



Wildlife Tourism in a Changing World

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Editor’s Note

Globally, wildlife tourism is entering a new era—one where sustainability is no longer optional, but essential. Across destinations worldwide, there is growing recognition that tourism must actively contribute to conservation, community well-being, and the protection of fragile ecosystems.

As travellers become more conscious of their impact, expectations are changing. Increasingly, visitors are seeking responsible experiences that support wildlife protection, respect local cultures, and operate with greater environmental accountability. In response, destinations and tourism businesses are adopting stronger sustainability practices, from managing visitor pressures and reducing waste to supporting local livelihoods and conservation initiatives.

At the same time, climate change and habitat loss continue to place immense pressure on natural landscapes.

This makes it critical for wildlife tourism to move beyond short-term growth and focus instead on long-term resilience and stewardship.

For India, this global shift presents an important opportunity. With its rich biodiversity and growing nature tourism sector, India can play a leading role in demonstrating how tourism, conservation, and communities can thrive together.

At TOFT, we believe responsible tourism must remain at the centre of this journey. The future of wildlife tourism will depend not only on protecting destinations, but on ensuring that tourism creates meaningful and lasting positive impact for nature and people alike.

*By Deepika Chowdhry,
Director, TOFT India*



Wildlife tourism succeeds when
nature benefits too



SUPPORTER
FEATURE

Lodge of the Quarter



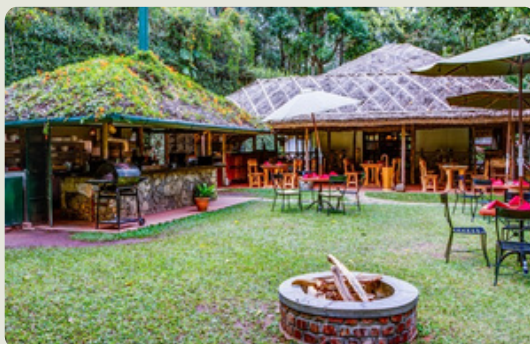
Spice Village Thekkady

CGH Earth Experience

Nestled in Kerala's spice-scented highlands, Spice Village has been a pioneer in sustainable hospitality since its establishment in 1991 by Jose Dominic. Built using local materials and traditional craftsmanship, the lodge draws inspiration from the eco-friendly homes of the indigenous Manan community, blending harmoniously with the surrounding landscape. Sustainability is reflected in every aspect of the property, from roofs thatched with native elephant grass to the creative reuse of materials, including upcycled furnishings and recycled paper products. The Manan community remains integral to the lodge's self-sustaining model, managing organic gardens and sharing traditional knowledge that continues to shape its conservation-focused ethos.



[More Details](#)





EXPERT PERSPECTIVE

Lessons from a Lifetime in the Wild

By Bittu Sahgal

With each passing day, the crucial role forests play in fighting global climate change and safeguarding water and food security is becoming more evident. Driving through forests, with no agenda and no hurry, one finds silence and serenity, luxuriating in the indolence of landscapes that can be intoxicating for those who seek isolation without having helter skelter in search of 'wildlife action'.

It is easy to forget yourself in the quiet of a wilderness, where birdsong and the distant roar of lions define a comforting silence.

After travelling from wilderness to wilderness, such quiet moments in the lap of nature reveal the value of ecosystems that future life depends on. Forests are not just destinations, but living systems that have survived because people understood their value and dedicated their lives to their protection.

As climate change becomes an in-your-face reality, forests and wildlife habitats remain the life rafts we must protect and restore to secure the future for generations to come.



Sustainability & Wildlife

Latest Updates

Cleaner, Quieter Safaris: Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve Considers EV Transition



Ref Image from internet

The Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve (TATR) is proposing to replace its 300-plus petrol-powered safari vehicles with electric alternatives, aiming to cut fuel consumption of over 1,000 litres per day and promote greener tourism. The move comes as ageing Gypsies become harder and costlier to maintain. Officials are exploring financing support from government and private stakeholders to help local operators afford EVs, while ensuring the transition does not impact livelihoods linked to wildlife tourism.

No more open-jeep safaris in Karnataka's tiger reserves

Karnataka's Forest Department has directed wildlife reserves and tiger sanctuaries to replace open safari vehicles with safer buses to enhance tourist safety. The move follows the death of a tourist at the Dubare elephant camp and aims to prevent future incidents. As an interim measure, existing safari vehicles may be fitted with protective grilles or shatterproof glass. Authorities will also station ambulances near safari centres and elephant camps and equip safari vehicles with first-aid kits.



Ref Image from internet

New and Renewed Supporters & Certifications



DMC Supporters

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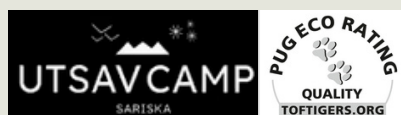


ITO Supporters Renewed

Maxwell Scott Travel
Daktari Travel



PUG Certification Renewed



Utsav Camp, Sariska



New India & Nepal Member



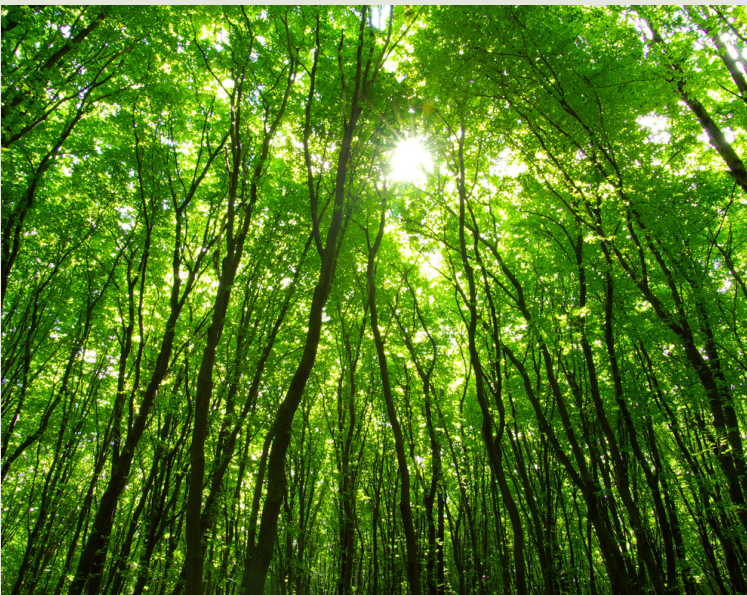
Cholan Tours Pvt Ltd



Nepal Hiking
Team Pvt. Ltd.

Upcoming Events

Van Mahotsav (1- 7th July)



Van Mahotsava, which means 'the festival of trees', is celebrated in the first week of July.

It is celebrated for a week from 1st July to 7th July in various parts of India.

The Global Sustainability Summit (GSS), 2026

23rd - 24th July, 2026 || Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi

The Global Sustainability Summit (GSS) 2026 is a premier platform for global dialogue on sustainability, climate action, and low-carbon development. Bringing together thought leaders, governments, businesses, and academia, the summit seeks to inspire collaboration and accelerate solutions for a more resilient and sustainable future.



॥ माता भूमिः पुत्रोऽहं पृथिव्याः ॥

FROM TOFT Future Endeavours with PM Museum



Ms Deepika, Director of TOFT, recently met with Mr Ashwani Lohani, Director of the Prime Minister's Museum & Library, for an engaging discussion on future collaborations and endeavours. The meeting highlighted opportunities to strengthen initiatives around tourism, heritage, and cultural engagement.

As a gesture of appreciation and shared commitment towards responsible tourism and conservation, Ms Deepika also presented the TOFT Good Wildlife Guide to Mr Lohani. The interaction reflected a mutual vision for promoting sustainable travel experiences and meaningful partnerships in the future.

Nature Tourism Does Not Turn Tigers into Man-eaters

by Julian Matthews



Nature Tourism Does Not Turn Tigers into Man-eaters

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Nature tourism in India is facing an existential threat. In recent times it has been accused of being the reason behind 'man-eating' tigers around Bandipur and Nagarhole Tiger Reserves. The roads shutting down for nearly three months in the 2025 safari season. In my 35 years working in wildlife conservation and nature tourism, I have never encountered a claim so misguided.

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 over 500 individuals, Karnataka's PAs have one of the densest tiger populations in India today.

The Real Story of Tiger Recovery
Over the past two decades, the rapid growth of nature tourism in Karnataka – mirroring developments across India – has been central to the recovery of the tiger from the brink of extinction. This recovery would not have happened without visitors: people who came to experience these landscapes, fell in love with wildlife, understood their ecological value, and pay for that privilege. That economic engine – what I call tigeromics – has helped secure the tiger's future against relentless anthropogenic pressures.

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, *Tiger Operators* for

Tigers (TOFT) calculated that a single tiger in Rajasthan generated Rs. 900 crore (US\$181 million) for the rural economy over his 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 Rs. 60 crore per annum in park fees today to mitigate conflict and support conservation and park management.

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

existed on the subcontinent for millennia, long before tourism. What has changed is tiger density, and a huge increase in the density of bordering human populations. Many reserves today are effectively 'full'. In places such as 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 zones or landscapes 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 now evidence that they become problem animals.

In reality, all tigers today are increasingly exposed to human activity: forest paths, 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. However, with increasing degraded habitats outside parks and shrinking prey bases, tigers would not have survived alongside large predators for millennia.

Tigers are not natural man-eaters. They avoid humans whenever 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.

Crucially, nature tourism in India (unlike Nepal) has never been formally recognised as a conservation tool. Unlike many wildlife-rich countries, it has been treated by forest bureaucracy 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

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Tourism is not the villain in this story; lack of land-use planning, ineffective governance, and a failure to manage land around Protected Areas 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.

result is a nature tourism industry that India never strategically planned for or designed – and today many communities feel excluded from its potential benefits. Too often, park fees generated from visitors are dispersed with largest to 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.

What Must Change Now
So, what is the long-term solution to India's growing abundance of tigers? First, and most critically, India must ensure more land to nature, in line with its own national and international biodiversity commitments. This must be coupled with greater awareness, livelihood options, and genuine cooperation with communities living alongside forests, through nature tourism collaboration and participatory forest management.

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monitoring of all lodges for sustainability standards, ensuring local employment. There must be greater private and community involvement in habitat restoration and wellbeing, both on public land and on former private estates. Conflicts of interest – such as policymakers simultaneously acting also as tourism operators, or 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, single species designs, indefensible governance, and a failure to manage reserves 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.

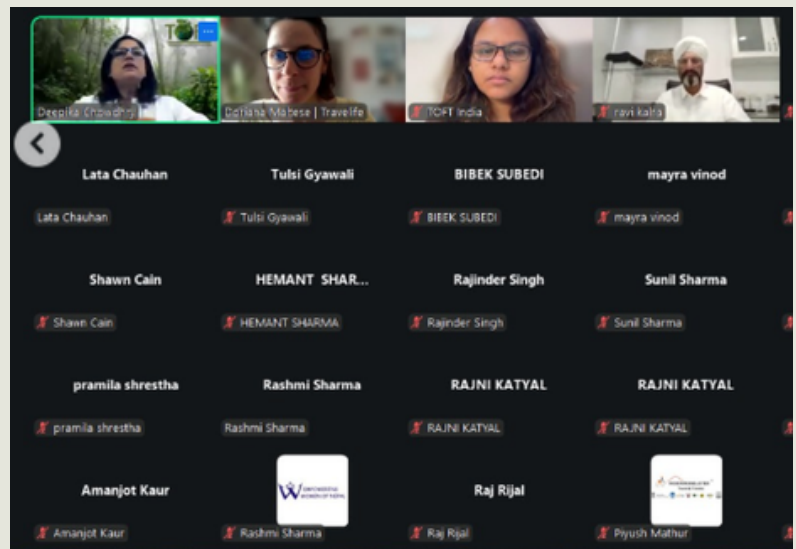
Julian Matthews is the Founder of Tiger Operators for Tigers (TOFT).

FROM TOFT Travelife Webinar

In a recent collaborative online session, Travelife and TOFT India brought together 26 tourism professionals to discuss the growing importance of sustainability certification, evolving international market expectations, and upcoming EU sustainability regulations coming into effect in September 2026.

The session highlighted how sustainability is no longer optional, but essential for businesses seeking long-term growth, global competitiveness, and international market access. Participants gained practical insights into how Travelife certification helps tour operators strengthen credibility, improve sustainability performance, and future-proof their businesses.

Adding valuable industry perspective, Travel Corporation India Ltd (Travelife Certified) and Travel Inn India Pvt. Ltd (Travelife Partner) shared their inspiring sustainability journeys, including the challenges, learnings, and business benefits experienced through the certification process. The strong engagement and meaningful discussions reflected the industry's growing commitment towards building a more responsible, resilient, and sustainable tourism future.



Travelife & TOFT

Industry session webinar



TOFT AWARDS 2026

**Nature Positive Travel: Driving
Conservation, Empowering People**

NOMINATIONS OPEN



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Share sustainability stories and best practices



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Apply for joining TOFT, Travelife certification, or PUG audit

For joining TOFT and PUG Certification – admin@toftindia.org

For Travelife Membership – toftigers@toftindia.org



TOFT works to promote responsible tourism that supports conservation, communities, and credible sustainability standards.



www.toftigers.org