters have been incorporated at the group's luxury properties. Several properties have biodiversity awareness centres, showcasing local habitats, marine species, or land animals. Outreach programmes engage with local communities by providing hospitality training, swimming lessons for local children, and engagement with rickshaw drivers. A bottling plant produces reusable bottles used by all the brand's properties.

Jude Kasturi Arachchi, Director of Jetwing Hotels, highlighted some more of these thoughtful practices through the example of Jetwing Vil Uyana, a man-made nature reserve. Located just 5km from Sigiriya Rock, Jetwing Vil Uyana is in the heart of Sri Lanka's cultural triangle. Here, 36 luxurious cottages are located among 28 acres of wetland that once used to be a desolate and abandoned slash-and-burn cultivation area.

CONSERVATION

Over four years, the abandoned agricultural land was restored to a wetland, with part of the area

reforested and another section used for paddy cultivation with traditional means.

Numerous birds and animals returned to the restored wetland and forest. Mammals species increased from 12 to 25, birds from 29 to 138, butterflies from 24 to 43, and amphibians and reptiles from 3 to 39.

Vil Uyana is one of the best places in Sri Lanka to spot the elusive grey slender loris. It has a dedicated conservation site for the loris, and an information centre to improve awareness.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

The open design structures at Vil Uyana built using traditional thatch and clay, require less artificial illumination and ventilation overall.

Food waste is processed onsite in biogas digesters and the resultant gas is used to fuel kitchen stoves. An organic garden supplies fresh produce.

All the wastewater is treated and used in gardens, and all dry leaves and garden waste is composted at the property.

Man-made lakes filled with rainwater provide all the water for the property.

Many children in the farming communities nearby leave school mid-way. To help them acquire new skills, the Jetwing Youth Development Programme offers free six-month training sessions to learn about hotel operations and to gain a working knowledge of English. Graduates are often offered job options at Vil Uyana.



BAMYAN ECOTOURISM PROJECT, AGA KHAN FOUNDATION, AFGHANISTAN

Think of Afghanistan and the first thing that comes to mind is violence and conflict. Protecting history and promoting tourism in this context can be very hard, yet it can provide the boost needed to start changing the image of a place. **Bamyan province is located in the highlands of Afghanistan, 160km northwest of Kabul.** The province is a cultural centre for the Hazara ethnic group, and agriculture and livestock are the main livelihoods here. It is an area of historical importance, cultural relevance, and great natural beauty, including the country's first natural biodiversity park. People can go trekking in the mountains during summer, and skiing in winter. **Until the 1970s it used to be a famous tourism destination that thousands visited.** The province is peaceful once again, and the hope is that tourists too will soon begin to return. Fazal Ahmad from the economic inclusion wing of the Aga Khan Foundation, Afghanistan, spoke about the ongoing efforts to make this happen.

FIRST STEPS

Skill development is key in such cases, so the Foundation first trained local owners of hotels, guest houses and restaurants in hospitality management. **Local youth were also trained as guides** for activities, such as hiking and skiing, and they were connected with larger national-level operators.

The Bamyan Tourism Association was established to coordinate all development activities in the province, and Bamyan University was provided support to create a tourism department.

The Foundation attracted USD 11 million as investment from the private sector, for building accommodations, including a five-star hotel, in the area.

Public officials were given a chance to go on exposure trips to neighbouring countries, and learn about pro-tourism policies.

OUTREACH

Twenty community councils were formed by people living near the tourism spots, and they were educated about the value of preserving resources and adopting tourism as a livelihood option.

To ensure year-round tourism, skiing was added as a winter offering. The Foundation trained locals to ski, invited local and international skiers, and published a ski guide.

By highlighting a few festivals like Navroz, and organising outreach programmes in 17 schools and public performances, they hoped to spread the word about cultural preservation.

MARKETING

A website, brochures and photo book were developed to promote the destinations.

Visits were facilitated for national and international media to explore Bamyan and write on it.



SOCIAL TOURS, NEPAL

Social Tours started as an experiment in 2002, with the idea of channelising tourism for social work. The goal was to provide fantastic holidays, and to ensure that the income that was generated filtered down to the local community, to guides, drivers, and homestay owners. Since then, the company has stayed true to its focus on being environmentally and culturally sustainable, and contributing to the local economy. Founder Raj Gyawali shares some of his learnings from a decade and a half of work.

GROUND RULES

There is a great shortage of water in the mountains, so people have to carry their own water, and littering of plastic bottles is a serious problem. So, guests who travel with Social Tours bring all their waste back and hand it over for recycling.

For a better and deeper engagement with local culture, products like the 'Debate Buddhism with a Monk' experience are curated. Such opportunities for direct interaction help dispel a lot of misconceptions that visitors tend to have. That this also makes for memorable holidays is a bonus.

Social Tours also plot exactly where the money travellers spend with them is going, to know how (and how much) of the income is actually being shared.

INNOVATIONS

After the earthquake in Nepal in 2015, when several monuments


were damaged, Social Tours created products like the 'Rise of the Artisan' experience, where travellers could meet and support craftspeople who had the traditional skills to be able to rebuild a 2,000-year-old stupa.

After the earthquake, when tourism had taken a hard hit, the outfit also started a social media campaign asking travellers to take a photo of themselves with a card that read: 'I'm in Nepal now.' This built up momentum and eventually, the Nepal tourism board decided to take the campaign forward to help mitigate the post-quake slump.

Social Tours also offers travellers the opportunity to accompany shamans for their annual Shaman Full Moon Festival in August, when they travel to a high-altitude lake to chant and dance the night away. It's an immersive journey, which allows one to observe an age-old practice from close quarters.

Adventure tourism is both a boon and bane for Nepal, where popular trails like the Everest Base Camp and the Annapurna treks are under a lot of pressure, especially in the peak season. This makes products like the Community Eco-lodges Trek, which deliberately veers off the main Annapurna trail and hosts guests in community lodges and homestays, even more crucial.

An annual fixture on the capital's calendar, the Kathmandu Kora Cycling Challenge, where nearly 3,000 riders cycle 50, 75 or 100km to raise money for charity, is also organised by Social Tours.



SARMOLI NATURE TOURISM PROGRAMME, UTTARAKHAND

Inclusive tourism is so important today because typically, the tourism industry has invisibilised people who live on the landscapes it visits. Yet, increasingly, practitioners are sharing both the benefits from the resources and the responsibility of protecting them with the local communities. Communities that have for instance, lived in and around forests for a long time, and depend on them for subsistence.

Sarmoli, located in Munsiyari, Uttarakhand, is a beautiful village with a stunning view of the Panchachuli range. Malika Virdi moved here 25 years ago, and was re-elected recently as the Sarpanch of the Sarmoli-Jainti Van Panchayat, a body that decides how common resources like forests should be used. She shared her experiences on working with the residents to create a tourism and homestay programme.

CONSERVATION

Conserving forests without affecting livelihoods is a major challenge. Community tourism offers an alternative, non-extractive livelihood that enables the regulated use and conservation of forests.

Trekking, birdwatching and other activities that celebrate nature were also started, so that the forest could provide an actual living, not just subsistence.

A certain percentage of the income was put back into conservation. It was a slow, tentative start in 2004, but now, more than

a decade later, it's safe to say that the project has been successful.

AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCE

Sarmoli invites visitors to immerse themselves in its world and customs. Tourism is not the only source of livelihood here, so the community sticks to its farming seasons, and other activities.

The idea is not make a spectacle of rural life; homes are not dressed up here. People are aspirational, and many are, for example, switching from sloping to lintel roofs. They are told that this causes loss of tourists, but are not forced to make any changes.

When visitors ask for photos before they arrive, they are told that these are local homes, not meant to be displayed on the internet. They are encouraged instead to experience it.

The community also challenges visitors to consider how much electricity cities consume, which is produced in valleys like these, harming rivers and the landscape.

REALITY CHECKS

A frequent criticism is that mountain men drink, and women do the work. But guests are rarely aware of the realities of a depressed rural economy, forcing many to leave. Here, they are encouraged to think about the larger development paradigm.

Within the village, the community adopts the *sukh-duk* formula. If you want *sukh* or money, you also have to take on *duk*, or the struggle to protect resources.



CULTURE AANGAN, MAHARASHTRA

Started in 2005 as a community-based rural tourism company working in Maharashtra's Sindhudurg district, Culture Aangan has grown over time to expand its footprint over four Indian states.

Rashmi Sawant, the company's founder, shared the story of Pinguli, a small village along NH17 that connects Mumbai to Goa, home to a tribe that worked as spies for the Maratha king Shivaji. The tribe travelled from village to village, performing puppet theatre and collecting information. However, once India gained independence, as a scheduled tribe, they were allotted land outside the main village. **One family in the village of Pinguli has preserved old scrolls and paintings that are used to accompany oral storytelling and shadow puppets and won many awards for their skill. Culture Aangan worked with the family to protect this heritage.**

CONSERVATION

All the paintings were rolled up and tossed into the attic. Culture Aangan decided to convert an unused cowshed in their backyard into a small art gallery.

The paintings were sent to the Prince of Wales museum in Mumbai to test for age and authenticity; then framed to protect and showcase properly.

To spread the word, an opening ceremony was organised, and the district collector was invited for it, along with other eminent theatre personalities.

As a result of the publicity, the artist started receiving invitations to attend state art festivals around the country.

ARRESTING MIGRATION

Due to the lack of interest in the art, migration became a major problem, with many puppeteers leaving the village to find work as grasscutters or stone breakers.

To keep the art alive, designers from the National Institute of Design, Ahmedabad, were invited to hold a workshop for the entire village. With their guidance, and the collective handed-down knowledge they had, the villagers relearned the lost skill.

The team visited schools around the village and encouraged teachers to bring children here on day trips, so they could see the value of this art form found in their own backyard.

MONETISING

The NID designers shared ideas on how to use the art to make simple merchandise, such as greeting cards, lampshades, bookmarks, notebooks, table runners and so on. **The souvenirs were made available for purchase on an online platform.**

An experience called 'Dancing with the Puppets' was launched, in which travellers could visit the village of Pinguli, interact with the puppeteers, see the workshop where they paint, and watch a shadow puppet performance at a small stage that was set up.

Culture Aangan's vision for the village of Pinguli with its 1,500 people is that it will turn into an art village with a performance space, souvenir store, small café run by local women, and maybe, host an annual international puppetry festival run by a self-help group from within the community.

TERRA CONSCIOUS, GOA

Working in India's sunshine state, a popular tourist destination that is now beginning to reel under the impact of overtourism, Terra Conscious advocates community-based conservation and responsible marine tourism. It seeks to transform an existing livelihood that grew out of the rich marine life Goa has, but now threatens it.

Puja Mitra, founder, Terra Conscious, presented a status report on Goa's marine biodiversity. The state has humpback dolphins, two species of whales, finless porpoise, two kinds of otters, two turtle species, crocodiles, and a coral reef. **These are coastal animals that spend their lives within a 2-3 km distance of the shoreline. So, they are threatened by the current 'party boat tourism'.** In fact, the Ocean Watch programme that the company ran with the help of Goa's 600-odd lifeguards, demonstrated that 37 dead animals hurt by boats were found on the beaches within a period of six months. Terra Conscious hopes to change the way tourists engage with marine species:

COMMUNITY

In the Chapora-Morjim Bio Zone, the outfit is working with eight community operators to offer thoughtful dolphin watching tours. The process started by educating boat owners of the value of the humpback dolphins, which are Schedule 1 species that should have the same protection as the tiger. .

Terra Conscious also made educational content available, and **helped boat owners create experiences for which they can charge more than the standard Rs300 per head for boat tours.** This gives them an incentive to provide better quality of experiences to tourists.

Boat owners were also educated on DolphinSmart guidelines: on maintaining an adequate distance from the animals instead of surrounding or chasing them; shutting off engines, so that the sound does not interfere with their communication; and ending each trip with garbage collection.

OUTREACH

Currently, the system allows about 400 operators to offer 'party boat experiences' in Goa. Terra Conscious has been advocating to change that.

On the consumer side of things, **they are trying to reach out to travellers and schoolchildren through fun infographics** that highlight the biodiversity of Goa and ask for better quality experiences to protect it.

Organising garbage collection on beaches and in the underwater coral reef is also a crucial part of their agenda.

But most importantly, Terra Conscious has joined forces with other like-minded ethical operators who care about the environment, to form a collective to push for responsible tourism in the state.

Outlook Responsible Tourism Awards 2018



Winners of the third Indian Responsible Tourism Awards, chosen after a six-month process by 17 eminent members of our jury. Created by the All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association (AIACA), each trophy (right) has been hand-painted by kalamakari artists from Hyderabad on a copper platter made by Tambat artisans from Pune, whose ancestors made coins, arms, letter forms for printing and other metal objects for 18th-century Peshwa rulers.



The Jury



Aman Nath
*Founder,
Neemrana Hotels*



Amanpreet Bajaj
*Country Manager, India
Airbnb*



Amit Dixit
*Editor,
Outlook Traveller*



Ananda Banerjee
*Author, Illustrator & Award-winning
Wildlife Conservation Journalist*



CB Ramkumar
*Board Member, Global Sustainable Tourism
Council, & Founder, Our Native Village*



Belinda Wright
*Executive Director, Wildlife Protection
Society of India (WPSI),
& Proprietor, Kipling Camp*



Dr. Harold Goodwin
*Director, International Centre for RT,
& Professor Emeritus, Manchester
Metropolitan University*



Jaya Jaitly
*Founder & President,
Dastkari Haat Samiti*



Malika Virdi
*Mountaineer & Sarpanch of
Sarmoli-Jainti Van Panchayat*



Milan Moudgil
Mountaineer & Photographer



Prerna Bindra
*Wildlife Conservationist
& Author*



Ratish Nanda
*CEO,
Aga Khan Trust for Culture, India*



Suman Billa
*Joint Secretary,
Ministry of Tourism*



Sheema Mookherjee
*Former Publisher, Lonely Planet
(India), & Proprietor,
Salban – The Kanha Homestay*



Steve Borgia
*Honorary President,
Eco-tourism Society of India*



Sohail Hashmi
*Historian, Academic
& Film-maker*



Dr. Venu Vasudevan
*Former Principal Secretary,
Kerala Tourism*

HOW ARE THE WINNERS CHOSEN ?

The judges expend a significant amount of time and effort on the judging of the Awards, and there is often robust debate. Later, the chair of the jury, Emeritus Professor Dr. Harold Goodwin writes the citations for the Awards. **The jury's reasons are specific, and it is important to note that few, if any, businesses or organisations are responsible in every aspect.** None are perfect, but the ones selected by the judges this year are leaders in responsible tourism, which is most succinctly defined as 'making better places for people to live in and better places for people to visit'.

We look for businesses and organisations that can educate and inspire others to make tourism better and offer experiences that attract more responsible consumers. The judges can only select from amongst those that apply – if you know of better, more responsible businesses, please encourage them to apply, or nominate your own business.

THE PROCESS

STEP 1. Invited Nominations (August 2017): We received about 300 entries in 8 categories.

STEP 2. The Longlist (September 2017): Only 10 in each category made it to the Longlist. They filled out detailed forms created in consultation with our jury and industry experts, and provided supporting documents and references.

STEP 3. The Shortlist (November 2017): Two (undisclosed) judges for each category combed through the documents and arrived at the Shortlist of 5.

STEP 4. Jury Meet (December 2017): Jurors, along with the chair, met in Delhi to discuss the final entries and choose the winners. There was intense debate and discussion that lasted for over 8 hours.

STEP 5. Authentication Process (January 2018): We visited some properties/tour operations to verify claims, and crosschecked facts through a network of journalists, industry experts and travellers.

STEP 6. Winners Announced (February 2018): Awards were announced at the Summit in Delhi.

The Winners

Best Individually-run Homestay

Gold: Ghoomakad, Rakkar village, Himachal Pradesh
Silver: Chhotaram Prajapat Homestay, Salawas, Rajasthan

Best Community-run Homestay

Gold: Friends of Orchha, Madhya Pradesh
Silver: Demul, Spiti, Himachal Pradesh
Silver: Baramati Agri Tourism, Maharashtra

Best Heritage Property

Gold: The Bhuj House, Gujarat

Best Wildlife Property

Gold: Fringe Ford, Kerala
Silver: SAI Sanctuary Trust, Karnataka
Silver: Wildernest, Goa

Best Boutique Property

Gold: Maachli, Maharashtra
Silver: Meena Bagh, Himachal Pradesh

Best Outdoor Operator

Silver: Konkan Explorers, Goa
Silver: Quest Expeditions, multiple destinations

Best Urban Neighbourhood Operator

Gold: Reality Tours and Travels, Mumbai
Silver: The Preserve Alleppey Society, Allapuzha

Best Cultural Immersion Operator

Gold: The Folk Tales, multiple destinations
Silver: Culture Aangan, Maharashtra

Outstanding Achievement Award

Kerala Responsible Tourism Mission

Best Overall Winner

Fringe Ford, Kerala

Best Wildlife Property & Overall Winner

Fringe Ford

Fringe Ford allowed a 520-acre cardamom and coffee plantation to return to the wild, creating a forest that is now a haven for several rare and endangered species of the region. A very low-impact wildlife lodge, the owners have made a conscious decision to have only 5 rooms on the estate, which are older structures that were upscaled. In the absence of fences, Fringe Ford merges seamlessly with the Wayanad and Tholpetty reserve forests, creating a borderless stretch of the Malabar rainforest. The only activities offered in this wilderness reserve are guided walks. The Travancore flying squirrel, Malabar giant squirrel, Nilgiri marten, lion-tailed macaque, brown palm civet and the Nilgiri langur can all be seen here along with elephants, gaur, tiger and leopard.

The regular presence of wildlife enthusiasts and field-work students (in subsidised programmes) in the forest has significantly reduced poaching, cannabis cultivation and illicit liquor manufacture, and encouraged data gathering. They have also been advocating for a new law on ‘Private

land participation in preservation and conservation of forests’ and have recently presented a white paper on the subject to a Parliamentary Committee on environment and science. If and when the law comes into force, they have promised to be the first property to volunteer.

All the staff are from local villages, most of whom have been working here since it opened its doors to guests nearly 12 years ago (or earlier). They don’t grow too many vegetables or fruits on the property to avoid potential conflicts with wildlife. Fresh fruit and vegetables are sourced locally, therefore, and spices and honey come from the local tribal co-operative — all of which eventually find pride of place on the table, transformed into traditional delicacies.

Fringe Ford has grid hydro-electricity and no air-conditioning. It gets its water from a perennial stream using high-school science and gravity. The grey water is cleaned through a reed bed, and brown water goes straight into septic soak pits. Devoid of sound and light pollution, it’s a great place to engage with nature in deep, interesting ways.

Outstanding Achievement Award

Kerala Responsible Tourism Mission

Over the last decade, the Kerala Responsible Tourism Mission has created several wonderful cultural experiences for travellers, and in the process, created more opportunities for local communities. They help guests from India and abroad see how Kerala truly lives.

The judges were pleased to receive an application from the Kerala Responsible Tourism Mission in the Best Cultural Immersion Tour Operator category. They wanted to recognise this inspiring initiative, which over the last 10 years has piloted a range of approaches for securing additional livelihoods for local communities and enhancing guest experience. The Village Life Experiences provide a cultural immersion for guests who benefit from them, and engage villagers who create and share those experiences.

These interactions are based on mutual respect and create shared memories, even as they provide an additional income, an incentive for the villagers to maintain their traditional practices. Forty farmers have restarted paddy cultivation, and local arts have been granted a new lease

of life. Some 1,100 families are benefitting from tourism to Kumarakom alone, where traditional skills such as coir-making, weaving, screwpine leaf crafts and bronze vessel making have been revived.

A rare example of intervention by public stakeholders to encourage ethical tourism at the grassroot-level through better trade and community linkages, greater awareness, cultural conservation and capacity building, Kerala Responsible Tourism Mission also relies on the local panchayat system to promote and implement responsible practices among private stakeholders.

This is an exemplary initiative, which has been recognised internationally on several occasions. Now, moving beyond the development phase, Village Life Experiences will in 2018 be extended to 20 new villages in all 14 districts of Kerala. Rarely are initiatives piloted, tested, assessed and fine-tuned, before being rolled out at scale. This is an outstanding achievement and one that should be widely replicated.

Best Individually-run Homestay

Ghoomakad

Developed by a family in the village of Rakkar, near Dharamsala, Ghoomakad is a homestay in a traditional mud-house, with a 20+ seater co-working space that has reliable internet. The judges were impressed by the way in which organic farming, waste management and recycling have been turned into activities for guests; and by the survival camp experience, which lets guests connect with and learn about nature and themselves. Offering a rural experience with modern technology enables Ghoomakad to attract guests keen to bathe in a mountain stream, work online during the day and enjoy the cultural life and peace of the village at night.

Best Individually-run Homestay

Chhotaram Prajapat Homestay

Described as “an initiative in reality”, they have “taken an initiative to offer the unaltered and the real-time panorama” of their civilisation in the village of Salawas, which is on the outskirts of Jodhpur. The Prajapatis are a community of weavers, and that remains the main income of the family; the homestay provides supplementary income. The 15 members of the family are the staff of the homestay, and guests eat from the family kitchen. The judges were impressed by the extent of the guests’s engagement with the family and the opportunity to learn how to make a durrie from them.

Best Wildlife Property

SAI Sanctuary Trust

The SAI Sanctuary Trust (SST) is a non-profit located in the Western Ghats – the heart of the watershed area for the entire south Indian peninsula. From the initial purchase of 55 acres of private forested lands in 1991, the Sanctuary has grown to more than 300, protecting a biodiversity hotspot. They recently opened two eco-friendly cottages. With strong environmental credentials, the judges wanted to recognise this as an example of a wildlife sanctuary using tourism as supplementary income. Here, the flora and fauna come first. All travel is on foot in small groups, and trekking through the core area is done only once a day.

Best Wildlife Property

Wilderness

With 16 cottages designed out of eco-friendly acacia wood, Wilderness strives to make living in the wilds an experience to cherish. They actively market both the winter and monsoon experiences. With foot trails, hides and *machans*, guided close encounters and talks, the judges recognised that it counters ‘nature deficit’ for all urban guests. It also offers an Ayurshala, local traditional food, cultural experiences and visits to traditional sanctuaries and holy forests conserved for generations by locals. A mere 10 out of the 700 acres of the private sanctuary is built-up, and supports 200 families, directly benefitting seven villages.

Best Community-run Homestay

Friends of Orchha

As the name suggests, it’s a lovely and warm community near Orchha that offers a wonderful window to rural life. Friends of Orchha has broken caste barriers by inviting travellers to stay and experience Bundeli life with a community that is still discriminated against. The project was a response to four years of drought in the region and has improved the standard of living for to the local families of small farmers, artisans and labourers. A registered non-profit formed in 2006, Friends of Orchha provided the loan capital for sanitation blocks in family compounds, which were repaid from tourism earnings; the families provided the labour.

Best Community-run Homestay

Baramati Agri Tourism

The Baramati Agri Tourism project has a wide and direct impact, with 100% local involvement in over 350 agritourism centres in Maharashtra. Operating in a drought-prone area, where there are no conventional tourism draws, such as heritage monuments or natural attractions, the project relies entirely on the cultural assets and farming activities of this community of shepherds. About 80-85% of the profit is channelled directly to the villagers, who double as guides and travel operators, when they are not working in their farms, growing local produce organically, using harvested rainwater. All local sourcing is done within a 2km radius.

Best Community-run Homestay

Demul Village Homestays

It was started in 2004 with the help of the Spiti-based social enterprise, Eco-sphere, in order to diversify livelihood opportunities in a community dependent on agriculture in an environment, where only one crop can be produced in a year (during the six months of winter, temperatures often drop below -30° C). Judges were impressed by the scale of the project. Of the 55 households in Demul, 48 have converted a room into a guest room. Using traditional village governance, homestays are allocated on a rotational basis, and each year, the money is distributed equally amongst all homestays, avoiding the impact of excessive competition.

Best Heritage Property

The Bhuj House

In 2013, the Bhujwala family decided to restore The Bhuj House, their traditional Parsi home into a heritage homestay in the historic town of Bhuj in Kutch, Gujarat. One of only two Parsi houses remaining here, its future has been secured, and the Bhujwala family has protected the Agiary through a trust maintained by the family. This is a homestay designed to conserve the legacy of the Parsi community that was once an integral part of this city. A lot of effort went into the conservation of the building, and several local craftsmen and masons were encouraged to revive old techniques as part of the restoration process.

Best Boutique Property

Maachli

Maachli is a family-run farmstay located in a preserved forest, where the owners have planted over a 100 habitat-friendly trees over the last 15 years. Guests here engage in the practical and cultural life of the village... 90 % of the staff are women from the area. Local sourcing for recipes cooked in clay vessels on woodfire also ensure that additional incomes are created for several villagers. Offering an opportunity to “tune man’s cord with nature”, the four sustainable yet comfortable cottages here are built to resemble local *maachlis* or huts, where farmers store their produce and rest awhile, if they can.

Best Boutique Property

Meena Bagh

Recently constructed in the Himachali style with wood-panelled and mud-plastered walls, Meena Bagh in Shimla celebrates local culture, music, food and architecture. The owners encourage writers and artists to stay and work here, offering deep discounts. The property harvests rainwater, recycles grey water and biodegradable waste, solar heats its hot water and uses LED lights throughout. The structure is also fully thermal- and sound-insulated. Only waste wood has been used for the panelling and the furniture, and local workers who built the property have subsequently been employed to run it.

Best Outdoor Operator

Quest Expeditions

Quest has five activity centres along the coast, reducing the local dependency on fishing by providing employment in water sports and hospitality. Promoting activities that use non-motorised power – paddle, pedal or wind – this award is for their sea kayaking ‘Paddle for the Environment’ experience. With core values of environmental and social responsibility, Quest employs eight boys from the Don Bosco Shelter Home for orphans and street kids as guides at its Rameshwaram centre, teaches local children kayaking, employs elderly gardeners, and gives lifeguard and snorkelling training to fishermen to help them find work in tourism.

Best Outdoor Operator

Konkan Explorers

From sea kayaking to kayak surfing, they promote soft ecological impact nautical activities in Goa. Each experience is customised according to the physical and technical skills of guests, and the guides are put through intense technical and safety training, given the unpredictability of the sea and wind. The unsinkable kayaks they use are exceptional tools for delivering proximity to nature and to wind, tides and currents. Where outboard motors are used in boats, they operate with 40hp engines, the minimum power needed for safe navigation. All employees at Konkan Explorers are local, and 40% of them are women.

Best Urban Neighbourhood Operator

Reality Tours and Travels

Notwithstanding sceptics, they have been encouraging locals and tourists to go out of their comfort zone and see Mumbai’s slums in a different light. In doing so, they have been breaking stereotypes and showing a side of Dharavi that few care to explore otherwise; 80% of their profits support development projects here. Started in 2005 by Krishna Pujari, who arrived in the city as a young migrant himself, and Chris Way from the UK, the company was recognised as an overall winner of the Responsible Tourism Awards at WTM, London, in 2012. Since then, they have expanded to Rajasthan, Kerala and Delhi’s Sanjay Colony, also a slum.

Best Heritage Property

Preserve Alleppey Society

The Preserve Alleppey initiative was started by the ladies wing of the Lions Club of Alleppey in 2000, and later registered as a Charitable Society. Educated women not formally employed found an opportunity to work creatively here. Nearly two decades later, it’s still using tourism to create local pride and to contribute to conserving the town. Members of its all-women team of 15 lead walking tours that include the Gujarati quarter, an old coir factory, an Anglican Church, markets and temples. Tours end with refreshments at one of their homes. The Society is now compiling a guide to Alleppey’s history, buildings and its local and migrant communities.

Best Cultural Immersion Operator

Folk Tales

Established in 2013 as a “Responsible Rural Travel organization”, Folk Tales offers an immersive tour of Meghalaya, where guests spend time with weavers in their villages and weave their own local silk or cotton cloth on a handloom, before spending a day with tea pickers, working through the whole process. Then they live with indigenous tribes, learning about folktales, traditional ceremonies and honey gathering. Operating in 11 states, they have capped numbers at 500 guests annually, so that no village receives more than 50 guests per year. They have eliminated the use of plastic water bottles altogether.

Best Cultural Immersion Operator

Culture Aangan

Formed in 2010, this Mumbai-based outfit aims to build communities through tourism, providing education and using a self-help group model to develop homestays and revive art forms. The judges were impressed by the Sindhudurg tour that has helped revive Pinguli puppet craft. The tour offers an in-depth experience of Indian village life; enjoying folk theatre, setting up and watching Pinguli shadow puppets, visiting markets, mango and cashew orchards, and engaging with marginalised camel herders. The community has an effective veto over the arrival of visitors. Culture Aangan also operates in Rajasthan and Uttarakhand.

About Us

Mapping India & South Asia

Summit. Awards. Workshops. Outreach. Research. Advocacy. Awareness Campaigns. TV. Inspiring Stories. And fantastic holiday ideas for EVERYONE!

For about four years now, the **Outlook Responsible Tourism Initiative** has been rallying to protect, preserve and celebrate India's heritage — be it a monument or an art form, an endangered bird or a musical tradition, out in the countryside or in our own backyard. We do it by celebrating and supporting people- and planet-friendly travel companies, hotels and homestays. We do it by telling travellers about the wonderful journeys they can take. We do it by mainstreaming thoughtful, immersive travel! Come along with us.

