

# TIGER TOURISM IN RAJASTHAN RE-LAUNCHED



Tiger tourism had been shut down by the Indian government but now the nature reserves are reopening to tourists with greater safeguards being provided for wildlife.

Once you are in the midst of these natural reserves, do not miss out the calls of peacocks, and even langur monkeys. In fact, tourists throng Rajasthan's Ranthambore Park looking for tigers. Do not be surprised if you come across one ambling along on the rough road right ahead of you, before vanishing into the bush. In fact, you can never anticipate the adrenalin rush that you will get due to the close proximity to a beast that has so much of power as well as majestic appearance.

**In fact, nearly 40 tiger reserves had been firmly closed in India.** Tiger tourism had been totally banned. All this was due to the petition filed by environmental campaigner Ajay Dubey claiming that tourism was leading to trauma in tigers as well as damaging any conservation efforts in these natural reserves. Then the Supreme Court took this matter up with the forestry ministry but there was no response.

However with thousands of livelihoods depending on tiger tourism, including hotel staff, guides, drivers, farmers, craftspeople, as well as shopkeepers; this embargo was soon lifted and the natural parks reopened, though with a fresh set of new guidelines.

**Today the tourists are allowed into 20 per cent of the redefined tiger habitat areas.** The state governments have drawn up new regulations for entry into the parks, timings as well as registration of visitors and vehicles.

All this has led to the authorities to re-look at their efforts about conservation as well as monitoring. After all, even the guides, hotel staff and others realize that tiger remains at the top of the ecosystem. Thus survival of the tiger means that the rest of the ecosystem will survive too. Saving the tiger means survival of more than one species. The threats to the tiger include the loss of habitat due to farming and bad management. Next is the problem of poaching of the big cat.

Since tourism in volume does make a huge impact on the environment, careful tourist management is very important. With such a wide range of landscapes being present in India's parks, different measures are required for each reserve. There cannot be one solution that would fit all.

When you ask those who have been involved in tiger conservation for a long time, you would realize that **there is little evidence that tigers tend to get stressed by tourism.** After all, in case they do not wish to be seen, they would simply melt into the jungle. Thus the fears in the mind of people about the harms meted out by tiger tourism are simply farfetched. On the other hand, the benefits being brought on by tiger tourism are simply too many to be ignored and even the state authorities realize it.

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