

The Value of Nature: Why Biodiversity is Tourism's Greatest Asset

Editor's Note

Tourism exists because nature exists. From iconic wildlife and pristine forests to thriving wetlands and grasslands, biodiversity forms the foundation of countless travel experiences across the world. Yet, the ecosystems that attract visitors are under increasing pressure from habitat loss, climate change, and unsustainable development.

For the tourism industry, protecting biodiversity is no longer just an environmental responsibility—it is a business imperative. Healthy ecosystems sustain wildlife, support local communities, strengthen destination resilience, and ensure that future generations can continue to experience the world's natural heritage.

Around the globe, governments and tourism businesses are recognising that conservation must become an integral part of tourism planning. Investing in habitat restoration, supporting protected areas, working with local

communities, and adopting credible sustainability standards are no longer optional—they are essential to safeguarding the industry's future.

India is home to some of the world's richest biodiversity, offering an extraordinary opportunity to demonstrate how tourism can become a force for conservation. By placing nature at the heart of tourism development, we can create experiences that generate livelihoods while protecting the landscapes and wildlife that make them possible.

At TOFT, we believe that every tourism stakeholder has a role to play. The greatest legacy we can leave is not simply more visitors, but healthier ecosystems, thriving wildlife, and stronger communities. After all, the future of tourism depends on the future of nature.

*By Deepika Chowdhry,
Director, TOFT India*



Nature isn't a destination; it's a
responsibility



SUPPORTER
FEATURE

Lodge of the Quarter



Utsav Camp, Sariska Tiger Reserve

Located in the Tehla region near Sariska Tiger Reserve, Utsav Camp Sariska is surrounded by the Aravalli hills, striking boulders, and dry deciduous forests. Founded by naturalist and hospitality expert Luv Shekhawat, the camp was thoughtfully designed to blend seamlessly with its surroundings while preserving the area's natural ecosystem.

Once a barren landscape, the area has been transformed into a thriving green habitat with native trees such as Neem, Dhok, Jamun, Mango, and Palash, attracting a rich diversity of birdlife. Guided by a commitment to sustainability, Utsav Camp follows responsible practices including waste management, energy conservation, reduced plastic use, and the planting of native species to support biodiversity and groundwater conservation.



[More Details](#)





EXPERT PERSPECTIVE

Indian Wildlife Tourism is Clearly Evolving

By Aly Rashid
Executive Director, Jehan Numa

Two decades ago, it was largely about tiger sightings—and while the wild tiger remains the flagship, the experience today is far more diverse. From snow leopards, brown bears, and red pandas in the Himalayas to rhinos, primates, and birdlife in the east, along with varied species across central, western, and southern India, the canvas has expanded. What is particularly encouraging is the growing recognition—among private players, governments/policy makers, and local communities—that wildlife tourism can be a powerful conservation tool. When communities are part of the tourism economy, through guiding, hospitality, or local enterprise, it creates real livelihoods. This builds strong incentives to protect wildlife and habitats, with tourism in many areas now central to conservation.

The opportunity ahead lies in telling this story better to international audiences. While the product has evolved, global perception has not kept pace. At the same time, the domestic market is growing rapidly, with Indian travellers becoming more aware. Over the next two decades, this combination will play a key role in shaping the future of wildlife tourism in India.



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Sustainability & Wildlife

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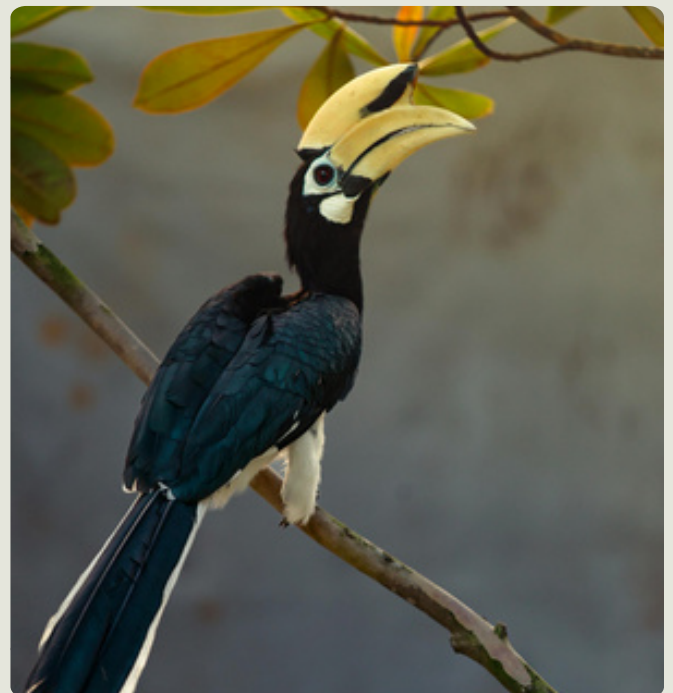
Three Years of Zero Poaching: Manas Leads by Example



Assam's Manas National Park and Tiger Reserve has achieved a historic conservation milestone by recording zero cases of rhino and tiger poaching for three consecutive years.

A New Chapter for Ecotourism: Hornbill Safari Introduced in Chhattisgarh

Chhattisgarh is introducing a Hornbill Safari at the Udanti-Sitanadi Tiger Reserve, giving nature enthusiasts a chance to spot the majestic Malabar Pied Hornbill in its natural habitat. The initiative not only promotes eco-tourism but also supports conservation efforts and creates sustainable livelihood opportunities for local tribal communities. It's a step towards protecting biodiversity while encouraging responsible travel.



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Upcoming Events



**World Nature
Conservation Day**
(28th July)



**International Tiger
Day**
(29th July)



**International
Conference on
Sustainable Tourism
and Ecological Integrity
in Protected Areas
(ICSTEIPA - 26)**
2nd August, 2026

FROM TOFT TOFT Participated in London Roadshow



TOFT Co-founder and Director Mr. Vishal Singh participated in the second edition of the India & Nepal Differently London Roadshow, organised by Indian Experiences on 17 June at Six Park Place, St James's, London.

The roadshow brought together leading travel operators from India and Nepal with UK travel agents for a day of meetings and networking, strengthening partnerships and promoting responsible travel across the region.

Showcasing India and Nepal beyond conventional itineraries, the event highlighted authentic tourism experiences, including heritage properties, conservation-led wildlife lodges, river cruises, and community-based stays that support local communities and conservation.

Representing TOFT, Mr Vishal Singh engaged with travel trade partners and shared the organisation's vision for responsible tourism that balances conservation, community well-being, and exceptional visitor experiences. TOFT's participation reinforced its ongoing commitment to championing sustainable tourism practices and fostering collaborations that promote India and Nepal as destinations for purposeful and impactful travel.



TOFT statement on Tiger Stress and Tiger Tourism



Our TOFT statement as a counterpoint to those who worry about stress levels of tigers as a result of tourism interactions. The graph is irrefutable proof of the relationship between the development of nature tourism and tiger conservation in India, specifically in its most famous tiger reserve, Ranthambhore. Don't forget it was close to declaring the tiger's extinction in 2004 when the TOFT campaign started, and nature tourism was in its infancy.

[Read More](#)

FROM TOFT

TOFT Hosts Networking Dinner in Delhi



TOFT hosts a Networking Dinner on 3rd July to bring together our donors and supporters from the lodge and Destination Management Company (DMC) community for an evening of connection, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas.

The gathering reflected a shared commitment to advancing responsible wildlife and nature tourism across the region.

An evening of meaningful conversations among tourism stakeholders.

[Read More](#)



Nature Tourism Does Not Turn Tigers into Man-eaters

by Julian Matthews

Nature tourism in India is facing an existential threat. It was recently accused of being the reason behind 'man-eating' tigers around Bandipur and Nagarhole tiger reserves, resulting in the shutting down of Karnataka parks for nearly three months this past season.

What we are witnessing is not the result of nature tourism, but the direct consequence of an extraordinary conservation success: the return of viable tiger populations to India's forest heartlands. From historic lows to now over 300 individuals; these areas have one of the densest tiger populations in India today.

Over the past two decades, the rapid growth of travellers to Karnataka - mirroring developments across India - has been central to the recovery of the Royal Bengal Tiger from the brink of extinction. This recovery would not have happened without visitors, coming to experience these landscapes, fall in love with tigers, understand its ecological value, and pay for that privilege. That economic engine - what I call tigernomics - has helped secure the tiger's future against relentless anthropogenic pressure.

Nature tourism is a conservation tool like no other. In just 20 years, it has transformed the tiger and its habitat from something once viewed as dangerous and dispensable into a powerful economic asset.

In 2010, TOFT calculated that a single tigress in Rajasthan generated INR 900 crore (US\$101 million) for the rural economy over her lifetime. That figure would likely be the same, if not higher, today in Bandipur and Nagarhole, which attract tens of thousands of domestic and international visitors, generating nearly INR 60 crore in park fees annually, to mitigate conflict and support communities and park management.

To now blame tourism for tiger attacks - many of which occur miles outside designated tourism zones - ignores both history and evidence.

Human-tiger conflict has existed on the subcontinent for millennia, long before tourism. What has changed is both tiger density, and a huge increase in the density of bordering human populations.

Many reserves today are effectively 'full'. In places like Bandipur and Nagarhole, tiger populations may now exceed ecological carrying capacity. As numbers increase, territorial disputes rise. Older, injured, or displaced young tigers are forced beyond protected boundaries in search of territory and prey - often into buffer forests or farmlands stripped of wild prey and reliant on livestock. This is not tourism's fault; it is the predictable outcome of conservation success.



Tourism has, undeniably, made a small number of tigers within tourism zones more comfortable, or 'habituated', to vehicles. These tigers have become more diurnal, accustomed to safari traffic within the roughly 20 percent of park areas where tourism is permitted under NTCA guidelines. But these individuals represent a small fraction of any reserve's population and there is zero evidence that they become problem animals.

FROM TOFT

In reality, all tigers today are increasingly exposed to human activity: forest patrols, vehicles, machinery, weddings, music, and expanding villages whose populations have doubled or tripled over the past 30 years. Rising conflict, therefore, is hardly surprising - and statistically is likely no greater than historic patterns would suggest. Tigers are not natural man-eaters.

They avoid humans wherever possible. Step off a safari vehicle and the change in behaviour is immediate: a classic fight-or-flight response. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred, they flee. If this were not the case, humanity would not have survived alongside large predators for millennia. Degraded habitats outside parks and shrinking prey bases, tigers and leopards are now far too dependent on livestock. This inevitably increases encounters with herders and forest users.

Crucially, nature tourism in India (unlike Nepal) has never been formally recognised as a conservation too. Unlike many wildlife-rich countries, it has been treated by forest bureaucracies as a problem to be controlled, not a partner to be engaged. Restrictions have replaced collaboration; community integration has been talked about but rarely planned. The result is a huge industry that India never strategically planned for or designed - and today many communities feel excluded from its potential benefits. Too often, park fees garnered from visitors, are dispersed with largesse as forest department funds with no correlation to their actual origin.

The safari industry is far from perfect. It should have been better planned, better legislated, and more inclusive. TOFT has campaigned for this for over two decades. Yet despite its flaws, tourism is working—and in many cases, working exceptionally well.

So, what is the long-term solution to India's growing abundance of tigers?

First, and most critically, India must restore more land to nature, in line with its own national and international biodiversity commitments. This must be coupled with far greater awareness, livelihood options, and genuine cooperation with communities living alongside forests, through nature tourism collaboration and participatory forest management.

Strategic land-use planning and carrying capacity limits to nature tourism is essential going forward, as is rigorous monitoring of all lodges for sustainability standards, ensuring local employment.

There must be greater private and community involvement in habitat restoration and rewilding, both on public land and on former private estates. Conflicts of interest—such as policymakers simultaneously acting also as tourism operators, as seen with wholly government-owned enterprises in Karnataka — must be removed. State wildlife boards should be led by experts in ecology, community development, and sustainable tourism, not dominated by political appointees.

None of this is radical. It is being done successfully in many wildlife-rich countries around the world. It simply needs to be done properly in India. Tourism is not the villain in this story; poor planning, inflexible governance, a single species tourism model, and a failure to manage success are. If India wishes to preserve its globally celebrated tiger recovery, it must stop scapegoating nature tourism and start treating it as the indispensable conservation and rural development partner it can be.



14th December
2026



Pradhanmantri
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