

Practising Responsible Tourism (26th and 27th of September,2011)

“A two Day Workshop”

Organised by Ecotourism Society of India in collaboration with Department of Tourism J&K.

A two day work shop organised by Ecotourism Society of India in collaboration with the Department of Tourism govt. of Jammu and Kashmir in the summer capital of the state at hotel Broadway Srinagar. This workshop was organised on the eve of the World Tourism day being celebrated today on 27th September. Mr.Mandeep Singh Soin President EOSI inn his welcome speech informed the learned audience that the main objective of the workshop is to achieve responsible and sustainable ecotourism. The speaker reiterated that to achieve this objective there was a need to have certain policies and the present policies need to be assessed. The speaker was of the view that the deliberations regarding the ecotourism have given birth to the ESOI which was established in 2008. He stressed upon the fact that ecotourism was the need of the hour as good environment sense makes good business. He briefly discussed the pillars of the ecotourism like Advocacy, Guidelines and Certification.

Mr AtulDuloo,IAS and Commissioner Secretary Tourism to JK Govt. also spoke on the occasion. The learned speaker informed the audience that his Govt. supports such initiatives and pointed out the need sensitize all the stakeholders. He stressed upon preserving environment as tourism and other industries are dependent on environment and tourism is the key driver for both direct and indirect employment. Mr Dullo was of the view that besides having various laws in place, implementation of various master plans was all the more important. The speaker suggested that awareness programmes be organised for ecotourism and we shall involve educational institutions, professionals and experts especially for capacity building programmes and to have meaningful suggestions and recommendations for promoting ecotourism.

Mr Farooq A Shah, Director Tourism Kashmir said that Kashmir has been a tourist destination for centuries and thus a key economic driver of the state. He was of the view that tourism never ever comes to halt but at the same time we cannot afford to operate tourism as merely a business. The Director regarded tourism as a Double Edged Sword having both positive and negative impacts. He reiterated that the need of the hour was to manage mass tourism without degrading the environment. In this connection Environment Impact Assessment (EIA) shall be conducted before exploring new tourist destinations. The speaker assured the audience of the full support in organising awareness programmes, capacity development programmes for various stakeholders which would help the state to achieve the goal of sustainable tourism.

Mrs Seema Bhatt also spoke on the occasion on the topic, Why responsible tourism in the Himalayas. She highlighted the contribution of tourism industry towards GDP and expected the demand to double in the near future. She also discussed the impact tourism on cultural and social aspects. Himalayas being the prime tourist attraction for millions of tourists for adventure, recreation and religious tourism, the speaker stressed on the management of the waste, private sector involvement and suggested that incentives be offered for best practices for travel and tour operators of the region. The speaker was of the view that tourist as one the stakeholders shall have

to discharge their obligations towards a responsible ecotourism. The speaker expressed that the growing number and changing aspirations of the tourists was a key challenge to be faced in the near future. She suggested that organisations like ESOI and other societies can play a vital role towards responsible ecotourism. She stressed that in addition to awareness programmes, certification, monitoring and a model be developed for the fragile Himalyan region for responsible and sustainable tourism.

Mr NawangRigzinJora, Hon'ble Minister for Tourism and Culture Govt. of J&K. also spoke on the occasion. At the very outset the Hon'ble minister hoped that the recommendations of the workshop

shall help the Govt to achieve responsible tourism. Mr Jora was of the view that staff be sensitised about the disposal of the waste with special reference to NOONKON base at Ladakh. He advocated that tourism shall benefit the locals as is the concept of community participation. The Minister admitted that govt. has not been able to provide proper solid waste disposal system but will be taking immediate measures for the same and a comprehensive plan is in the pipeline for the same. He informed the gathering that the Hon'bleGovernor J&K has constituted committees for planning AmarnathYatra in an eco-friendly manner and every effort will be made to ensure minimum ecological imbalance on the fragile environment of the state. The minister also advocated introduction of EIA for newly created tourist destinations for Kashmir and Jammu University has been requested to come forward with a comprehensive project. He reiterated that time has come to change our mind set and we are supposed to be eco-friendly and environment sensitive.

The Workshop was divided into five technical sessions on the day one.

Technical Session I

Mr. Samir Sinha Head Traffic India talked about environmental/wildlife law for tourism. The speaker discussed various Acts like Wildlife Protection Act, Environmental Protection Act, and Air (Prevention and Control of Pollution) Act. The speaker also stressed on the need to organise awareness programmes and sensitizing various stakeholders and cautioned that wildlife values should not be subservient to tourism. The speaker stressed on implementation of laws besides awareness and educating the tourists. Mr Sinha was among the first speaker to suggest Do's and don'ts at tourist destinations. The speaker also desired to have National Wildlife action Plan.

Technical Session II

Technical session started with the presentation of Mr.Mandip Sing Soin, who discussed international best practices and the global sustainable tourism criteria movement. The speaker also discussed various tourism awards and the criterion used. Mr Soin cited examples of Australia in implementing global practices like, tented accommodation, school for physically challenged, creating income generation projects, garbage disposal, recycling and use bio-degradable products making the tourism sustainable.

Mr Jose Dominic member EOSI shared his experiences from CGH earth. The speaker responded to the concern raised by the Director Tourism who had earlier said that tourism is double edged sword and said that the tourism can be converted into a double sided spoon. Mr Dominic explained how natural resources are being used in the roofs of the hotels and how the waste was being used for paper and fertilizers in the Lakshadweep. The speaker stressed for the need to learn from world experiences to preserve cultural heritage.

Technical Session III

The third session inaugurated by Seema Bhatt and Dr Bhattachariya. Dr Bhtachariya talked about public private partnership ecotourism. The speaker defined Ecotourism in the light of National Forest Commission, 2006. Dr Bhattachariya threw light on what he called mantra for new age travel industry that includes conservation of natural resources, conservation education and community involvement. The speaker informed the audience that Madhya Pradesh Ecotourism Development Board was the country' first ecotourism board. He also talked about the MP forest policy and the promotion of ecotourism in MP. Dr Bhattachariya also discussed the projects being run under Public Private Partnership. The speaker suggested organising wilderness camps, jungle camps, eco-camps

establishment of eco-parks and high way forest retreat. He also suggested starting certification courses in eco-tourism besides organising training programmes. During the presentation a question was raised regarding the disposal of waste to which the learned speaker replied that paper mashie garbage dustbins are used for the purpose besides having an eco-tourism charter.

Technical session IV

Mr Saleem Beg Chairperson, INTACH J&K chapter complemented ESOI and talked about preserving built heritage and discussed how their organisation has renovated the heritage buildings in the valley. He was of the view that to preserve the heritage buildings retain our cultural identity and reminds us of our landmarks of the past and also attracts tourists. Mr Beg also talked about the various projects being carried out in collaboration with various national and international agencies.

During the session Mr HimanshuLal an architect discussed the eco-friendly architecture being used in Garli in Himachal Pradesh. Mr HimanshuLal explained how the involvement of community led to sea change in the first heritage village of the country.

Technical Session V

Ecotourism around Hiamalya's high altitude wetlands was the first topic discussed by Mr PankajChandan. The speaker discussed the tourism potential of the fragile region which is rich in biodiversity. The speaker was of the view to take necessary measures to preserve and promote eco-tourism in the region. The speaker also gave detailed account of the activities undertaken by WWF in india for the development of the ecotourism. He also discussed the migratory birds of the Hiamalyan region.

Mrs Seema Bhatt also spoke during the session on the topic "towards ecotourism certification". In her presentation the need of the hour was to encourage eco-friendly activities. The speaker of the view was of the opinion that certification process be introduced in order to have responsible and sustainable tourism with special reference to homestays. At the end of the presentation a hotelier asked about how to have certification for hotels as certification and ecotourism was contradictory.

Mr SammerMaithal spoke on the viable alternatives for conventional energy at high altitudes. The speaker discussed the benefits of solar energy. He was of the view the usage of solar energy shall go a long way to have ecotourism at high altitudes.

Day one concluded with suggestions/recommendations like for organising awareness programmes for all the stake holders and capacity building programmes for professional development, introducing certification courses. The one suggestion was to have Ecotourism Board for Jammu and Kashmir State.

Day two 27th September

Technical Session VI

Mr Cherian presented his paper on the topic “Sharing best practices” of his experiences at the Orange City. He discussed the ways and methods adopted by them for responsible tourism activities. He also discussed the community oriented approach and ecotourism practices and was of the view that an entrepreneur in tourism must be innovative, having respect for ecology and environment for the sustainable development.

Technical Session VII

(Panel Discussion: House boats – A unique tourism opportunity)

Moderator Mr Jose Dominic

Mr F A Shah, Director Tourism Kashmir

Mr MM Shah Legal Advisor Pollution Control Board J&K.

Mr Tuman ,Cahirman House Boat Owners Association

Mr manzoor Ahmad Wangnoo Chairman NELCO

Mr Dominc discussed the similarities between kashmir and kerla in the context of tourism resources.

Mr F A shah admitted that house boat is the USP and heritage of Kashmir but we have tp think regarding the factors responsible for deteoration of the DAL lake. He requested the house boat owners association to adopt green practices on the lines of lake Geneva and various other lakes of the country and the world. He held the house boat owners and dal dwellers responsible for the construction of shops, houses and lavatories in the Dal. He concluded with request that let us join hands together for the restoration of the glory of the Dal Lake without blaming one another.

Mr MM shah said that due to the irresponsible approach of both the civil society and govt. authority’s dal has lost its glory. He requested House Boat owners to cooperate for restoration of the wealth and ecology of Dal lake.

Mr manzoor Ahmad Wangnoo also showed his concern for the deterioration of the lake and complemented Dept. of tourism for their conservation efforts for the Nageen lake. He criticised the govt. for realignment of house boats at doldrum area and also for the proposal of amusement park inside the dal.

Mr Tuman also expressed his concerns and requested the govt for one time settlement by way rehabilitation of the Dal dwellers. He admitted that they were ready for realignment but are worried about the rehabilitation of the population residing inside the dal lake.

All the participants were of the view that the time has come join hands together to preserve the tourist destination especially the DAL without shifting responsibilities on the shoulders of the others.

Mr F A Shah requested the learned audience that let us pledge and join hands together to restore the pride of the state and pride of the Nation the Dal Lake.

Mr Bhatacharya requested the panellists,that the need of the hour was to have a comprehensive mgt plan addressing all the issues pertaining to the Dal Lake.

Mr Mandeep Sigh Soin suggested that today on the World Tourism Day let the Dept of tourism decide to adequate steps for the responsible tourism.

Mr Jora also requested all the stakeholders to contribute their part and our govt shall subsidize the efforts.