

Press Release

Sikkim Commits to Sustainable Tourism

In a two-day conference on Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India (STCI) in Gangtok, on Nov 28, 29 2018, the Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation, Govt of Sikkim has made a commitment to practice Sustainable tourism and adopt the STCI.

This workshop was jointly organised by the Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India , the Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI) and Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation, Sikkim ESOI is a non-profit organisation that proposes to promote and ensure environmentally responsible and sustainable practices in the tourism industry. It was established in 2008 at the behest of the Ministry of Tourism, Govt of India and is responsible for the Ministry's mandate to operationalize STCI across the country.

The workshop was attended by over a hundred participants that ranged of hotel industry individuals, travel professionals, members & office bearers of SH& RA, TAAS, SAATO, & SUTO, Non Governmental Organisations , Civil society Professionals, Academicians, representatives from the Ecotourism Board and the Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation

The workshop aimed at setting corrective and curative measures with regard to tourism practices with ecological sensitivity and conservation of nature and community development in the region. These practices were highlighted by speakers who practice them in their businesses and yet benefit financially along with creating a lighter footprint and supporting the local communities and environment.

Speakers such as Mr Karma Gyatso, (former Chief Secretary & Principal Secretary Tourism) highlighted the progress of tourism in Sikkim, along with sounding a cautionary note on how it was time to provide a strategic direction, to maximize the gains and minimize the already visible impacts.

Dr H.S.Pabla, former PCCF, Madhya Pradesh and a honorary Board member ESOI stressed how Responsible Ecotourism can lead to conservation of natural heritage, especially in eco-sensitive zones such as Sikkim.

Expert speakers not only highlighted the vast range of tourism activities presently being promoted in the state, but also favoured promoting low impact tourism. Issues of regulation and compliance also featured in stakeholder discussions. ESOI took the audience through the history of STCI, its significance and applicability. The procedure involved in getting certification under STCI was described in detail.

Panellists and speakers shared with the audience various examples on how best tourism could be made more responsible and sustainable. These ranged from electricity saving devices in hotels; waste segregation; recycling and reuse of wastewater and rainwater harvesting. It was agreed unanimously that guidelines

for sensitive zones are needed and capacity building of local communities in the hospitality sector was crucial for better inclusivity.

It is to be noted that Sustainable Tourism Criteria for India already features as the sustainability standard in the tourism policy of the state. Now the process of its applicability on the accommodation sector and the tourism service providers is being discussed.

For this purpose, it was suggested that a STCI task force constituted of the representatives of all sectors of the industry, civil society, Dept of Tourism and Civil Aviation be formed. ESOI- ECOSS would help with steering the task force to make it functional.

Since STCI is still a voluntary compliance, it shall need a strong intention from the industry and a push from the state govt to get it going, though its acceptance and subsequent success could mean the business of tourism becoming economically, environmentally and socially sustainable in the long run.

In her concluding remarks, Ms Leepandi Tagrain(Dy Director) Sikkim Tourism formally announced Govt of Sikkim's commitment to STCI and its concurrence to becoming a Grand Patron member of Ecotourism Society of India(ESOI) to ensure handholding for operationalizing the STCI.

The workshop concluded on an optimistic note with all geared up to trek on the long road to Sustainability. Each participant received a certificate of participation.