



Tamil Nadu Ecotourism Policy-2017



Tamil Nadu Forest Department



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1.0 Preamble:

- 1.1 Ecotourism is defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education" (The International Ecotourism Society 2015).
- 1.2 The Ecotourism policy is essential as it will provide the broad framework for promotion and development of ecotourism in the State in a planned and scientific manner. The policy envisages visit to natural areas with minimal impact, enriching the visitors' experience and provide livelihood opportunities to the local communities wherever feasible.
- 1.3 Ecotourism has been recognized as a permissible activity in the Protected Areas and Forest Areas as per guidelines of MoEF&CC. The State policy has incorporated the basic tenets and is in consonance with the guidelines.

2.0 Ecotourism in Tamil Nadu

- 2.1 Tamil Nadu has since time immemorial followed a strong tradition of conserving Forests and Wildlife. Thirukkural, the ancient Tamil literature has several couplets on conservation of nature and compassion for wildlife.



- 2.2 Tamil Nadu lies in the Deccan Peninsula zone as per the bio-geographical classification of India. The landform varies from coastal to plateau to high mountain ranges in the Eastern and Western Ghats. The convergence of the mountain ranges of Eastern and Western Ghats and continuous ecological landscape, with a mosaic of vegetation, hosts a diversity of fauna. The State is endowed with rich biodiversity and has a wide spectrum of vegetation types ranging from the evergreen, moist deciduous, dry deciduous, dry evergreen, bamboo brakes, grasslands to littoral and mangrove forests. Besides, the State has a long coastline of over 1000 kms and supports a variety of



ecosystems like beaches, lagoons, mangroves, mudflats and corals. The small islands along the coast are rich in marine flora and fauna. The inland wetlands in the State harbour rich avifauna, with several bird species migrating from other countries in large numbers. The State has a large protected area network comprising three Biosphere Reserves, four Tiger Reserves, five National Parks, fifteen Wildlife Sanctuaries, fifteen Bird Sanctuaries and two Conservation Reserves. The State has the distinction of establishing the first terrestrial as well as marine biosphere reserve in India, viz., Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (1986) and Gulf of Mannar Biosphere Reserve (1989) respectively.

The forest area is 17.59% of the geographical area and Protected Area is 30.92% of the State Forest Area. The Western Ghats is recognized as one of the twenty five global biodiversity hotspots of the world and one of the three mega centers of endemism in India. Tamil Nadu's unique Kurinji (mountain), Mullai (forest), Marudham (farmlands), Neidhal (coastal) and Paalai (desert) landscapes are unique ecological entities and provide immense opportunities for ecotourism. The salubrious climate, the rich flora and fauna makes it an ideal destination for developing ecotourism befitting the tagline "Enchanting Tamil Nadu".



2.3 The State is a pioneer in scientific management of its forests. The Community owned sacred groves have been well conserved as part of the natural and cultural heritage of the state.



3.0 Vision:

To create ecotourism opportunities for strengthening the conservation of the rich natural and cultural heritage of Tamil Nadu and enhancing sustainable livelihoods of the dependent communities.



4.0 Objectives:

- 4.1** To identify, promote and develop natural areas as ecotourism destinations.
- 4.2** To develop ecotourism on each site based on the carrying capacity and to regulate the influx of visitors within the threshold level to preserve the sanctity of site.
- 4.3** To promote ecofriendly infrastructure in conformity with the guiding principles.
- 4.4** To facilitate partnerships between all stakeholders to develop, promote and maintain ecotourism sites.
- 4.5** To create livelihood opportunities and share benefits with the local communities for their support to conservation.
- 4.6** To build capacity of all stakeholders in interpreting the natural and cultural attributes of the sites, develop hospitality ethics and to provide quality visitors' experience.
- 4.7** To evolve site specific code of conduct for visitor behavior and sustainable tourism.
- 4.8** To promote nature conservation through education, creating awareness and enhance visitor learning experience for conservation.
- 4.9** To develop monitoring and evaluation protocols for periodical assessment of the impact of ecotourism on forests, wildlife, communities and to gain insight on visitors' satisfaction.



5.0 Guiding Principles:

The following guiding principles shall be the basis for development of ecotourism in the state:

5.1 Community based Ecotourism:

The emphasis of ecotourism policy shall be on the active involvement of the local communities for their empowerment and socio-economic upliftment. Community based ecotourism has the potential to utilize the entrepreneur skills of the communities for nature oriented responsible and economically viable tourism within the carrying capacity of the ecotourism site. The economic benefits of ecotourism shall be an incentive to the participating communities to conserve the natural heritage of Tamil Nadu.



5.2 Management Planning of Ecotourism Sites:

Ecotourism sites will be identified by assessing the potential of sites based on criteria including the site's unique significance, resource availability, vulnerability, logistics. This assessment shall be the essential prerequisite for development of sites and formulation of Management Plan. There are certain districts with low ecotourism potential and require special attention to identify ecotourism activities and will be done with the help of local communities to promote ecotourism. Efforts will also be made through Forestry Extension Centres to develop eco-spots for ecotourism close to the urban sprawl. The activities for each ecotourism site shall be identified based on the natural resource potential and its impact. The identified activity should not cause any adverse impact to the environment. Ecotourism activities will be open for all sections of visitors without compromising on the conservation of natural and cultural resources of



the area and respect for local customs and traditions of Tamil Nadu. The safety norms for the visitors to the ecotourism site are to be in conformity with the standard protocol.

5.3 Ecotourism for Conservation of Natural and Cultural Diversity:

Ecotourism is not only limited to the biodiversity and landscape values but also to the customs, cultures and traditions native to respective eco-sites. Ecotourism sites in Tamil Nadu can be used as important means to conserve the unique cultural traditions associated with the biodiversity of an area. The local resources, traditional knowledge, folk history, culture & architecture would thus be preserved for posterity. The large number of visitors to temples and cultural sites during the festival season would be regulated as per the existing Conservation laws.



5.4 Legal Framework:

All ecotourism activities shall be in conformity with the laws of the land including the Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980, Tamil Nadu Forest Act, 1882, Environment (Protection) Act, 1986 and Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 including the guidelines issued by National Tiger Conservation Authority, Government of India.

5.5 Building Infrastructural Support:

The concept of sustainable tourism shall be the guiding principle for development of infrastructure and promotion of any activity. Creation and development of institutional and infrastructural support at ecotourism destinations with least impact on natural resources and local culture shall be the priority. The existing infrastructure and facilities should merge with the landscape. Locally available material should be used without extensive concrete structures. The development of additional ecotourism infrastructure should primarily be located outside the forest, however semi-permanent and eco-friendly infrastructures may be set up within the ecotourism site. Ecotourism



in the State shall promote energy efficient and ecologically sustainable infrastructure as well as practices to minimize the carbon foot print. The waste shall be disposed in an appropriate manner and recycling would be adopted to minimize environmental pollution.



5.6 Partnership and Stakeholders:

Ecotourism will be managed and promoted through partnership and co-operation between all stakeholders, viz., Local communities, NGOs, tour operators, tour agents, home stay operators, hospitality industry and the government organizations. Multi stakeholder partnership is envisaged to develop ecotourism infrastructure and products in partnership with local community and private enterprises, wherever feasible, in order to ensure long-term sustainability of ecotourism. The key stakeholders identified are:

- a) Tamil Nadu Forest Department
- b) Department of Tourism
- c) Hindu Religious & Charitable Endowment Department
- d) Local community
- e) Local Bodies
- f) Tour agents and operators
- g) Hospitality Industry
- h) NGOs/Volunteers/Eco clubs, etc.,

The coordination and networking with the State Forest Department, Tamil Nadu Tourism Development Corporation and Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Department for management, promotion and marketing of ecotourism destination and



products are necessary for development of sustainable ecotourism. Further it is stipulated that

- I. Forest Department will promote Eco-Tourism only in Tiger Reserves, Wildlife Sanctuaries, National Parks and Reserve Forests.
- II. Activities which Tourism Department is already doing in the areas indicated at (I) above will be allowed to be run by them except those in the core areas. It would imply that in other than core areas, the Tourism Department will be able to promote tourism related activities in further as well. This should be done in consultation with the Forest Department.
- III. Forest Department is running certain activities presently in areas which are not covered under (I) above. The Forest Department will exit from such activities in all cases except those activities which are being run by the Eco-Development Committees (EDCs), as they are run by local people. The Tourism Department may continue with its activities nonetheless.

5.7 Building framework of Standards and Norms: Monitoring & Evaluation

Criteria and Indicators serve as important tools to plan and manage ecotourism sites in a responsible and sustainable manner. Criteria define the essential elements against which sustainability of Ecotourism at a site is to be assessed, with due consideration paid to natural and cultural diversity. Monitoring and evaluation frameworks shall be based on the criteria & indicators approach and when applied to assess an ecotourism site, it will determine the sustainability level of site and the remedial measures that needs to be adopted. Criteria & indicators for each site are to be developed separately before the commencement of activities. The assessments of ecotourism sites will indicate the viability of site as a sustainable unit and it would be prudent to discontinue sites which are economically and/or ecologically unviable

5.8 Creating Awareness & Capacity Building:

Ecotourism will act as tool for education and awareness as well as to generate public support for conservation. Each site is to be developed in such a way to maximize the potential for raising awareness among large sections of the local people and those visiting the site. To promote long term conservation, special emphasis will be given on raising awareness among school children and youth.

Capacity of the local communities and the forest staff involved in ecotourism activities shall be strengthened on a continuous basis to ensure responsible and



sustainable tourism. Similarly, various outreach and awareness programmes shall also be continuously undertaken for other stakeholders and partners.



6.0 Strategy:

The strategy outlined will be in conformity with the guiding principles and is a means to achieve the objectives.

6.1 Activities:

The Forest Department shall be the Nodal Department for implementing the policy and shall create a special purpose vehicle in the form of State Ecotourism Board (SEB) to be registered under the Tamil Nadu Society Registration Act, 1975, covering the entire State to assist in delivering the vision and the objectives of Ecotourism Policy mainly in the protected areas and other forest areas.



The State Ecotourism Board (SEB) shall strive to combine both nature-based as well as cultural tourism, in a complementary way within the context of environmental and socio-cultural sustainability. The SEB will promote ecotourism development and



management that emphasizes the ‘sense of place’ that is unique to each destination. The State Ecotourism Board (SEB) will further ensure the involvement of viable community-based models of ecotourism by making sure that the ‘community’ is well-defined and incrementally empowered (both in terms of skills and financial resources) to eventually become self-sustaining.

The SEB shall steer the ecotourism in the State and will take policy decision for promotion and development of ecotourism.

In the Tiger Reserve, SEB shall encourage preservation of wildlife and forests following the guidelines of GoI, MoEF F.No 15-31/2012-NTCA dated 15th October 2012 notified under section 38-O (1) (c) of the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972. These guidelines have distinct procedure for management of ecotourism. To implement Eco-Tourism activities as referred in 5.6 (1) State Eco Tourism Board will be formed with the following Structure:-

- (i) Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Chief Wildlife Warden (Chairperson)
- (ii) Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Working Plan)
- (iii) Commissioner / Director, Tourism.
- (iv, v) Two Collectors by rotation, every two years.
- (vi) Joint Secretary / Deputy Secretary Environment and Forest Department

At the District level Ecotourism Management Societies (ETMS) shall be established to promote, manage and regulate ecotourism sites. The revenue generated from the ecotourism site in the District will be ploughed back for development of the site and surplus would be contributed to the ETMS/SEB for development of other sites and conservation related activities.

The existing Ecotourism Management Committee (ETMC) will be integrated into the ecotourism federation at Divisional Level. The federation will facilitate the development of ecotourism by ensuring implementation of the ecotourism guidelines and management plans, coordinate with the other stakeholders, monitor the allocation of funds and revenue generation.

The Government of Tamil Nadu will provide assistance wherever possible for the development of infrastructure, ecotourism amenities, information and interpretation centers, and facilities for organizing natural and cultural events.



6.2 Ecotourism Management Plan:

A management plan shall be developed for every Ecotourism site / destination, with detailed SWOT analysis, maintaining a fine balance between conservation and tourism. Such a plan shall be approved by the SEB. Besides the Ecotourism Plan shall be made an integral part of the Management Plans of respective Protected Areas. In case of any conflict, the conservation of Protected Areas, Forests and Wildlife shall take precedence over ecotourism. For sites outside Protected Areas all ecotourism plans shall be in line with the prescriptions stated in the Working Plan.



6.3 Ecotourism Product Development, Promotion, Publicity & Marketing:

The ecotourism sites identified and developed will have its uniqueness and value in terms of aesthetic, natural, cultural and landscape characteristics which will be recognized and developed into a ecotourism product with which the site could be recognized in future. The product developed will cater to different target groups and will include hiking, trekking, wildlife sighting, bird watching trails, boating, photography, visit to medicinal plants conservation area, craft making, local handicraft, promoting local festivals, and adventure sports. In the coastal wetland sites, activities like snorkeling, scuba diving, walks and boat rides for viewing and appreciating the rich and special flora and fauna can be taken up.

The pricing and appropriate packaging and branding of ecotourism destination is important to the success of ecotourism. The SEB will finalize strategy in this regard.

6.4 Training and Capacity Building:

The ecotourism management can be improved by developing capacity of the stakeholders including the local communities. Regular training and skill upgradation may be organized for the same by the SEB.





6.5 Review:-

This Ecotourism policy will be reviewed after five years.

