

TOURISM IN INDIA: THE END OF THE TIGER?



The Bengal Tiger has become one of the symbols of India and thousands of tourists come here to see it. As a result of no official rules and protection, the tiger is now on the verge of extinction. The government is ready to act.

Visitors to India come here to admire the unique character of this vast country. India is the country of colors, the Taj Mahal, beautiful architecture and striking culture. And also the tiger. **Many tourists admit that their ultimate dream is to sneak a peek at the Bengal Tiger as to them it represents the beauty and perfection of its home country.** Once, tiger used to be very common here and reserves were created to promote it. Along came the hotels, comfortable huts and the modern-day commodities. Tourists came by thousands while hundreds of tigers disappeared.

There are two reasons which directly influence the plummeting numbers of tigers in the reserves - tourism and poaching. While initially, the influx of tourists generated a lot of money, it has become obvious that the largely unregulated development is directly responsible for the extinction of tiger here. The tigers can no longer easily cross from one reserve to another and their prey shies away by the ever-present visitors who come in on elephants or cars and destroy the vegetation.

Poaching is yet another cruel reality here; tiger body parts fetch a shockingly high price in China, where it is used for traditional Chinese medicine. Many people are not aware of where their medicine comes from and what the environmental costs are. While a poacher gets \$5,000 for a dead tiger, the body is worth ten times more at the market. This needs to stop.

The government has looked at the numbers and since 2002 more than half of the tiger population has gone. The most alarming prognosis estimates that within five years, there may be no more tigers to admire. **Therefore tourism is now to be phased out in 37 reserves.** By a major increase of entrance fees, the number of visitors will be limited to a minimum and more money will be generated to help protect whatever there is left of the population. There are no exceptions - either the tourists leave, or all tigers die.

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