

Practising responsible tourism through passion and process

Eco Society of India workshop concludes in Ernakulam

Kochi, April 6

The Eco Tourism Society of India (ESOI) recently concluded a workshop on “Practising Responsible Tourism” in Kochi. The two-day workshop, following on the heels of a similar workshop in Delhi, was well received by practitioners in the tourism industry, from within and outside the state, most notably promoters of Madhya Pradesh’s wildlife tourism.

While the Delhi workshop focused on environmental laws, the workshop in Kochi was more practitioners oriented. The next in the series will be held in Bhopal in end-April. The workshop brought under its umbrella senior bureaucrats from the tourism department, experienced hoteliers, who have been in the industry for decades and maverick newcomers, who took participants through the “passion and process” of setting up a sustainable hospitality model.

The workshop featured presentations by Smt. Sarada Muraleedharan IAS, executive director of Kudumbashree, Mr M. Sivasankar IAS, director of the state Department of Tourism, and Mr James Zachariah IFS of Periyar Experience, among others.

“I hope the workshop will motivate participants to understand and to learn about what responsible tourism is,” said Dr V. Venu, secretary, Kerala Tourism. “We, in Kerala at least, have started practicing responsible tourism, and incorporating responsible tourism practices in our business. So, we can take the message that we pick up in this workshop to our partners in the business.”

The focus of the workshop was the environmental strain caused by the increased traveler traffic and the steps that can be taken to set up a sustainable hospitality model. The presentations, made over two days, gave participants an insight into why and how to set up an environmentally-friendly resort, the financial demands it makes, and the technological pitfalls that a beginner can watch out for.

“The industry chooses to practice sustainable tourism for three reasons,” said C.B. Ramkumar, who spoke of the “extremist practices” of My Native Village, his resort based 45-km north of Bangalore, which is self-sufficient in food and hopes to go off the grid in a year. “Sustainable practices could be a lifestyle choice, it could be because they believe in the cause, or a marketing ploy. There is nothing wrong with choosing this path for any of these reasons, but the intent should be sincere or the practices will collapse.”

Ministry of Tourism secretary Mr Sujit Banerjee, who was special guest at the concluding session of the workshop, also reflected on the strain that increased traffic and urbanization puts on the environment, especially in sensitive areas such as Assam’s Kazhiranga National Park. He pointed out that it was only through empathy with nature and the environment that the situation could be turned around.

ESOI was founded by tourism industry professionals and environmentalists under the advice of Ministry of Tourism in 2008 as a non-profit organisation to promote and ensure environmentally responsible and sustainable practices in the tourism industry. The society works closely with Central and State Government bodies, as well as networks with like-minded regional / State players, travel & hotel associations, and NGOs across the country to facilitate and support synergy of policies, initiatives and activities to establish Responsible Tourism practices.

“The people who made presentations on various project are people who have achieved things, and brought projects into world attention,” said Steve Borgia, one of the founding members of ESOI. “So, this is workshop is a great arena for those who want to do similar things. I am a product of such learning, and I think this workshop offered great insight for prospective practitioners, who wish to see the world differently and contribute to make the world a lot more beautiful.”