

Ecotourism Society of India

www.ecotourismsocietyofindia.org

Press Release

Tourism has been labeled as the world's biggest industry in terms of its contribution to global Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the employment opportunities it generates and the number of clients it serves. Although a small part of global tourism, nature-based tourism has become one of the fastest growing sectors within tourism. The relevance of tourism to economies of developing countries, and its potential for generating win-win outcomes for biodiversity and poverty has resulted in its advocacy as a conservation tool. However, to prove its mettle as a conservation strategy, tourism must be sustainable and contribute not only to poverty reduction but also to biodiversity conservation. This kind of tourism is referred to as 'Ecotourism'. In Indian conservation policy, debates around ecotourism have become particularly salient as a consequence of recent orders of the Supreme Court of India and directions of the National Tiger Conservation Authority. Competing (and conflicting) perceptions of conservation and the role of ecotourism therein, have become evident in the positions adopted by different stakeholders, mainly the State, the tourism industry and affected local communities.

In this context, the Bhopal International Conference on Sustainable Tourism is being jointly hosted by the Ecotourism Society of India (ESOI) and the Madhya Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation with support from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India in Bhopal on April 18-19, 2013.

The aim of this conference is to come up with a meaningful conceptualization of ecotourism that meets policy requirements, reflects existing ground realities and strikes a balance between Conservation, Tourism and Local Livelihoods. This will help create enlightened policies at the government level and bring above best practices in the Tourism Industry

To achieve this, the conference will facilitate deliberations among international experts, policy-makers from the Government of India and State governments, academics, NGOs and representatives of communities currently engaged in tourism. The technical sessions of the conference will look at international best practices of multi-stakeholder involvement as well as the national level ecotourism framework in India, leading to Responsible Tourism practices so that India can become a model ecotourism destination.

The platform of this conference will also be channelized for generating specific policy inputs for Madhya Pradesh's Ecotourism Policy as well as for discussions on harnessing the tourism potential of Madhya Pradesh's rich and important religious destinations with special emphasis on its historical Buddhist sites.

The confirmed eminent International and National speakers participating at the Conference, amongst others, include **Enrico Ducrot**, CEO, Viaggi dell'Elefante and ECO Luxury, Italy; **Richard Vigne**, CEO, OL Pejeta Conservancy, Kenya; **Les Carlisle**, Group Conservation Manager, at & Beyond, South Africa, **Hashim Tyabji**, Member, Tiger Nation; **Dr. Rohini Chaturvedi**, UK (Cambridge), Guy Chester GSTC, Lynn Woodworth Australia, **Swathi Seshadri**, EQUATIONS.

Mandip Singh Soin FRGS, Honorary President and founding member, ESOI, emphasising on the promotion of sustainable tourism development said "it is a balance between conservation, tourism and local livelihoods while maintaining the cultural and environmental integrity of the host communities and enhancing the protection of ecologically sensitive areas and natural heritages". He welcomed MP Tourism support to the conference and efforts in saving the environment promoting ecotourism in the state.

Raghvendra Kumar Singh, Managing Director, Madhya Pradesh Tourism states "in present scenario Ecotourism is essential for human development and environmental development. The BICST 2013 is another step to make a new framework for and promote environmental friendly tourism in Madhya Pradesh known for its religious hubs of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Islam, Khajuraho temples, impregnable forts, exquisitely carved Jain temples, palaces, which are the glorious reminders of erstwhile era of the royal Rajas and Maharajahs. Also famous for its wildlife sanctuaries and national parks endowed with incredible natural beauty and splendor".

For further information on the Conference and participation, kindly log on to the website www.bicst2013.org.