

INDIA: CAN DOMESTIC VISITORS GIVE WILDLIFE TOURISM A BOOST?



It is no secret that wildlife tourism in India has been negatively affected this winter season. Foreign tourists just haven't shown up like they usually do. This is mainly due to the Supreme Court ban that took place back in July preventing tourism activities in the tiger reserve forests.

However, a few months later in October that ban was lifted. The problem is that by then the majority of foreign tourists had already cancelled their tours.

As a result tourists started to view India as both a chaotic and challenging tourist destination. Surinder Sodhi, the Senior Vice President and Head of Leisure Travel Inbound stated that inbound bookings dropped about 40 percent because of the ban. That is a significant drop since inbound tourists account for up to 15 percent of total arrivals.

However, all hope isn't lost. **The tourism industry is looking towards domestic tourists as a way to make up for lost foreign tourists** this season. Fortunately, domestic tourism wasn't affected as much by the ban as foreign tourism was. This is because domestic tourism is mainly made up of weekend travelers. And since they don't have to travel as far, there is a shorter lead time.

For example, according to Sodhi, domestic travelers usually travel on impulse. They make their travel plans only a week in advance. Now compare that to foreign travelers. They usually plan their trips up to 3 months in advance. That's a huge difference.

Even though the industry is putting their hopes on domestic tourists, they aren't expecting a huge surge in bookings. What they really want is for foreign tourists who cancelled due to the ban to reconsider.

Regardless of what happens, wildlife conservationists believe the cost of wildlife tourism in India is on the rise. This is a direct result of the Supreme Court stepping in and banning new construction around the forests. And since no new resorts will be built, the existing resorts will basically become one big monopoly. But according to Shivang Mehta, this will be a small sacrifice when you consider the ultimate goal which is conservation.

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