

ORISSA FOREST SECTOR

ECOTOURISM POLICY(Draft)

1. BACKGROUND

The state of Orissa with its rich natural and cultural heritage is one of the most attractive tourist destinations in the country. Well-endowed with vast forest areas, rivers, coast line, beaches, lakes and lagoon, it provides unique opportunities for promotion of ecotourism in the state.

The state which is well known amongst tourists for its temples and beaches deserves greater exposure of its hinterland of hills, forests, wildlife and tribal culture through promotion of ecotourism.

The state has about 31% of its land covered with forests, supporting around 86 Sp of Mammals, 473 Sp of birds, 110 Sp of Reptiles, more than 3000 Sp of Plants including 132 Sp of orchids, 60 Sp of Mangrove Plants and 350 Sp of Medicinal Plants. The rich biodiversity of the state is conserved through a network of protected areas comprising 2 National Parks and 18 Sanctuaries. This network is complemented by wilderness areas, wetlands and other bio diverse sites along the coasts including mangroves and turtle rookeries. Elephant, tiger, leopard, blackbuck, crocodiles, Olive ridley turtle, Irrawaddy dolphin and migratory birds provide special attraction to the tourists.

Ecotourism, distinguished from other forms of tourism in terms of its minimal impact on the visited areas, is defined as:

"Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the welfare of local people." (TIES, 1991)

Ecotourism offers an opportunity to showcase the state's unique natural and associated cultural heritage to visitors while enhancing the livelihood options for the local people.

2. VISION

Ecotourism will promote *responsible* travel to natural areas and provide opportunities for visitors to experience firsthand, understand and 'quietly' enjoy state's natural and cultural heritage. This shall lead to conservation of nature, sustaining of ecological processes, increased respect for local culture and traditions and tangible improvement in the local economy.

3. GOAL

To optimise the benefits of tourism to biodiversity conservation, ecosystems functioning, and social and economic development, and the benefits of biodiversity to tourism, while safeguarding indigenous socio-cultural values.

4. OBJECTIVES

The above will be achieved through the following objectives:

- Objective 1 Promote amongst all stakeholders, awareness, experiential learning and understanding of the values and principles of *sustainable* and *responsible* community based *ecotourism*, particularly in relation to the state's protected areas and other areas of wilderness.
- Objective 2 Develop, brand and market an Orissa style of visitor experience, particularly with respect to promoting a 'quiet' enjoyment of its natural heritage.
- Objective 3 Invest in appropriate and eco- friendly infrastructure for promotion of ecotourism.
- Objective 4 Establish partnerships between all stakeholders to develop and promote destinations and activities in accordance with defined principles, standards and legal requirements of community based ecotourism.
- Objective 5 Build capacity of all stakeholders in natural and cultural heritage interpretation, hospitality, business and communication skills to successfully and sustainably manage ecotourism.

5. GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ECOTOURISM

Ecotourism will be promoted and developed in accordance with the above vision, goal and objectives, based on the following core set of principles:

- Principle 1 Nature Area Focus - provide visitors the opportunity to directly experience nature.
- Principle 2 Interpretation - provide opportunities to visitors to experience nature in ways that lead to greater understanding, appreciation and enjoyment.
- Principle 3 Environmentally Sustainable Practice – ensure environmentally sustainable practices within carrying capacity of the area.
- Principle 4 Promotion of Conservation and Benefits to Local Communities - ensure promotion of conservation and tangible returns to the local communities.
- Principle 5 Respect Culture - be sensitive to, interpret and involve the local culture
- Principle 6 Strategic Marketing for Customer Satisfaction - to market and promote effectively so that realistic customer expectations are achieved.

6. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

The objectives will be achieved through the implementation of a strategy based on the following key initiatives.

- Strategy 1** The unique values (Unique Selling Points) of Orissa will be identified and agreed through a state-wide participatory, consensus-building process involving all stake holders; key government, non-government, private and community sectors. This will provide the basis for establishing an Orissa brand and responsible marketing of sustainable tourism, in which community-based ecotourism in and around protected areas will play a significant role. Outputs from this participatory process will include:
 - Strategy for marketing a responsible and sustainable tourism in Orissa, of which community-based ecotourism will comprise a core.

- Establishment of a partnership between the stakeholders namely tourism industry, forest sector and local communities, to steer and coordinate the development of community-based ecotourism in and around protected areas and other areas of wilderness.
- The income generated from eco-tourism activity shall be ploughed back for the welfare of the community managing eco-tourism and for promotion of eco-development and eco-tourism facilities.

Strategy 2 Capacity in the designing , establishment and management of ecotourism initiatives, including destinations, will be strengthened and developed by:

- Establishment of a centre of excellence for responsible tourism to build capacity within the local communities, government and private sector to take responsibility for achieving sustainable tourism, and to create better places for people to live in and for people to visit.
- In-house training in responsible and sustainable tourism within public sectors (tourism, culture, forests, wildlife, etc.).
- Introduction of responsible and sustainable tourism, into the curricula of secondary schools and educational institutions. This will be reinforced through eco-clubs and Green Volunteers.
- Customised training courses for those engaged in community-based ecotourism enterprises; in natural and cultural heritage interpretation, hospitality, business management, communication skills etc.
- Preparation and promotion of best practices guidelines, codes, standards, audits, accreditation schemes and models concerned with different aspects of ecotourism.

Strategy 3 A web site will be established by the competent authority to promote, and coordinate the marketing of quality ecotourism initiatives in Orissa. The web site will promote ecotourism by:

- Explaining the concept of ecotourism and its principles, with examples of best practices.
- Highlighting Orissa's special values, thereby encouraging potential visitors to explore the website (and its links) further for potential destinations.
- Providing information on/links to ecotourism destinations, eco-lodges, home-stays and other facilities in Orissa, including on-line booking.
- Providing a transparent and objective audit of ecotourism enterprises that indicates the extent to which eco-lodges, home-stays and other ventures meet a predefined set of best practice criteria. This will enable the responsible traveller to make an informed choice of their destination/accommodation facility, while also encouraging enterprises to adopt and develop best practice.

Strategy 4 The ecotourism market will be promoted by investing in the development of a network of prime ecotourism destinations, having good, reliable means of access and ecolodges (and home-stays) that demonstrate best practice in

the use of renewables (materials, energy etc), community management and, for the visitor, experiential learning and quiet enjoyment. Destination outputs will:

- Promote use of renewable and biodegradable resources.
- Management by registered Divisional level ecotourism societies comprising of Joint forest Management Committees.
- Promotion of non-motorised forms of transports as far as possible.
- Activities will be of an experiential nature, enabling the visitor to learn and see from 'doing'. Trained and knowledgeable local instructors and guides will be available to lead/facilitate/interpret such activities.
- Promotion of eco-friendly waste disposal methodologies.

Strategy 5 Research and monitoring will inform the outcomes and effectiveness of policy implementation, and the future development of ecotourism will be determined by environmental impact assessment, socioeconomic evaluation and its contribution to environmental conservation. In particular;

- Ecotourism will be monitored with respect to (a) visitor impacts on the environment and local communities, and (b) the conservation message conveyed to visitors.
- Research will focus on generating new knowledge, insights and modalities for sustainable ecotourism.
- Potential impacts of projects including construction and development of visitor facilities will be assessed.

Strategy 6 The Forest and Environment Department, Government of Orissa shall be the nodal Department to promote ecotourism in the state.

- The department shall constitute the Orissa Ecotourism Development Board (OEDB) to act as the nodal agency.
- It shall be the Board's mandate to ensure the attainment of the objectives and goals set forth in this policy.
- The Board shall develop necessary systems and standards for the purpose.
- The Board shall be equipped with required technical and financial resources.

Sd/-

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ECOTOURISM ACTIVITIES

Ecotourism activities shall be site-specific. Following are some of the recommended ecotourism activities and facilities:

FACILITIES

- a. Nature Camps including day visitor centres
- b. Eco-friendly accommodation including home stays
- c. Nature shops
- d. Nature Education and Interpretation Centres with guide service
- e. Amphitheatre
- f. Facilities for adventure sports (rock climbing, rappelling and parasailing along with water sports such as river rafting, boating and canoeing)
- g. Herbal Ecotourism with sale outlets
- h. Urban Ecotourism through Eco-Parks

ACTIVITIES

- 1. Trekking, cycle tracks and Nature Walks.
- 2. Wildlife Viewing and River Cruise
- 3. Angling
- 4. Bird Watching
- 5. Elephant ride
- 6. Any other depending on the site in question

ORISSA ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT BOARD (OEDB)

Orissa Ecotourism Development Board is proposed to be the apex body in the state engaged in promotion of ecotourism and development of requisite systems and standards for the same.

CONSTITUTION: The Board shall have the following composition

1. Chief Secretary	Chairperson
2. Secretary (Forest and Environment)	Member
3. Secretary (Tourism)	Member
4. Secretary (Finance)	Member
5. Secretary (Revenue)	Member
6. PCCF Orissa	Member
7. CWLW Orissa	Member
8. Nominated members	
- Travel and Tourism (1)	
- Wildlife Conservationist (1)	
- NGO (1)	
9. CEO	Member Secretary

FUNCTIONS

- i. Plan, develop and facilitate ecotourism projects compatible with this policy.
- ii. Identifying and establishing an Orissa brand with unique values of the State, through consensus building process involving all stakeholders.
- iii. Developing and enforcing standards and norms for promotion and implementation of ecotourism destinations, based on specific carrying capacity studies conducted.
- iv. Identify and prioritize ecotourism destinations throughout the State based on parameters to be defined and approved by the Board.
- v. Establish partnerships between various government departments, local communities and other stakeholders.

- vi. Promote community based ecotourism enterprises in protected areas and other potential destinations through constitution of "Ecotourism Societies" at the forest division/PA level.
- vii. Capacity building of various stakeholders.
- viii. Develop marketing strategies and promote networking among ecotourism enterprises and operators.
- ix. Facilitate education, research, monitoring and evaluation of the ecotourism activities.