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2019





# OUTLOOK RESPONSIBLE TOURISM SUMMIT & AWARDS 2019

## TRAVEL.TECH.TRANSFORM

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# SUMMIT 2019

## PLENARY SESSION

### WELCOME ADDRESS

1. Suman Billa, Joint Secretary, Ministry Of Tourism, Government of India

### KEYNOTE SPEAKER

2. Anshu Gupta, Founder, NGO Goonj & Ramon Magsaysay Awardee

### SESSIONS

3. Bansari Vyas, Business Head, Travel & BFSI, Facebook, India & South Asia  
4. Aditya Ghosh, CEO, OYO Rooms, India & South Asia, and Outlook Responsible Tourism Initiative's Radhika Nair  
5. Rajesh Magow, Co-founder & CEO, MakeMyTrip, India  
6. Gopinath Parayil, Founder, The Blue Yonder, and Outlook Responsible Tourism Initiative's Chris Kurian  
7. Nikhil Ganju, Country Manager, TripAdvisor India



## WORKSHOPS

## OUTLOOK RESPONSIBLE TOURISM SUMMIT & AWARDS 2019



### 1. Storytelling and social media

Shivya Nath, Blogger, The Shooting Star  
Mariellen Ward, Blogger, Breathedreamgo

### 2. Creating eco-alternatives: From water harvesting to waste management

Mayank Mishra, Business Head & Strategist, SHiFt Studio

### 3. Photography: Beyond filters and gimmicks

Anindito Mukherjee, Photojournalist and regular contributor to Reuters and Bloomberg

### 4. Travel start-ups you need to know about!

a. Paras Loomba, Founder, Global Himalayan Expeditions, b. Akhil Malik, CEO, Zostel  
c. Vikrant Chheda, Founder, White Collar Hippy

### 5. Reimagining and celebrating Indian food

Udit Maheshwari, Cordon Bleu-trained Chef  
Iona Sinha, Co-owner of Melting Pot Food Company, which runs Cafe Lota and Roots Cafe  
Salim Riaz Khan, Melting Pot Food Company

### 6. Working with communities

a. Malika Viridi, Sarpanch, Sarmoli Van Panchayat, b. Antara Chatterjee, Founder, Little Local

### 7. Attracting more Indian and international travellers

a. Emma Horne, Founder, Emma Horne Travel  
b. Gopinath Parayil, Founder, The Blue Yonder

### 8. Adventure: Travel the responsible way ahead:

a. K Krishnan Kutty, Executive Director- Haniif Centre for Outdoor Education, b. Maninder Kohli, Founder, Juniper Outdoor Pursuit Center

### 9. Raising & managing funds for your responsible travel company

Ranbir Singh, Founder, SoulBrowser Inc & former COO & MD, JP Morgan Bank, Tarun Sobti, Development, Hotelivate & former Director, Hotel Trident, The Oberoi Group, Rajeev Kumar, LRV Foundation;  
Raj K Pathak, Chairman, India Entrepreneur Club, Delhi;  
Vansh Sharma, former executive, Deutsche Bank



# CHANGING TRACKS

## Is technology the biggest ally of responsible travel?

Technology is transforming the travel universe in unexpected ways and holds new possibilities for making travel more inclusive and democratic. It is also changing the very imagination of travel today, fuelling people's desire for new experiences as their ability to travel increases. Does this transformation translate into a democratisation of travel for people of all social backgrounds, genders and abilities? How are these changes in the travel sector shaping the possibilities for immersive and authentic experiences that are mindful of the environment and the needs of various kinds of travellers, and fostering pride in local communities?

How can small responsible tourism businesses in a country like India leverage the advantage that technological growth in travel offers? Are India's largest travel companies at least beginning to think about mainstreaming responsible tourism? At the Outlook Responsible Tourism Summit 2019, these are some of the questions we sought to address.

## Are India's largest travel outfits responsible enough?

The Outlook Responsible Tourism Initiative sees itself as a bridge between different audiences in the travel universe in India. Besides its engagement with small entrepreneurs and community travel enterprises at the Summit, the Initiative invited on stage, for the very first time, major players, such as MakeMyTrip, OYO, Facebook and Trip Advisor, to talk about mainstreaming responsible travel in India.

By their own admission, the leaders of these companies believe the road to being responsible is a long one, even though they see business sense in it. Environmental interventions by most of them continue to be limited to activities like planting trees to offset carbon emissions or crushing plastic for recycling. Despite the slow progress, there are encouraging signs like OYO choosing to invest in water harvesting facilities in its properties in and around Shimla, which had suffered a water crisis in the summer of 2018.

## Is social media democratising travel?

Social media platforms bring an unprecedented number of people together. Over two billion people come together on Facebook platforms alone. Given how the Indian traveller has taken to the digital world, travel businesses that embrace the connected world are bound to grow faster than others. It appears that 86% of the businesses that have used Facebook platforms have been able to expand or sell more or reach out to more consumers, grow their businesses and employ more people. Social media sites have a real revenue impact by allowing not only a wider reach, but also helping entrepreneurs reach the right audiences using sharpshooting tools.

It is simultaneously true that small businesses in India (89%) are often challenged in terms of the digital tools they have. While social media companies like Facebook offer self-based learning programmes like Blueprint for small and medium entrepreneurs to bring their digital skills up-to-speed, it would be useful to know their effectiveness.

## What do travellers use social media apps for?

They use the Facebook Family of Apps to discover destinations (66%), make decisions about stay (52%) and learn something new about travel experiences through social networking (71%). Travel feeds from consumers now include videos and live feeds sharing experiences, hence being social has become a way of life when the consumer travels. This, as we know, is good news for small businesses that rely on word-of-mouth publicity.

## Possibilities of immersive travel?

The growing popularity of experiences is an opportunity to invest more in travel options that allow for social and cultural immersion. However, going by Trip Advisor data, iconic activities and monument visits remain the bulk of the bookings in the experiences segment. Yet, locally immersive experiences like historical and heritage walks, particularly food tours are the fastest growing experiences in this space. Besides, experiences continue to be booked largely by people who are well-off, from lucrative travel markets around the world, frequent travellers, mostly women and those with children. A lot more needs to be done to make these experiences more accessible to travellers from varied social and economic backgrounds.



**Suman Billa****Joint Secretary, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India**

The challenge India's tourism sector faces is how to bring growth in tourism within the framework of sustainability and responsibility. It is not just about getting investments and getting tourists into the destination and sending them out. I think we need to look at what kind of tourists do we get and what kind of investments do we get into a place.

How do we create a framework where the tourist will not only learn from the community, but the community must also learn from the tourist?

**Harold Goodwin****Advisor on Responsible Tourism, World Travel Market,  
& Director, Responsible Tourism Partnership**

In responsible tourism, what matters is that you address the issues that matter locally. And in that sense listening to communities, what they want to solve through tourism, listening to what they want to share with guests, is critically important.

We are moving in terms of the market from value for money towards experience for money. If you look at outbound tourism from Europe, the trip length is falling but the amount are spending per day is increasing.

**Anshu Gupta****Founder-Director, GOONJ**

One of the biggest assets of village people in this country is their dignity. There's no place in the world where charity is sustained, and [yet] development happened... charity takes away dignity from people.

**Aditya Ghosh****CEO, OYO Rooms, India & South Asia**

We are today the third-largest branded hotel chain in the world. If we don't do our bit, those destinations won't be around. There will be no tourism hospitality business. If we don't do it, there will be no customers. So, I guess, it is a business necessity, even if it does not make a PNL sense today or tomorrow morning.

**Rajesh Magow****Co-Founder & CEO, MakeMyTrip India**

I think, fundamentally, the need for mainstreaming responsibility arises from the fact that you improve the experience, otherwise, a lot of the tourism will go out, if we don't do well, domestically.





# THE STATS

India has a **150 million** strong leisure travel market, estimates the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI)

According to a study conducted by Travel Port across **25 countries** and **16,000** respondents, India is **#1** with the most digitally advanced travellers

About **500 million** Indians have access to internet by phone.

Voice searches are used by **69%** of Indians, while **85%** have used a payment app during their trips

The popularity of sustainable travel is growing **97%** among Indians.

of those interviewed by **Booking.com** want to travel sustainably

**88%** of them are willing to pay extra for sustainable travel and **72%** of them are motivated by the positive effect of tourism on local communities

**Over 50%** of them are keen on buying local souvenirs, local products and food, using public transport, visiting less touristy destinations

According to AirBnB, **94%** of Indian study subjects in a sample of over a 1,000 use social media for travel decisions



# THE CHEKUTTY INITIATIVE

Instead of using plastic lanyards at the Outlook Responsible Tourism Summit 2019, Outlook Responsible Tourism Initiative joined hands with The Blue Yonder to use Chekutty dolls and cotton yarn as an earth-friendly alternative.

The *Chekutty* Initiative is an inspiring example of a creative response in the face of a human tragedy at a scale as massive as the Kerala floods in 2018. The floods affected everyday life across communities, but proved particularly devastating for craftspeople, wreaking havoc on their livelihood. At the Chendamangalam handloom weaving units at Karimpadam, for instance, not only did the flood waters destroy raw materials and tools, they also laid to waste large quantities of ready stocks of cotton cloth, threatening the survival of the weaving units and families that depended on them. Several of these craftspeople may have been forced to turn to unskilled labour just to make ends meet had it not been for the 'Chekutty Initiative'.

Social entrepreneurs Gopinath Parayil of The Blue Yonder and Lakshmi Menon of Pure Living saw promise in sullied cloth deemed unusable. *Chekutty* dolls upcycled from damaged stocks initially by weavers and later made by volunteers from across nine countries in 250 workshops, brought revenues (far exceeding the original price of a finished saree) critical to the revival of the handloom units and the flagging spirits of the weavers. Users and buyers of chekutty in Kerala were asked to use #chekutty to upload images of the dolls in their surroundings. These social media posts were stories generated at no cost, countering rumours about epidemics, concerns of road safety and the extent of damage post the floods, lifting the image of Kerala as a travel destination worth visiting.

6 takeaways for travel entrepreneurs

1. The vision of travel entrepreneurship in India needs to see culture and craft as inalienable parts of tourism and deserving of the support of the travel industry.
2. Environmental disasters like floods cause huge losses of revenue to the tourism industry. The damage caused to smaller scale industries like traditional crafts and handlooms might prove to be hard to recover from, if timely support is unavailable.
3. Travel businesses are best equipped to be the first responders during a natural disaster. Also, communities that are exposed to responsible tourism models are likely to be more resilient to the climate crisis.
4. To help revenues pick up and for recovery from damage, public financial outlays are critical, but so is remaking the image of the affected destination as safe and travel worthy. Travel and craft industries thus have a massive stake in sending out positive stories about the affected destination.
5. Crowd-sourcing allows one to gather positive stories in a participatory manner at a large scale and at little cost, turning the effort to a campaign, building mass appeal. *Chekutty* used symbolism to build hope, embracing flaws to rebuild life with dignity.
6. Through diverse stories of courage, compassion and solidarity, *Chekutty* positioned Kerala as a place of great resilience, as a wonderful place to live in and for responsible tourism.







WHAT DID WE  
LEARN?



# Working with Communities

MALIKA VIRDI, SARPANCH, SARMOLI VILLAGE VAN PANCHAYAT  
ANTARA CHATTERJEE, FOUNDER, LITTLE LOCAL

## Thumb Rule

Rural tourism must grow in synergy with livelihoods like agriculture and crafts that are the backbone of a rural lifestyle, marked by an understanding of and respect for nature, a collective existence and a small environmental footprint. Tourism should thus broaden base benefits from showcasing a rural lifestyle, supplement existing incomes and strengthen livelihood security, rather than trying to replace these primary activities

## The Challenges

**Essentialising rural identities:** The current expansion of travel opportunities and the search for new experiences is taking tourists to lesser-known rural destinations in India. However, most often than not, visitors entering villages tend to see rural communities as the 'other'. Travellers from cities tend to essentialise them as 'isolated entities', even though most communities are highly connected to the world. Even the most well-meaning city dwellers tend to reduce rural communities to uni-dimensional identities as those living 'close to nature' or as people 'in need', who are 'underdeveloped' or 'to be saved'.

**Recognising meeting grounds:** It is important for urban travellers to understand that like their own selves, the villager's existence also hinges on dignity, a sense of ownership and pride, about her land, forests and culture. She shares with them aspirations for a better income, a dignified livelihood and better quality of life. It can, however, be quite challenging to impress this upon visitors who despite good intentions often overstep boundaries, or may be disrespectful to their hosts.

**Misconceptions among village communities:** Rural communities new to tourism could have misplaced notions of hospitality about what might appeal to urban audiences. They may think of investment-heavy 'modern' facilities and furnishings like plush carpets and plastic chairs, instead of renovating or refurbishing traditional furniture, or using local textiles to redecorate their homes.

## Bridging the Gaps

How can these gaps in understanding between travellers and hosts be bridged to ensure that tourism remains mindful of local people, nature and culture, even as they present promising opportunities for both sides? Looking at issues on both the traveller-entrepreneur or guest-host dyad will be useful here.

### The Rural Tourism Enterprise

**Designing community-first experiences:** Tourism programmes and itineraries must be designed around the culture, food, folklore, crafts and agricultural practices showcasing perspectives and skills of rural communities through which they act as stewards of the land, while living off it. For example, local people with interests in birds and plants can be bird guides and naturalists. Tourists can be shown the importance of endangered bird species as showcased in motifs in traditional crafts. New products made of local grasses can be designed. Trips or festivals can be organised around community conservation activities like check dams or rejuvenated waterbodies.

**Sharing, not commodification:** Communities entering tourism and their facilitators need to remember that tourism enterprises are a step towards sharing culture and not commodifying it. The pride and self-respect of host communities can be maintained by facilitating their capacity to tell their own stories and the stories of their landscape themselves.

**Laying the ground rules:** Any community tourism enterprise needs to be mediated by responsible organisations or individuals who lay down the ground rules, keeping communities at the centre and finding solutions for tourists' needs and demands accordingly.

**Communities in control:** Community tourism enterprises have the responsibility of watching over and addressing the impact that bringing visitors has on their landscape. Thus, it only makes sense that communities be at the helm of all decision-making with regard to issues associated with rural life and tourism. Communities and their mediators must intervene to set terms of interaction with the tourism industry and check rapacious growth by exercising control over their own lands to minimise damage. Eventually, this is what will facilitate an authentic experience for travellers.

**Tourism not at the cost of local access to resources:** Entrepreneurs bringing tourists into the community should not allow competition for resources. The demands of tourists must not be met at the cost of the community. For example, demands for evening bonfires or call playback by birders should not be entertained because the deleterious impact that these activities will have on forests and birds will stay long after the tourists have left.

**Capacity building of rural communities:** Sharing of experiences between communities that have considerable experience and those that are newer to tourism may facilitate the breaking of myths. For example, all homestays should have attached toilets.

**Pace your expansion:** Taking things slow is safer and a lot more meaningful than aiming for rapid expansion of rural tourism enterprises.

**A mix of planning and spontaneity:** Even though the best moments on a trip are spontaneous, it is important to plan the experience in advance. Well-planned itineraries, community-run homestays matching basic urban conveniences of toilets and clean bed linen, are important to ensure smoother trips and interactions. However, there should be enough flexibility to experiment with activities that the visitors and hosts, once comfortable, might be open to exploring together.

**Embrace uncertainty:** Sometimes despite planning, things may not pan out as envisaged. For example, the dates of a local festival might change due to a change in the position of stars.

### The Traveller

**Beyond the service provider-consumer dyad:** Visitors might need to be reminded that they are

visiting someone's home. Thus, unlike in a hotel or guesthouse, the homestay owner is a host who cannot be reduced to just a service provider or servant. She or he will provide for the guest's comfort according to his or her own capacity and not according to the guests' demands.

Food arrangements like lunch tiffins can be made so that the hosts do not have to compromise on other necessary daily activities like farming or collecting food or wood from the forests or making crafts.

**The importance of orienting guests:** Good orientation exercises and preparedness regarding what to expect on the trip can be very effective. Clearly spelt out rules, priming travellers for an experience that will not be an out-and-out commercial trip, levying fees for last-minute cancellations, are some of the ways to ensure that travellers respect homestay owners and not treat the rural homestay experience as a low-cost alternative.

**The guest as a co-creator of experience:** The experience of some community-led tourism enterprises in India suggests that it is possible to impress upon guests that they are not buying or merely consuming the holiday experience, but co-creating it with their host. Hence, what they bring to the experience will also define it.

**Respecting personal space:** Guests must be primed to respect the personal space of the hosts. For example, not ask questions they would themselves be uncomfortable answering. Or avoid drinking with the host, for there may be a social or religious dynamics that the guest may be unaware of. Or chip in with household chores in some places.

**Checking the do-gooder syndrome:** Well-designed programmes that place the abilities and skills of rural communities at the centre help facilitate an exchange with urban visitors. Drawing travellers' attention to the rare intangibles they take away, like knowledge that may be inaccessible in their own settings is one way of discouraging patronising attitudes of 'do-gooders' who might come with motivations of charity or teaching the underprivileged or witnessing a 'primitive way of life that may well disappear' in the near future.

### Opportunity

**Community-led tourism can be a moral force:** Community-led tourism can lead to regeneration of the hospitality industry by defining a set of standards that foreground the reciprocity between nature and local communities, not merely referencing profit-oriented practices of the hospitality industry or demands of consumers.







# Storytelling & Social Media

SHIVYA NATH, BLOGGER & AUTHOR OF 'THE SHOOTING STAR'  
MARIELLEN WARD, BLOGGER, BREATHE DREAMGO.COM

## The Challenges

- How should entrepreneurs use social media platforms to market responsible travel, straddling the fine line between promotion and authenticity, to reach the right audience?
- How can they promote responsible tourism without using the word 'responsible'?

## Thumb Rule

"Marketing is no longer about the stuff that you make, but about the stories you tell"

Seth Godin,  
Author and digital marketing expert



## Storytelling that Grabs Your Heart

1. Simple stories about everyday life in a place are central to building a connection with the audience.
2. Find short anecdotes about characters around you — people, mythological figures, animals, rivers, trees and buildings — that could be told in an emotionally powerful way.
3. Create still pictures or video portraits of these characters, or stories that follow their journeys: animal rescue operations, cooking meals with ingredients bought from a local market or foraged from a forest, an elderly lady learning to use a camera, a porter in the hills, etc.
4. Highlight the impact of your work using a 'before' and 'after' photo-series and videos with simple captions say, on rebuilding after a natural disaster, reviving a pond or a dying craft, replacing plastics with bamboo in articles of daily use, etc.
5. Get people from the rural communities to tell their stories directly to the world. Voices of Munsiyari, India's first Instagram account to be run entirely by a rural village community, is a great example.

6. Mobile is the most important device for social media. Make sure your storytelling looks good on a mobile interface.

## Variety of Content

1. Create a monthly editorial calendar at the beginning of every month to divide days by theme. For example, Mondays can be for destination-related posts, Tuesdays for inspirational posts, Wednesdays on experiences and Thursdays to highlight characters integral to your work or travels.
2. Try a mix of photos, videos, questions, polls, call-to-action, only text, and see what works best for you and your audience.
3. Experiment with day and time of posting to assess when you get greater engagement.
4. Add your enterprise's name in creative hashtags for a campaign or event to cement the association and aid promotion.
5. Engage as regularly as possible with readers and followers by responding to comments and messages to deepen the connection with your audience.

Identify the right social media platforms for your travel business...  
Which are the social media platforms relevant for travel in India?

Parameter	Facebook	YouTube	Instagram
Reach	1	2	3
Network	Closed	Open	Open
Potential for Organic Growth	Limited	Yes	Yes
Allows Paid Promotions	Yes	Yes	Yes

## Know Your Goal!

### Is it...

- Creating awareness about your destination and the experiences you offer?
- Connecting with a specific kind of audience?
- Getting bookings from social media?
- Using the platform as a channel for guests to recommend you to future travellers?
- You could be present on all channels but decide your core platform once the objectives are clear.

## Assess the Effectiveness of Use Regularly

1. Use platform insights and analytics to weigh time spent on a platform against gains from it in terms of revenues, followers and views, depending on your objectives.
2. Go the extra mile, and track some of these manually.



3. Create a dedicated email address just for Facebook for you to track inquiries coming through the platform.
4. Share different incentive codes offering free guided tours or a welcome drink on different social media platforms to track customers channeled through them.
5. Do it the old-fashioned way. Collect feedback through a physical form or ask how they found out about you.
6. Look at user-generated content by following the appearance of your unique hashtags and blogs and articles written about you using Google Alerts.
7. Meaningful conversations with your audience, comments and private messages from them are a sign of engagement growing over time.
8. People connect with your passion for your work. Guests and visitors tend to share reviews or stories of places where they had an opportunity to interact with the host.

## Quality over Quantity

### Focus on Credibility, Quality and Fit of Your Followers, Not on Numbers

1. Numbers don't necessarily lead to awareness or conversion.
2. Check to ensure that your followers are real, engagement is good and that you're comfortable with the quality and messaging in their feeds.
3. Ask for references, follow their feeds, track the comments and help other people engage with them.
4. You can spot fake followers using free tools such as Bot Checkers, Instagram and Twitter Audit Scores.

### Not Enough Time? Hire an Influencer!

If you do not have time for social media content creation and engagement you could hire a professional blogger or storyteller.

### They Can Help...

...increase brand destination awareness in four phases of travel: dreaming, planning, experiencing and sharing.

...create backlinks for your website and/or social media handles.

...by participating in campaigns to promote a product, service, brand, destination or idea through popular hashtags.

...create content that you can use to share on your channels or you can buy for your commercial use

**Numbers that Matter:** These figures will help you judge the reach and potential efficacy of a digital storyteller.

1. Domain Authority Score tells you the quality of content and the authority of the website or blog hosted by the influencer. High-ranking sites or blogs get a bigger boost on Google than low-ranking ones, and hence could be indicative of the reach of the influencer. Scores range from 0 to 100 and the maximum tends to be about 60. A score above 40 can be considered robust.
2. Backlinks refer to all the links that point to your website or blog. Links from authoritative and relevant sites help you rank better in the Google Search Engine Result Page (SERP).
3. Spam Scores are indicative of the quality of content on a website. A higher positive score suggests that the content is of questionable standard and veracity.
4. Respect copyright. Make sure you have an agreement before you actually start to use a storyteller's content for commercial purposes.

**Learn From: Wildlife SOS, Voices of Munsiyari, Backwater Sanctuary, 'I love Spiti' Campaign**



# Creating Eco-alternatives: From Water Harvesting to Waste Management



MAYANK MISHRA, BUSINESS HEAD & STRATEGIST, SHIFTS STUDIO, DELHI

## Thumb Rule

Eco alternatives are about the way in which environmental problems posed by building construction, waste management and water supply are approached, and cannot be reduced to technological fixes as a response to the same

It is no more about every unit you save, but it's also about the choices you make

## THE BASICS

On one hand, closeness to nature is often associated in tourism with stereotypes such as lack of amenities, physical discomfort and the absence of fun, while on the other hand, it can be perceived as expensive and designed for wealthy tourists. However, sustainable travel or ecotourism is really about travel and accommodation options imagined and conceptualised to protect and preserve nature, irrespective of price brackets.

**Look at a building and site as being nested within an interconnected system:** Considerations and decisions about material and resource use, the local community and guest experience have a domino effect on the state of nature in the area, since all parts of an ecological system are interconnected. For example, creating a series of check dams with attention to water runoff and ground conditions can enable a huge rainwater storage area, and that is completely natural. Not only does it improve the microclimate and soil fertility, but it also enhances the guest's experience. In a project each element cannot be managed through independent solutions. Following



connections and flows between elements, resources and nature will enable one to make the most of each resource and reduce waste. Closed loop systems, (where the waste from resource use is utilised at the site) help achieve projects whose net energy consumption is 'zero', having a positive impact on the overall ecology of a place.

#### **Best views cannot be the sole criteria for siting decisions:**

What are the potential implications of a particular building site for the landscape, flora and fauna, water supply systems, energy consumption and ambience in that place? Clustering buildings on locations offering best views may have adverse impact on some or all of these aspects.

#### **Opt for energy-efficient alternative technologies to ensure physical comfort:**

Insulation, double-layered tents, shading devices on glass surfaces and radiant cooling and heating systems below the floor all lower thermal heat loads considerably, causing a substantial reduction in air conditioning and heating demands.

#### **Combining methods works best:**

A combination of all the above mentioned energy features works best in maintaining comfortable ambient temperatures, rather than relying on a single method. For example, for heating water, use a combination of a solar panel and a gasifier. The latter uses dried leaves and local biomass instead of wood.

#### **Maximise natural light:**

Day-lit spaces created without compromising on thermal comforts or increasing your heat loads, help to connect to the outside world.

#### **Focus on reducing overall energy and resource demands:**

High energy consumption cannot be offset by green technologies. Focus on reducing your energy consumption on the whole. So a combination of insulation and radiant cooling helps maintain ambient temperature at a comfortable 28°C through the day as compared to

the 22°C blast cooling via an air conditioner during peak heat hours on a summer day. Consciously choose low energy and resource consuming technologies. For example, hydropneumatic systems over gravity-fed systems to pump water or system of underground pipes supplying recycled water rather than sprinklers to water lawns.

#### **Choose natural over top-down, artificial and foreign solutions:**

1. Water treatment can be done through root zone waste water or eco-sand systems that are completely natural, don't consume electricity and can be adopted at various scales to cater to the needs of a home, community or city.
2. Use organic oils for termite and pest control in a site, so it prevents entrance of pests but minimises harm to pollinators and other beneficial insects.
3. Use kitchen waste to make nutrient rich organic fertiliser through vermi-composting.
4. It makes ecological sense to use plants suitable to local environmental conditions for landscaping and food crops. Have a list of plants that can be grown and those to be avoided. For example, bougainvilleas are unsuited to a barren site for they increase soil salinity and don't allow other plants to grow.
5. Create landscape structures using stones and other natural material rather than cement to maximise rain water percolation.

**Retrofitting:** Most measures like insulation can be retrofitted, which don't always yield the best results, but will be better than having energy intensive solutions. For instance, you could insulate your building from the outside in a hot place preventing heat from entering, reducing cooling requirements. Retrofitting is not an easy task. You have to make sure

you're not actually compromising the structural state, for instance.

**Local first:** Locally available materials such as bamboo and earth consume less energy. Adhering to structural codes helps ensure the safety of structures built using these materials and can be additionally certified by an architect or a structural consultant. Use of local materials reduces maintenance costs, creates more employment, provides opportunities for easy skill building and forges partnerships that bring a sense of local ownership to a project, ensuring cooperation and collaboration with the community in the long run.

**Managing waste:** All the waste generated early at the construction your site can be reused in the new building or for landscaping, helping to avoid construction waste which would otherwise go to the dumpyard without recycling. Adapt solid waste and try to use it on your site. Segregate waste at the stage of collection, separating dry and wet waste, plastic and glass using coloured bins. Have a recycling yard to segregate and store the latter. This solid waste is potentially positive income for people who start using it, since it can all be sold in the market. Create your own networks with recyclers, making sure they have enough business.



# Adventure Travel: The Responsible Way Ahead

Maninder Kohli, Founder, Juniper Outdoor Pursuit Center

K Krishnan Kutty, Executive Director, Hanifl Centre for Outdoor Education

## The Challenges

The public conversation on risk management in Indian adventure travel is still nascent. With the growing popularity of adventure sports, it is important to take stock of safety protocols that need to be in place to prevent accidents and deaths. Recent analyses reveal accidental deaths that could have been preventable through simple interventions

There is a lack of organised effort to collect and analyse data on accidental deaths in adventure travel among tour operators, for fear of the discussion affecting their business adversely. The overall tendency is thus to suppress data instead of analysing it to identify gaps and lapses that could be addressed to prevent such a futile loss of life. The number of deaths can be reduced by improving conditions of safety

Key problems relate to timing of trips, oversight about climatic and geographical conditions, lack of medical facilities, profit maximising and cost cutting measures resulting in large team sizes, inadequacies and incompetence related to fitness assessments, support staff, leadership skills, safety equipment and gear

## Thumb Rule

Risk is an inherent part of outdoor experiences and cannot be eliminated entirely. However, travel operators can assess, address causes and reduce risk to ensure a responsible adventure travel experience

## Causes of death among trekkers in the Indian Himalayas

A recent analysis of 43 accidental deaths by the Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF) among trekkers in the Himalayas since 2017, reveals that the most prominent causes of death were altitude sickness, hypothermia, accidental slips, avalanches, rock-fall, as well as those who went missing.

### A quick history of risk management in the United States of America

The Journal of Accidents in North American Mountaineering has been categorising accidents by severity of injuries and fatality since 1943.

The concept of risk management itself emerged around the 1980s in response to a death in a programme run by a very well-known company in the US.

Since 1994, Wilderness Risk Managers' Conferences have been organised in the US.

They were initially funded and supported by Outward Bound and National Outdoor Leadership School, two of the country's biggest organisations with a stake in how risk was managed in outdoor recreation.

The conference addresses a host of issues related to adventure and outdoor recreation including legal issues, specific skills training of personnel, creating risk management protocols, community-first aid courses, addressing serious injuries, wilderness medicine and leadership in addition to soft skills in handling the media, family of the injured or deceased.



## Preventing Risk During Treks

**Leadership:** Groups should be recruited by trip leaders with established proficiency and training.

**Putting a group together:** The leader must know the capabilities and vulnerabilities of each person joining the expedition. Avoid trips where members are being recruited online without appropriate protocols to check fitness levels of group members.

**Cheaper trips are not better deals:** The cost of a trip cannot be the main criteria for choosing a team or company to go on a trek, rafting expedition or any other adventure activity with. Groups offering cheaper prices for the same trips may be doing so at the cost of expert staff, equipment and/or gear vital to ensure the safety of the travellers.

**Fitness of group members:** In addition to a medical certificate issued by a doctor, indicating the fitness of a person to undertake say, a trek, the team leader must ensure that she or he has no underlying conditions that could worsen under conditions of extreme cold and exertion. Fitness must also be assessed by what the aspirant can achieve in terms of physical exercise like walking, running or push-ups. A meticulous assessment of all these aspects will help tour operators to ensure the well-being of clients and ensure a sustainable business in the long run.

The expedition leader must match the group members' capabilities with the level of difficulty that the expedition or activity entails.

**Planning itineraries:** Itineraries must be planned carefully timing and spacing the trekking, camps and periods of rest according to considerations of season, weather and geographical terrain and time of day. For instance, mountain gorges must be crossed early morning before the sun is out and softens the snow or ice and destabilises rocks that could contribute to slipping and falling.

**Monitoring the group:** Team leaders should be monitoring the physical condition of the members at all times and should be alert to signs of fatigue among them. For instance, patients suffering from high altitude pulmonary oedema should be evacuated immediately. Provisions to carry them down should be available to avoid further stress to their bodies.

**Protocol enforcement:** Team leaders must enforce strict protocols about group itineraries and routes. No member of the group must be allowed to go back down without trained support staff for company. Returning unescorted can result in falls, injuries or individuals just losing their way.

**Invest in safety equipment and gear:** Sometimes all that is needed to prevent a death is very simple safety equipment like helmets or air pocket bags in case of skiers.

**Importance of support staff:** Risk management requires members to pre-empt and make provisions for situations that could arise during an adventure activity. Even in the right season, there is always the chance of getting hit by bad weather or other challenges. Hence, it is important to have buffer staff who can attend to persons who fall sick, so that the other people on the trip move on seamlessly.

**Safety of support staff:** Porters must be well trained, dressed in sufficient warm clothing, the right footwear and gear. Given the desperation for steady employment and incomes in rural areas, it is not unusual to find people with little altitude experience willing to take up underpaid jobs as porters or guides, labouring in poor conditions, without social security cover or safety equipment. Care must be taken to ensure that porters and guides are sufficiently protected for they often come from socially and economically vulnerable backgrounds.

### Resources in India

The Indian Mountaineering Foundation (IMF), Delhi, the apex national body for mountaineering and allied sports organised India's first Risk Management Conference in February 2019, where it also shared findings from mountaineering accident case study analyses with the participants. The Hanifl India Centre for Outdoor Education, an outreach of the Woodstock School, Mussoorie, organises a basic first aid course called the Wilderness First Responder, a nine-day course.



## Attracting Indian and International Travellers

Gopinath Parayil, Founder, The Blue Yonder  
Emma Horne, Founder, Emma Horne Travels

### Thumb Rule

People 'buy' people, so invest effort in building networks and collaborations through interactions, especially in real and also in virtual spaces

Authentic travel experiences hinge upon relationships built with local communities, making sure the travel enterprise connects with their felt needs

## Inbound Travel

### Building Networks

Networking with domestic and international travel agents, meeting them in person by participating in travel fairs and markets is critical to casting a wider net to attract clients. Register your presence at important travel events to interface with the companies, building personal rapport and reminding them of your work. Relatively small travel businesses and properties are defined by the personalities that run them, hence building one-to-one connections is particularly important to their success.



## The Story of Pokkali Rice

The Pokkali Rice Initiative of The Blue Yonder travel company and the Palliyackal Service Cooperative Bank is centered on reviving a rare, indigenous variety of paddy that is saltwater-resistant, and by extension, climate change resistant. The tour, 'Pokkali: The Story of a Rice', allows travellers to experience the community intervention and creativity involved in growing this rare variety of rice.

An award-winning effort listed among the best responsible travel experiences by prominent media publications, including *The Guardian* and *The BBC*, the initiative helped locals, who were doctors, lawyers, policemen or gardeners, and not farmers, to procure loans at low interest rates to cultivate Pokkali. The paddy cultivation, though not lucrative, at least at the moment, preserves tradition. The Pokkali rice came to coastal areas in Thrissur, Ernakulam and Alleppey from the Western Ghats in the 14th-century flood that created the Cochin harbour. It survived the floods in 1924 as well as the recent flood of 2018. It alternates with a season of prawn rearing, which while enriching the soil in the fields, helps farmers recover the money lost in Pokkali cultivation.

The Blue Yonder also collaborated with 75 hotels in Fort Kochi and in Ernakulam area to discuss possibilities of lengthening the stay of the traveller. The Pokkali rice tour contributes to this effort by attracting students, researchers, environmentalists and also helping organise 14- and 21-day long stays, where the company showcases this unique initiative and its relevance to local life in this part of Kerala through some wonderful storytelling by local guides.

## Publicity and Promotion

### Word-of-mouth vs. Social Media

Travel businesses can grow by word-of-mouth publicity with very little advertising, if the product/experience is good. Choose your social media platform with care. Instagram is particularly effective and putting out information on it along with other social media platforms helps in gaining visibility and connecting with those interested in your work.

### Talk about your work, do not 'green hush' it

'Green washing' is rather common in the sustainable/eco/responsible tourism space. But so is 'green hushing'. A large number of travel outfits doing interesting work 'green hush' or do not talk about their work in depth. Green hushing reduces the visibility of those doing genuine work, and travellers do not know enough about such options. The growing visibility of responsible travel outfits would improve the prospects of the industry as a whole, hence, it is extremely important to invest in showcasing one's work on social media, at fairs and festivals and leveraging opportunities provided by media organisations and by state tourism departments.

### Address criticism genuinely, particularly to reviews on public travel forums

It's important to address negative feedback, especially that which appears on public forums like TripAdvisor. Responding to complaints proactively with a genuine engagement is critical for a company's image. Treat every complaint as an opportunity to address the issue raised.

## Focusing on Travel Products

### A good travel product for a first-time visitor

A good product is one that offers an authentic, fun and potentially transformative experience for the visitor. This often requires an entrepreneur to go beyond what a client wants, because first-time travellers have standard or stereotypical information and do not always know the range of things that may be there to find or see.

### Cover the basic and the iconic, but add an off-beat experience or two

Offer your first-time visitors the basic, 'quintessential' India they wish to see, but also go beyond what they want, to deliver an authentic experience. So if you are catering to international travellers on a Taj Mahal or Rajasthan trip, add a village stay or visit, to allow for a true experience, even though the guest might not have thought of it.

### A good first experience ensures repeat clients

Repeat clients are not a common feature of travel in a country like India, but their presence means that you are delivering the goods. A first good experience at a property or with a travel company helps to ensure that clients return, creating opportunities for outfits to offer off-beat experiences in



non-traditional destinations. Repeat clients are likely to trust you and be open to your suggestions, whether it means a trip to a *dhobi ghat* or a local school, even at the cost of missing an important monument.

### It is all about experience

While most travellers essentially look for a clean, comfortable stay with good toilet facilities, they also seek friendliness in a host and interesting experiences. A small property could offer unique experiences like a riverside picnic, or tea on a sand dune, rather than money spent on swimming pools and expensive furnishings. Thus, imaginative use of the everyday practices, like cooking, rituals to care for animals or water bodies, routine work on a farm, to create personalised and customised experiences, enhance the novelty of a place for the client.

### Take it slow

Don't expect your clients to grow overnight. It is, in fact, not desirable. Identifying the kind of clients who find resonance with your ethos and style takes time, so be prepared with resources needed for a marathon run.

## Storytelling is the Cornerstone of a Good Experience

Good storytelling draws a live picture of local people's everyday life, their relationship with art, cuisine, work, their struggles and triumphs, to offer a sense of place. It enables visitors to experience the texture of the place and build their own connection to it.

### Local communities as storytellers

A good story calls for substantive content, and who, but local communities, could be better repositories of stories of their native land. The pride and sense of investment they bring to the table are important ingredients of a good story. Training interested and informed locals as storytellers to guide local tours brings authenticity and passion to the stories and the experiences.

## Collaborate and Expand

### Collaborate with communities

Authentic experiences can be built only when travel entrepreneurs invest in

relationship-building with communities. Transformative travel experiences for clients hinge on the relationship a travel enterprise builds with the local community. Working closely with a community and co-designing travel offerings that also respond to its felt needs, staying inclusive of the most marginalised, helps build experiences and stories that are real and close to the ground.

### Collaborate with ground-level operators

It always makes sense to stick to core competencies rather than claiming expertise in different parts of the country. To expand to other parts of the country, it pays to find the right partners and collaborators with whom you find common meeting grounds. These decisions need to be taken judiciously, since they call for investments in people, website, etc, and it might be better to recommend people to various networks. Federations of tour operators and destination management companies need to identify and invest in good ground-level operators, rather than trying to run operations remotely.

## Collaborate with Travellers

Travellers can also be the best storytellers on social media. If the traveller has had an authentic experience, then he or she will tell a good story about it. Follow-up with your clients to write an insta story or post, or give you a review, as soon as the holiday is over.

### Seek the support of tourism departments

Trade shows have become networking sites and not for business. The business comes from personal connections and storytelling. There are more officials now who understand these stories.







# Reimagining and Celebrating Indian Food

IONA SINHA, CO-OWNER, MELTING POT FOOD COMPANY (MPFC), WHICH RUNS CAFÉ LOTA, ROOTS CAFÉ, TRIVENI CAFÉ & MONSOON

UDIT MAHESHWARI, CORDON BLEU-TRAINED CHEF & CEO, MPFC

SALIM RIAZ KHAN, CREATIVE & BRAND DIRECTOR, MPFC

## Thumb Rule

Stick with what you know best. Work with Indian ingredients.  
Do not dilute your brand image. Know your customers' needs. Serve delight!

### Familiar but with a twist

Introduce novelty into simple, homestyle Indian food by using a range of Indian ingredients with different regional influences. Find regional recipes, pay attention to seasonality, and it will make a big impact on the customer who is looking for the wholesome and the familiar, with a twist.

### Refreshing change

People appreciate the charm of sitting outdoors to eat affordable, wholesome, homestyle food, presented with a little care. You don't have to mimic the menus or ambience of indoor restaurants in air-conditioned malls to attract the right customers.



### Do it from scratch

Make fresh ingredients your USP. Use your own freshly ground spices, bake breads, create sauces and chutneys and fresh juices. Avoid pre-packaged foods.

### Innovative combinations

Create flavour and texture combinations by building on the long history of regional food practices. Adapt them to suit the context of the contemporary customer and prevalent trends. The best answer to this challenge is using a range of Indian dishes and ingredients to create unusual combinations and presentations. For example, a simple chicken curry recipe offers a surprise when combined with a spicy chutney accompanying a crispy papad, local vegetables in the pulao and a bajra roti. Serve Kalimpong and Bandel cheese croquettes as appetizers.

### Patience is everything

Believe in your product from the beginning and stick with it. Do not dilute your brand in a bid to find customers. The initial months could be tough, for innovations are slow to pick-up. Once the media and food bloggers recognise the effort, customers, awards and recognition will not be far behind.

### People eat with their eyes

How you use your ingredients, and plate the meal matters. Present visually appealing food by taking advantage of the variety of colours and textures in Indian cuisines.

### Revive and support traditional culinary practices

Bring the millets, local varieties of rice, vegetables and oilseeds back on the table. Jump off the superfood bandwagon to explore and revive local wisdom and cooking practices about forgotten foods. This practice will not only be environmentally sustainable but will also be economical and support local economies. For example, the celebrated superfood flaxseed is *alsi* used extensively in Bihari and South Indian cuisines to make chutneys and podi idli.

### Go glocal

Source Western ingredients grown in India by local farmers. They will be cheaper, have a

smaller footprint and the hospitality industry will be supporting Indian farmers, or those in the communities where they are placed. For example, you can get 100% organic, chemical-free chocolate at half the price of the imported Belgian chocolate. Choose Goan chorizos instead of German sausages, and buy organic quinoa from producers in Andhra Pradesh.

### Incentivise creativity

Research recipes, cooking techniques and food combinations and invite suggestions or recipes from everyone in the team. You could reward them by naming the best dish after its innovator and putting it on the menu.

### Practice, practice, practice

Try the recipe at least five to six times before it goes out in public. Get your staff, old guests and anyone who will give genuine feedback to taste it.

### Align customer touch points to your brand idea

Align every single offering that you create or touch point for your customers with the essence of the brand. Ambience, table settings, crockery, graphics, all have to mimic what the brand is all about. For example, for the Melting Pot Food Company, it is about food that is Indian, seasonal, mostly contemporary, but also relaxed, friendly and very accessible.

### Be bold. Innovate. Reinvent

Experiment with what you are serving, design new editions of existing menus, come up with new ways of presenting the dishes. If dishes or flavours surprise the customer every time he or she returns, it only adds to his or her interest and prevents you from stagnating.

### Surprise!

Everybody likes to get something more than they expected, whether in terms of value, experience or hospitality. Make sure that customers do not leave the place unimpressed and more importantly, unhappy. Present your customers with some extra value. It becomes a quality they come to associate with your brand. For example, at Café Lota customers are served a cookie or a drink, while they wait for their turn.





# Photography: Beyond Filters & Gimmicks

ANINDITO MUKHERJEE, PHOTOJOURNALIST, REGULAR  
CONTRIBUTOR TO REUTERS AND BLOOMBERG

## Thumb Rule

Curate images to showcase your perspective, to tell the story of your enterprise. Identify a 'hero' image that captures the very essence of your work

### Curate images to tell a story

Curate a set of 8-12 images that cover key aspects of what your enterprise offers. Put them together to tell its story the way you want to. Make sure one of the set is a 'hero' image, a single still that captures the essence of your enterprise. Make sure you caption your images carefully, for captions help direct the viewer's interpretation.

### Workable vs. good images

Whether an image is good or bad is subjective, a matter of individual perspective. So when assessing an image, it is more useful to think in terms of a 'workable' image. A workable image is one that has elements that make the common place stand out. Elements like a fleeting or an unguarded moment, a still that evokes curiosity or surprise, transform the mundane into the extraordinary.

### Ethics of Photography

1. When taking photographs of places and people make sure you respect their space, maintain distance and position yourself in a way that allows you to capture a good image in a non-intrusive manner. Respecting people's space helps them to trust and welcome you.
2. Legal specifications are not discussed often in the context of photography, but government stipulations do not allow the featuring of those under 18 in magazines and newspapers.

### The Holy Trinity Light, Action and Angle

1. Light is one of the most vital factors in a getting a workable image.
2. When to use a flash? If you are shooting portraits in harsh light, then flash would help to fill in the shadow areas such as under the eyes. Choose the size of camera, use of flash and time of day after carefully considering them against the subject you are shooting. For example, shooting in a crowded lane may require a large flash, but that would entail a large camera making you conspicuous and lessening the chances of being able to mingle freely to capture candid moments of people in that lane.
3. Capturing fleeting moments with a good composition is a challenge, hence preparation is key when shooting moving subjects. If you have the opportunity to anticipate an action then you can position yourself in preparation and compose the image in advance. A slow shutter speed helps to capture the action. Also consider revisiting a place or subject where you captured the action. It might yield serendipitous finds.
4. Pay attention to backgrounds when composing an image. Simple backgrounds that are not too busy or layered help retain focus on the central subject of the image.
5. A novel angle or perspective can introduce interest into what might be an oft-seen image.
6. Avoid over editing images using filters and tools.

# Raising & Managing Funds

### What does a good business proposal have?

1. Clear definitions and vision. For example, what do you understand by responsible tourism and what is the vision?
2. A well-written business plan must accompany the pitch.
3. Clarity of objectives: Articulate what you seek to achieve from the project.
4. The larger scope of the project: Very minute, focused goal-oriented ventures are not adequate; scalability of the project is an important criteria to invite investment.
5. Wider impacts and alignment with other stakeholders: See how your venture can align with other stakeholders, other elements of the society and the region. What is its impact and meaning for the wider community? And show potential ways in which people worldwide might want to associate with it. Once you recognise an opportunity, see how the potential enterprise could not only boost the economy, but also consider its wider societal impacts on aspects like peace, prosperity, social cohesion, and so on.
6. Potential collaborations: Local collaboration makes the projects sustainable and allows the business to grow more rapidly, because it helps integrate the project with the local economy and expands the social impact. In your vision and development, try and visualise how it can spin off an economy, be helpful to a social cause. It is a very high impact opportunity for anyone to consider.
7. Target segments: Who do you think will be participating in production and trade? Who will be your buyer? Where will you be selling your product? Is there a seasonality to it? Is there a price point sensibility? What does your brand stand for? How will you promote it?

### Other homework

Look at how state policy frameworks of a destination support or impede you.  
Promote destinations and not merely your project.

Look for ways to collaborate with the state tourism department and government schemes.

### Why do you need to raise funding?

If you have managed to raise funds through banks and government schemes, you are the sole owner of your own business and can avoid the interference of investors.

Apply for funding only when you only have been able to run a pilot, or you are already making money. It is useful to invest time in understanding government funds, schemes, bank schemes, etc. If pursued consistently, with the right documentation, these can certainly be availed.

When you start a venture, you create seed money, you bootstrap, and the first target are the three F's for Funding: Family, Friends and the Fools who will invest in you. Fools because entrepreneurship is about doing things differently, it's about changing the world, creating disruptive change in the society in the business that you are doing and new ideas might not always look wise to people.

There are multiple ways to get funds, not just from banks or venture capitalists. Think of seed funds, private equity, term loans, overdraft facilities and working capital facilities.

Leverage financing leverages future business to fund an enterprise and it is very risk oriented, because if the business doesn't do well, the investor loses money.

### Joint ventures & franchises

A responsible tourism venture has several elements, with differing levels of risk, which may call for multiple sources of financing. For service-oriented ventures, micro-financing may be more suitable, because each of the chapters may need little money. Hence, bank loans and instruments may be more appropriate. Alternatively, vendors may get financed and then give you credit.

There are commission undertakings like SBLCs, Bank Guarantees, favouring guarantees, which can be monetised for large projects. Large projects could also be financed in a Public Private Partnership model, which calls for high investment.

SIDBI (Small Industries Development Bank of India) is also funding responsible travel ventures, through a program by the name of 'Praise'.



# Travel Start-ups You Need to Know About

## GLOBAL HIMALAYAN EXPEDITIONS

PARAS LOOMBA, FOUNDER

ZOSTEL

AKHIL MALIK, CO-FOUNDER

WHITE COLLAR HIPPIE

VIKRANT CHHEDA, FOUNDER

# GLOBAL HIMALAYAN EXPEDITION

## Core Idea

'Impact tourism' — travel that intervenes tangibly on the ground to produce a transformation that has tangible benefits for local communities and is a life-changing experience for both the tourist and for the village community

The company's focus is innovation in infrastructure design and installation for environmentally and socially sustainable access to electrification, digital education and livelihoods that boost rural economies, meeting in the process critical Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as outlined by the UN

Paras Loomba loved the mountains, having travelled from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh as the son of an Army officer. However, he finally chose to work for rural communities, inspired by an expedition to Antarctica, working with an American multinational company. During his treks in India, Loomba gleaned that the utter lack of basic infrastructure and roads, was causing life in rural Ladakh to lose appeal among the younger generation, who were migrating to cities in search of opportunities. Trained as an electrical engineer, Loomba believed that he could help deliver basic infrastructure like electricity in these remote parts of the Himalayas and contribute to improving quality of life for rural mountain communities. It is with this aim that he founded the Global Himalayan Expeditions in 2012.

## Why the mountains?

The recent data by Kathmandu-based research organisation ICIMOD suggests that about 160 million people in the Hindukush mountains, right from Afghanistan to Myanmar, do not have grid-based electricity. The terrain presents a challenge and the impact of electrification is stark in mountainous regions, adding incomes and creating additional livelihood opportunities like rural tourism that can reduce outmigration from these parts. If undertaken responsibly, tourism could contribute to addressing the impacts of climate change and help celebrate and preserve local cultures, under threat due to migration.

## The journey so far...

In six years, GHE has taken over 1,200 people from 60 countries to set up 480 solar grids, electrifying 94 villages to offset 1120 tonnes of carbon and impact 36,000 lives. These numbers are growing even as we go to press, as GHE continues to lead more expeditions to Ladakh, and scours other potential villages for electrification in the Himalayan region.

## The Process

### Identifying need

GHE identifies villages that need electrification by tying up with local trek leaders or mountaineers, who inform them about remote, underserved village clusters, unknown to travellers. The organisation then reaches out to the villages to discuss their needs and explore possibilities of potential partnerships with the communities. Once the village is on board, the expeditions are promoted, inviting people from across the world to join the team, to trek up to the villages and electrify them.

### Electrification

The expeditions are open to anyone with good health, the capability and willingness to trek and the ability to bear costs. The selected group (generally between 15 to 20 members) attends a half-day orientation on how solar energy works, followed by a trek to the village. The participants stay in the villages, interacting with the



inhabitants and experiencing the darkness that the community have been living with for centuries. The solar grid is set up over a span of 2-3 days transforming a village steeped in darkness to one with light. The participants too have the satisfaction of witnessing this change. The costs of electrification are covered by the expedition fees and additionally sometimes by crowd-sourcing, since costs vary depending on number of households, LED lights, street lights and televisions required.

Design and Maintenance

GHE employs the very simple and safe DC micro-grid technology that requires just a panel and a battery, minus an inverter. The low voltage electricity produced through this technology is suited for the Ladakhi context, given that it is safe, more efficient and does not require any power plants. It can support televisions, street lights and the two-watt computers that have been made available in these villages.

The GHE also helps village communities set up a communal bank account, where they collectively save a small sum every month per household to address maintenance and transportation issues, if need be. While women from the villages are trained as solar engineers to take up regular maintenance and repairs, more serious issues are fixed at local service centres set up in Ladakh.

Collateral gains

Tourism for livelihood security

The media coverage that GHE has received internationally for its model has resulted in tourist inflow to these previously lesser known parts of Ladakh. GHE has supported the setting up of 55 homestays in their expedition villages some of which have been registered with Airbnb and Booking.com. Women run these homestays and are trained in hospitality. These rural homestays provide a unique, immersive experience of Ladakhi life, culture and cuisine at affordable prices.

To overcome language barriers, GHE has designed and installed the ‘Homestay Travel Information Server’ for villages that have no connectivity or Wi-Fi. The server has details of village activities, products, cuisine and local developments that can be updated regularly. Thus electrification has had ripple effects augmenting incomes to the order of \$12,000.

GHE is also monitoring the footfall in these villages post-electrification, to ensure sustainability of their model.

Digital education

With energy access assured, the next logical step is access to education. DC power computers, with a lower wattage compared to ordinary computers (latter using three times the power consumed by the GHE computer) have been set up in innovation centres in the villages. The centres allow students access to offline Internet content through Wikipedia, Khan Academy, TED talks and the School Curriculum that is pre-loaded on a 1TB Wifi Server.

Other unique features

GHE has collaborated with the International Astronomical Union that can put telescopes powered by DC, and help auto track planets and constellations in the clear open skies in Ladakh. Tourists can gaze at the deep sky on the computer screens. The whole system is being run by local women and is an additional opportunity for income generation. It will hopefully, draw more and more tourists to the area, helping in dispersing tourist traffic from the more popular destinations in Ladakh.

Resources

Though started as an energy company, GHE today is a tourism enterprise that is facilitating infrastructure in these remote areas. This innovative start-up built good partnerships around the world that facilitated marketing, a robust advisory with experience in sustainable tourism and a team with diverse capabilities.

Recognition

GHE has received several accolades from leading multilateral, public and private organisations including the UNWTO, World Tourism Awards, World Travel and Tourism Council, ICIMOD, for this unique offering that marries travel and technology to contribute to sustainability in host communities.

Future Plans

Currently operational in Ladakh, this year the company plans to sustainably electrify villages in Indonesia, Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya and Nepal. Though the mountains have been their preferred zones of intervention and the one in which they have most experience, GHE is open to working in any remote area.



ZOSTEL

Core Idea

Harness the strengths and assets of local entrepreneurs, to build tourism opportunities, facilitated by technical, marketing and managerial inputs, while maintaining local ownership and ensuring benefits are shared fairly with local people





## What is Zostel?

Zostel is India's first backpacker hostel chain, started in 2013, when its founding team was still finishing business school. The company stepped in to the market to provide attractive, affordable stays suitable to young millennials (between 18 and 30 years of age), in their first jobs, with modest budgets, for whom travel is a lifestyle. Starting with small properties in Jodhpur and Jaipur with a small capital of Rs 20 lakh, Zostel has grown rapidly in six years to be operational in 33 locations across India and Nepal, in January 2019.

Unlike the previous generations, millennials want maximum bang for the buck, so the Zostel brand is positioned as a stay for youngsters, marrying affordability to a cool, casual vibe. The interiors have a quirky, casual and instagrammable aesthetic, the service is casual and non-servile and the spaces clean, designed to support safe, independent travel with facilities like wi-fi, gaming and socialising areas. Zostel remains the frontrunner in this niche segment, to which the Indian travel market is just waking. Big brands like Marriott, Hilton and Accord have created sub brands like Moxy, True and Drew & Joey to cater to this young audience.

## How does Zostel work?

Zostel is a strong brand with a very small marketing budget. Its greatest strength is its unique collaborative model with the local communities. Barring two, all of the 33 Zostel accommodations are run by a local micro-entrepreneur. The entrepreneurs understood their backyard and were great at hospitality, but needed marketing, branding and tech support besides some handholding in implementing the brand SOPs, which the company management did. This is the centrepiece of Zostel's success, evidenced in its properties being counted among the top three in any of the cities they are operational in.

## The Approach

Zostel has a two-pronged approach to sustainability, accounting for both social and environmental sustainability.

### Strategising for social sustainability

To ensure social sustainability, it handpicks people on the ground from among those who are committed to doing something for the region and from among migrants who want to return to their roots and contribute to their native

communities. The properties run by these local partners also receive monetary incentives to take care of on-ground operations according to specifications to ensure quality. These incentives are used as a lever to control quality and make sure the customers return happy, since the management is the biggest source of business for these micro-entrepreneurs.

### Environmental Sustainability Initiatives

Zostel operates in some of the most eco-sensitive areas like Chitkul on the India-China border, at Kaza in Spiti, and is mindful of not being seen as a brand that destroyed these places. It launched the 'I Travel Green' campaign as part of which it replaced plastic bottles and straws on its properties, with subsidised steel bottles. The organisation mobilised 10,000 people through their website to pledge to travel green. All Zostel properties put up Reverse Osmosis machines for bottles to be refilled, discouraging the accumulation of non-biodegradable waste.

Collaborations with NGOs like Economads in Fort Kochi and Waste Warriors in McLeodganj and cleanliness drives with schoolchildren in Dalhousie have been instrumental in building a larger conversation to educate the people about the dangers of mass tourism. Zostel invests in sensitising visitors to responsible travel, encouraging them to minimise their environmental footprint and to see that tourist sites are homes to local populations and hence travellers have to support the maintenance of the destinations.

### The rural turn

Zostel X tries to bring together the need of travellers for deeper explorations in lesser known destinations and the livelihood needs of people in these locations by setting up stays in villages that are not necessarily on the tourism map, but close to mainstream destinations like Jibhi or Shimla and Naggar. It identified potential properties through local people, who met representatives of *mahila mandals*, *panchayats* and visited villages to understand their needs. Based on this ground work, they came up with customer guidelines that articulated non-negotiables for visitors, keeping in mind local communities' sentiments about their culture and environment. The Zostel X initiative diverts visitors to decongest mainstream destinations, while providing alternative local employment to villagers and prevent migration.

# WHITE COLLAR HIPPIE

## Core Idea

Travel can be a medium of internal change among people, prompting them to relate to the environment and the world around them differently

Founder Vikrant Chheda always preferred to go on long treks in the mountains, wanting to preserve the mountains, and deeply affected by any damage to these habitats. He liked to connect with people, and felt it was a great experience when they reciprocated. He realised travel that allowed internal transformation leading to a change in one's relationship with the external world was what he wanted to put his weight behind. Drawing on this imagination, White Collar Hippy (WCH) aspires to be 'travel', not a 'holiday', company.

WCH started as a passion project, grew organically, and got a lot of attention because of the way the trips were conducted. However, slow travel also meant lesser revenues, to counter which he introduced new initiatives which roped in locals with time and expertise to design and facilitate immersive trips.

### What is a White Collar Hippy like?

WCH was invested in the idea of adventure, defining it as just taking someone out of their comfort zone, making them learn something new. It is about discovering that they have the ability to learn, to change and to organically connect with nature and with a place, look after it. These elements remain constant for each every WCH trip.

The company began to design trips that encompassed these elements. For instance, including local people like a school teacher in Ladakh, who recounts the history of Ladakh in verse. The visitors would be invited to his place for dinner in his lovely house, where someone local would cook for them. Chheda believes that such an opportunity to interact with local people inculcates a fondness and

warmth for them rather than treating them as objects to be seen.

### Technology for Transformation

WCH incorporated technology to amplify the impact created by their idea. Their online platform lists local 'experts' (individuals or organisations), who enable travellers to build a real connection with a place, people and their history. These experts create the experiences themselves, while WCH brings them the right kind of audience. People register to become hosts on this platform.

It also shares ideas to empower them with information on how to lead a trip, ensure safety, handle emergencies and partner with WCH. For example, WCH organised a music festival in Ladakh with Stanzin Namgay, who studied at TISS and was involved in many environmental initiatives in Ladakh. He was also a travel agent and organised cars for visitors and hotels. The company designed a trip together with him and he was the one who introduced them to the Ladakhi teacher, who also happened to be involved in restoration activities in the old town of Leh and organised heritage walks. Stanzin is now designing his own range of trips in the winter to visit remote tribes living near the Tso Moriri lake.

All WCH's experiences put the host first. She or he is the one who actually creates the transformational experience, shows the travellers around because of her or his knowledge and passion for the place. This is a combination that an outsider cannot replicate as easily.

WCH Trips have been organised with corporate clients, individuals and children.







**OVERALL WINNER**  
HIMALAYAN ECOTOURISM

**OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT**  
SPICE VILLAGE CGH EARTH, THEKKADY

**BEST ADVENTURE OPERATOR**  
Gold: HIMALAYAN ECOTOURISM  
Silver: EXPEDITIONS INDIA

**BEST EXPERIENTIAL OPERATOR**  
Gold: JOURNEYS WITH MEANING  
Silver: OPEN EYES PROJECT

**BEST HOMESTAY**  
Gold: MAYAL LYANG, DZONGU  
Gold: BHORAMDEO JUNGLE RETREAT, NEAR KAWARDHA

**BEST WILDLIFE STAY**  
Gold: KAADUMANE HOMESTAY, NEAR DANDELI  
Gold: MANGALAJODI ECOTOURISM TRUST, CHILIKA LAKE

**BEST EARTH-FRIENDLY STAY**  
Gold: THE GOAT VILLAGE, NAG TIBBA, ECOLORE  
Silver: THE SARAI AT TORIA, NEAR KHAJURAHO

**RESPONSIBLE TOURISM PATHFINDER**  
PARAG AJIT RANGNEKAR  
PEMA G. BHUTIA

**ONES TO WATCH**  
KUNDAN HOMESTAY, NEAR KULLU  
BANLEKHI RESORT, NEAR MUKTESHWAR  
HEARTH HOSTEL & HOMESTAYS, LEH



# THE WINNERS





# THE JURY



**AMANPREET BAJAJ**  
Country Manager,  
India & Sri Lanka  
Airbnb



**AMIT DIXIT**  
Editor,  
Outlook Traveller



**ANANDA BANERJEE**  
Author, Illustrator  
& Wildlife Journalist



**BELINDA WRIGHT**  
Executive Director,  
Wildlife Protection  
Society of India



**CB RAMKUMAR**  
Board Member & India  
Head, Global Sustainable  
Tourism Council



**EMMA HORNE**  
Proprietor,  
Emma Horne Travel



**HAROLD GOODWIN**  
Director,  
International Centre for  
Responsible Tourism



**JAYA JAITLEY**  
Founder,  
Dastkaari Haat Samiti



**KT RAVINDRAN**  
Former Dean,  
School of Planning &  
Architecture



**MALIKA VIRDI**  
Mountaineer, Farmer &  
Sarpanch, Sarmoli Van  
Panchayat



**MANINDER KOHLI**  
Founder,  
Juniper Outdoor  
Pursuits Centre



**MILAN MOUNDGIL**  
Adventure Enthusiast,  
Design Consultant &  
Photographer



**SUMAN BILLA**  
Joint Secretary,  
Ministry of Tourism,  
India

## 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 (July 2018):** We received about 300 entries in 5 categories. The sixth category was introduced to recognise individual practitioners whose outstanding contribution to tourism has changed the narrative of inclusive travel in India. Over 30 nominees were recommended by a closed group of over 60 public officials, journalists, tourism practitioners and travel industry insiders/leaders from all the States and Union Territories of India.

**STEP 2. The Longlist (September 2018):** 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 2018):** Two (undisclosed) judges for each category combed through the documents and arrived at the Shortlist of 5.

**STEP 4. Jury Meet (November 2018):** 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 (December 2018 and January 2019):** 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 (January 2019):** Awards were announced at the Summit in Delhi.





**The All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association (AIACA) helped create the trophies for our winners. Each trophy has been hand-painted by mural artists Bhavam Sujith and Pooja from Wayanad. The base is a copper plaque made by Tambat artisans from Pune, who continue to practise a craft dating back to the 18th century.**

## **Overall Winner HIMALAYAN ECOTOURISM**

Himalayan Ecotourism is a co-operative society engaging individuals from 72 families in villages in the buffer zone of the Great Himalayan National Park. Theirs is a model for tourism development which ensures local benefits, empowers local communities and provides a viable route to market as a model which could, and should, be replicated.

## **Outstanding Achievement SPICE VILLAGE-CGH EARTH, THEKKADY**

CGH Earth were pioneers in environmental, social and economic sustainability, and they have developed a series of destination-based experiences in 15 boutique resorts, all of which respect nature, build social relationships with their neighbours and with their participation and insights create unique experiences. Early adopters of Responsible Tourism, they have proved that "less can be more and that true luxury is an experience rooted in simplicity and soul, transcending mere form and ostentation."

## **Responsible Tourism Pathfinder PARAG RANGNEKAR**

Parag Rangnekar's passion for the environment has led him to engage with an array of interventions, ranging from bird conservation to impacts of mining and eco-tourism. Credited with setting-up Goa's first tourism cooperative, Parag also has the distinction of discovering the Goan Shadow Dancer Dragonfly and documenting for the first time in the state, 17 species of butterflies and 64 dragonflies.

## **Responsible Tourism Pathfinder PEMA BHUTIA**

Pema Bhutia is a founding member of the Khangchendzonga Conservation Committee (KCC), a pioneer in environmental interventions and ecotourism in Sikkim. In the last two decades, Pema with other members of the KCC has initiated the Yuksum community-run homestays, trained tourism service providers and built waste management and recycling systems. In 2009, they developed a zero-waste trekking trail to mitigate the impacts of mass tourism in the Kanchenjunga National Park region.



## Best Adventure Operator

### **GOLD:** HIMALAYAN ECOTOURISM

In Himalayan Ecotourism's co-operative model local villagers are partners and managers of the tour company. By investing in good working conditions, safety, equipment and training, the organisation establishes erstwhile wage workers as owners and expert adventure tourism service providers. The model also links business performance with environmental concerns by routing a share of the profits to the cooperative.

## Best Adventure Operator

### **SILVER:** EXPEDITIONS INDIA

Expeditions India offers high-quality kayaking and rafting experiences on the Ganga, which it conducts in intentionally small groups, with rigorous safety standards and a strict 'leave no trace' policy. The judges found their closed-door policy in May and June particularly impressive, for it recognises that peak season trips not only harm nature but also deny travellers the true experience of the river.

## Best Experiential Operator

### **GOLD:** JOURNEYS WITH MEANING

Journeys with Meaning is recognised for its commitment to earth friendly-travel as a tool of transformation. Designed in collaboration with local communities and organisations like HIAL-SECMOL of Ladakh, these experiences help travellers to engage with climate change or the impact of unbridled consumption while learning about inspiring environmental solutions they could adopt in their everyday lives

## Best Adventure Operator

### **SILVER:** OPEN EYES PROJECT

The Open Eyes Project's cultural immersion tours in rural Rajasthan along with their 'Women in Tourism' initiative stand out for their contributions to sustainability, creating livelihoods that have significantly increased the earnings of artisans, taxi drivers, guides and blind female massage therapists, who have all been trained by Open Eyes.

## Best Homestay

### **GOLD:** MAYAL LYANG, DZONGU

Mayal Lyang welcomes visitors into the warmth and hospitality of a Lepcha way of life in the Dzongu reserve. By choosing to stay small, this family-run homestay has supported the development of 20 others in surrounding areas, contributing to the local economy and helping to develop this part of Sikkim as a destination.

## Best Homestay

### **GOLD:** BHORAMDEO JUNGLE RETREAT, NEAR KAWARDHA

Planted at the foot of the Maikal Hills, near a wildlife sanctuary, Bhoramdeo Jungle Retreat welcomes guests to an area where tourism is still a rather novel idea. Rooted in the local community life of the Yadavs, Gonds and Baigas, the owners encourage visitors to taste Chhattisgarhia life through short treks to the forest, cycle rides and visits to the weekly market.

## Best Homestay

### **ONE TO WATCH:** KUNDAN HOMESTAY, NEAR KULLU

Developed by a vegetable seller in his century-old home, the guests at the Kundan Home Stay eat with the family and are introduced to the Natti dance and the local crafts native to this part of Kullu.



### Best Wildlife Stay

#### **GOLD:** KAADUMANE HOMESTAY, NEAR DANDELI

This three-acre wilderness “hideaway” with a bee park attracts deer, gliding frogs, flying squirrels and 65 species of birds. Its growing popularity notwithstanding, this homestay has chosen not to expand and has demonstrated how a small tourism business can create significant conservation and local economic development benefits.

### Best Wildlife Stay

#### **GOLD:** MANGALAJODI ECOTOURISM TRUST, CHILIKA LAKE

Mangalajodi is a community-owned and managed wildlife conservation venture that has consistently drawn conservation attention in India and abroad. The judges were particularly impressed by the way in which the former poachers of Mangalajodi now actively patrol and protect the birds in the marshes of the Chilika Lake.

### Best Earth-Friendly Stay

#### **GOLD:** THE GOAT VILLAGE, NAG TIBBA, ECOPLORE

The Goat Village has 10 Garhwali cottages at the midpoint on the trek to Nagtibba, which use a 1,000-year-old architectural technique called ‘Koti Banal’ to minimise earthquake damage. There is no electricity by design and no swimming pool, but guests can use the mud pool when there is enough water.

### Best Earth-friendly Stay

#### **SILVER:** THE SARAI AT TORIA, NEAR KHAJURAHO

The Sarai is a wonderful example of a responsible, energy-efficient luxury accommodation for travellers in Madhya Pradesh and a destination in itself. Thick mud walls create traditional structures with elegant interiors. The owners are also heavily invested in conservation projects in the area.

### Best Earth-friendly Stay

#### **ONE TO WATCH:** HEARTH HOSTEL

The Hearth Hostel is a restored community hostel for backpackers, built using local techniques and materials sourced from within a 50 kilometre radius. Equipped with dry toilets and furnished with old wood furniture, it offers visitors a kitchen garden, a library and an exhibition space among other amenities.

### Best Earth-friendly Stay

#### **ONE TO WATCH:** BANLEKHI RESORTS

Established only in May 2017, the judges recognised this new stylish ecologically responsible resort built of local materials by local artisans, with adventure and nature activities for guests.



# About Us

## *Mapping India & South Asia*

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

For nearly five 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.

