



सत्यमेव जयते

Government of Rajasthan

RAJASTHAN ECOTOURISM POLICY, 2021



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1. Background

Rajasthan is one of the most sought-after and popular tourist destinations in South East Asia owing to its history, cultural, geographical and ecological diversity. Culture, historical-monuments, palaces, forts, heritage sites along with the landscapes and wildlife form the most ever lasting memory when it comes to touristic impression of Rajasthan. The largest state with 34.22 million ha, Rajasthan is approximately 10% of geographical area of India. Around 9% of this land is under the administrative control of the Forest Department, with 3 National Parks, 3 Tiger Reserves, 27 Wildlife Sanctuaries, 2 Ramsar Sites, 14 Conservation Reserves and many niche faunal habitats in addition to vast expanse of desert ecosystem, the old Aravalli hill range, rich biodiversity, dense forests, host of water bodies and scenic places. The State offers the most amazing and unique canvas for those interested in mingling with the elements of nature. They provide ample space for variety of nature based activities like trekking, trailing, camping, birding, etc. Some of the finest monuments and wilderness areas which form the core of the touristic product lies within the forests.

Tourism as an industry is extremely vital to the country in general and Rajasthan in particular. The money spent by the tourist in the state changes hands multiple times, thereby creating cascading effects of numerous direct and indirect livelihood opportunities. In

current scenario, there is sufficient space within the tourism sector to cater to not just conventional tourism but also the real tourism that is essentially low impact and experiential in nature. Hence, there is a need of having a policy document that enables, certifies and facilitates the efforts of the tourism sector in a manner which is eco-friendly in natural areas.

2. Ecotourism

2.1. Ecotourism: Is a form of sustainable tourism within a natural or cultural heritage area where community participation, protection and management of natural resources, culture, indigenous knowledge and practices, environmental education and ethics, as well as economic benefits are fostered and pursued for the enrichment of host community and satisfaction of visitors.

According to the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), ecotourism refers to forms of tourism which have the following characteristics:

- 2.1.1 All nature-based forms of tourism in which the main motivation of the tourists is the conservation and appreciation of nature as well as the traditional cultures prevailing in natural areas.
- 2.1.2 It contains educational and interpretation features.
- 2.1.3 It is generally, but not exclusively, organised by specialised tour operators for small groups. Service provider partners at the destinations tend to be small locally owned businesses.

- 2.1.4 It minimises negative impacts upon the natural and socio-cultural environment.
- 2.1.5 It supports the maintenance of natural areas which are used as ecotourism attractions by:
- o Generating economic benefits for host communities, organisations and authorities managing natural areas with conservation purposes;
 - o Providing alternative employment and income opportunities for local communities;
 - o Increasing awareness towards the conservation of natural and cultural assets, both among locals and tourists.

The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change describes Ecotourism as 'responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people'. Such tourism is low-impact, educational, and conserves the environment while directly benefiting the economic development of local communities¹. Therefore, the focus of ecotourism is on its educational as well as economic benefits and at the same time is compatible with fragile natural ecosystems.

This policy is based on the basic understanding that local communities are the most vital pillar of ecotourism in the state. Ecotourism is an important vehicle for reconciling conservation and economic considerations for local stakeholders and includes most of the low impact tourism in the natural heritage areas which

¹Guidelines for ecotourism in and around protected areas, Ministry of Environment and Forest, 2nd June 2011

are facilitated by the local communities as partners in the process.

Ecotourism is unique among commercial opportunities in rural areas because, unlike so many other activities, ecotourism works best when it builds on local knowledge and authenticity. A carefully designed ecotourism initiative shall have the potential to contribute both to ecological conservation and local community development.

2.2. Ecotourism activities to be permitted: Ecotourism activities



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are defined as nature-based activities exclusively performed to sensitize people about the beauty, richness and fragility of the state's natural and cultural heritage, and shall not just focus on creating destinations in natural area or using natural environment for outdoor activities.

Ecotourism activities have to be coordinated by a qualified nature and cultural interpreter trained to entertain and educate the visitors.

- 2.2.1 Trekking, nature walk, bird and wildlife watching, hiking, flora and fauna observation, photography, etc;
- 2.2.2 Boating / River Cruising to view wildlife and experience wilderness;
- 2.2.3 Overnight Camping /Star Gazing in designated sites / forts / other monuments;
- 2.2.4 Any travel focussed on experiencing Rajasthan's fairs and festivals which promote eco-tourism and sustainability of local traditions;
- 2.2.5 Lodging in campsites, eco-lodges, homestays and guesthouses that are located in an area of natural and/ or cultural beauty, and involves local specificities and
- 2.2.6 Activities in specified areas of the forests such as jungle safari in vehicles or elephant / camel safari, trekking / nature walk, overnight camping in designated sites, bird watching and study of flora & fauna, etc.

2.3. Ecotourism Assets both within and beyond areas administered by the Forest Department: Natural and cultural

features that attract visitors, such as landscapes, endemic or rare flora and fauna, local agricultural products, local culture including festivals, folklore, history, monuments and heritage sites.

2.4. Ecotourism facilities to be incentivised: Accommodation, lodging facilities, and related amenities which blend with the natural and cultural environment of the area in terms of design, building materials, and energy, water and waste efficiency measures.

2.5. Ecotourism services to be developed: Basic services for



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ecotourism activities including but not limited to transportation, food, guiding, and interpretation. These services should promote a better understanding of the natural and cultural aspects of an area with minimum damage to local culture and natural resources.

2.6. Ecotourism certification mechanism to be developed:

Certification plays an important role in contributing to the quality of eco-tourism experiences and assuring visitors that the ecotourism operators are committed to the best practices and high-quality nature-based experiences aimed at conservation. Therefore, accreditation of goods and services will be an essential guiding principle. Certification will also provide price premium and access to new ecotourism markets and will necessitate state of art management planning for target ecotourism destination in consultation with the local community (traditional knowledge) and other stakeholders.

2.7. Ecotourism as forestry activity: Eco-tourism aims at experiencing of natural areas while fostering environmental and cultural understanding, and encouraging preservation of wildlife and forests, is a responsible form of tourism. Therefore, the State shall endeavour to identify eco-tourism with forestry activities so that necessary and meaningful development can take place within the sites for benefit of eco-tourists and local people.

3.1 Vision, Mission and Objectives:

The vision of this policy is to nurture and project natural, ecological and cultural richness of Rajasthan in a sustainable

manner that is rooted in environment conservation and with a sincere attention to social inclusiveness and economic empowerment.

The mission of the policy is to promote ecological conservation in Rajasthan, to encourage and develop unique, high quality, low impact ecotourism destinations centred on careful protection of natural and cultural assets, to foster quality educational experience, to empower local communities through



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creation of livelihood opportunities, poverty alleviation and capacity enrichment.

The main objectives of the Rajasthan Ecotourism Policy are as follows:

- 3.1.1 Conserve the existing biodiversity, ecosystems, heritage monuments, culture and traditions of the state of Rajasthan;
- 3.1.2 Offer memorable and high-quality learning experience to visitors, and encourage collaborative nature conservation efforts;
- 3.1.3 Promote engagement of local communities in nature tourism in a manner that enriches local economy and encourages sustainable use of indigenous materials through financially viable value chains;
- 3.1.4 Share the benefits of ecotourism development equitably with the local communities and indigenous people;
- 3.1.5 Provide opportunities to local communities to determine the appropriate presentation of their cultural values by obtaining their informed consent and full participation in planning and management of ecotourism business;
- 3.1.6 Ensure prior informed participation of all stakeholders by bringing them together on a common platform of understanding ecotourism;
- 3.1.7 Promote ecotourism in a sustainable manner based on the

Global Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC) based on the four pillars including sustainable management, socioeconomic impacts, cultural impacts, and environmental impacts and

3.1.8 Reduce negative impacts of tourism in over exposed areas and divert traffic to other lesser explored destinations.

3.2 To achieve the vision and objectives; ecotourism programs / projects will align with the following guidelines:



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- 3.2.1 Ecotourism plans for target destinations shall be conservation centric and in consonance with Tourism Policy of the State, Management Plan in case of Protected Areas and Working Plans in case of other forest areas.
- 3.2.2 All ecotourism activities shall be in conformity with the existing environmental laws of the country, including Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972, the FCA 1980², the Environment Protection Act, 1986, the Environment (Protection) rules 1986 and rules for Eco sensitive zones, NTCA guidelines, Rajasthan Tourism Policy 2020, directives of Hon'ble Supreme Court of India and National Green Tribunal.
- 3.2.3 Ecotourism activities will aim at building awareness among all stakeholders of the value and benefit of conserving the natural heritage area.
- 3.2.4 All ecotourism activities shall have the local communities and conservation at its foci and shall strive for providing stimulus to local economy by generating livelihoods.

3.3 Rajasthan Ecotourism Policy, 2021: Policy Period

The Rajasthan Ecotourism Policy 2021 shall remain in operation for a period of 10 years from the date of its notification or for a period as may be determined by the Government or until substituted by another policy, whichever is earlier.

²Creation of permanent structures including permanent camping sites, boarding and lodging facilities, new roads, aircraft landing stations, jetty for motorized vessels, etc. not constructed primarily of locally available material, shall continue to be permitted as per the provisions of the Forest (Conservation) Act 1980.

4. Strategies:

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

4.1. Organizational Strategy and Institutional Arrangements:

Rajasthan Ecotourism Policy, 2021 shall be implemented by Rajasthan Forest Development Corporation and administered by the Forest Department, Government of Rajasthan. However, for the purposes of branding, promotion, marketing Rajasthan Ecotourism Policy 2021 shall be considered to be a part of



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Rajasthan Tourism Policy and shall be promoted by the Rajasthan Tourism Department, Government of Rajasthan. The Rajasthan Ecotourism Development Society (REDS) registered under the Rajasthan Societies Registration Act, 1963 shall be reconstituted and will act as an advisory and oversight body for the Rajasthan Ecotourism Policy.

4.2. Rajasthan Ecotourism Development Society (REDS): This society shall advise in achieving the vision, mission and objectives of Ecotourism Policy with regard to forests, protected areas and other natural areas not directly under the control of the Forest Department. The Society shall be headed by the Hon'ble Forest Minister of Rajasthan and assisted by the officers of Forest Department, Tourism Department and other stakeholder departments. REDS 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.

4.3. Rajasthan Forest Development Corporation (RFDC): The RFDC in consultation with the Tourism Department, Govt of Rajasthan shall liaise with local, national and international stakeholders for planning, product development, advertising and marketing of the ecotourism product. The Corporation shall foster ecotourism development that combines both nature-based and cultural attractions in a complementary way within the context of

environmental and socio-cultural sustainability. It will promote ecotourism development and management that emphasizes the 'sense of place' that is unique to each destination. The activities of ecotourism would be implemented through the field units of Forest Department, Tourism Department, Central / State Govt. undertakings, Village Forest Protection & Management Committees (VFPMCs), Eco-development Committees (EDCs), Private entrepreneurs, NGOs etc.

4.4. District Level Committee: At the District level, a District Ecotourism Committee (DLEC) shall be constituted under the Chairmanship of the District Collector with Deputy Conservator of Forests (Territorial) as the Member Secretary and shall have members from other stakeholder departments like revenue, tourism, tribal development, rural development etc. to promote, manage and regulate ecotourism sites. The DLEC will be free to invite opinion from the experts in the field of tourism and hospitality sectors operating in their district. The DLEC shall work towards promoting community-based entrepreneurship to strengthen conservation of natural and cultural biodiversity and sustainable management of ecotourism sites.

4.5. Strategy for managing ecotourism sites: For administrative purposes, the ecotourism destinations and policy mechanisms for governing the ecotourism activities will be as under:

4.5.1 Ecotourism destinations falling in areas within the control of the State Government

- I. Destinations in the jurisdiction of Project Tiger areas.
- ii. Destinations located in other Protected Areas.
- iii. Destinations located in the Eco-sensitive zones of the Protected Areas.
- iv. Destinations which are unique in nature and located inside Reserve Forest & Unclassed forest areas.
- v. Destinations located on non-forest land but under the administrative control of forest department.
- vi. Destinations which are in the administrative control of other government departments.

4.5.2 Ecotourism activities in Project Tiger (PT) areas shall be governed as per the NTCA guidelines issued in 2011. For destinations falling under Protected Areas, Chief Wildlife Warden will draft rules for regulating the recreation and wildlife experience.

4.5.3 For all other areas which are not a part of PA or PT areas, the forest department shall issue a set of rules under Section 26 (d) and Section 76 of the Rajasthan Forest Act to facilitate entry and regulating Ecotourism activities like experiencing nature, wildlife – wilderness experience, camping, trekking, angling etc. along with detailed dos and don'ts.

4.5.4 Ecotourism sites falling under the eco-sensitive zones of the protected areas will be governed as per the Eco-Tourism Master Plan which shall be prepared by the Forest

Department in consultation with the State Department of Tourism.

- 4.5.5 Ecotourism destinations other than those with the Forest Department, which fall in the jurisdiction of local bodies like Gram Panchayats and Nagar Palikas - Tribal tourism, Village tourism, Agri-horti tourism, Herbal tourism, Home stays, artisan & folk tourism etc, will be regulated and governed by the Rajasthan Tourism Policy, 2020.
- 4.5.6 Ecotourism destinations which are basically a part of



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government land but the tourists use the facilities of the private players to enjoy the ecotourism experience – Concept of Nature Conservancies; limiting disturbance to privately owned property while nature / wildlife viewing. The Forest Department in consultation with the Tourism Department, will issue a set of guidelines for regulating this activity with an aim of minimizing the disturbance to wildlife.

4.6. Ecotourism Partners:

In order to realize the ecotourism potential of the destinations, it is imperative that the agencies partnering in the initiative have clarity about their roles, responsibilities and obligations. The five main partners in ecotourism initiative are, **The Forest Department**, who is the owner of the facility, **The Ecotourist**, the person visiting the area for experience, **The Operator**; the public entity, body corporate or the private entrepreneur who is managing the ecotourism destination, **The Facilitator**; we may call him Guide or Interpreter, who will be providing the interpretation, guiding and other intellectual inputs regarding the destination to make the experience memorable; **The Local Community** will be the main beneficiary of the initiative and the Government (Forest and Tourism Departments) who are leveraging the interdependencies of the partners to make the conservation initiatives successful. These shall be clearly defined along with the details of facilities and opportunities that the destinations offer in the Ecotourism Management Plan. The Forest Department will synergize with the

Tourism Department for areas other than those administered by them.

4.7. Ecotourism Management Plan

An Ecotourism Management Plan for each district (including the wildlife and non-wildlife areas) will be prepared at the district level by the District Ecotourism Committee (DLEC). It will be a document expressing the stakeholder's recommendations for how ecotourism is to be carried out in the areas falling under the jurisdiction. The Ecotourism Management Plan will be prepared in consonance with the working plan/ management plan of the areas falling in the jurisdiction of that Circle (National Parks, Sanctuaries, RF, PF, UF etc.) and it will determine the kind of eco-tourism activity that is desirable for a particular area.

- 4.7.1 The Ecotourism Management Plan will be perspective plan of five years and will give details of interventions such as requirement of infrastructure, development of activities such as eco-lodges, eco-sports, nature trails, trekking, safaris, home-stays etc. The activities at such ecotourism sites shall be identified based on the potential of it carrying capacity.
- 4.7.2 The Ecotourism Management Plan shall have an annual action plan indicating physical – financial phasing of the works proposed in the perspective plan.
- 4.7.3 The Ecotourism Management Plan shall be prepared in a participatory approach and it will clearly define the roles of communities living in and around the propose area and

also the role of NGOs, local government, government agencies and other representatives, besides the protected areas staff who know the area well and who will be responsible for the implementation.

- 4.7.4 The implementation of Ecotourism Management Plan shall be in accordance with timelines and implementation arrangement in the plan and will have credible indicators for monitoring and evaluation.
- 4.7.5 The Ecotourism Management Plan shall contain the following component strategies: - (i) zoning for visitor use. (ii) Visitor Site planning and design. (iii) Sustainable infrastructure design. (iv) Determination of the Carrying Capacity (v) Visitor management. (vi) Revenue generation and accounting (vii) Roles of forest department, private operator, facilitators and the local community (viii) Education & interpretation and (ix) Monitoring & Evaluation component.
- 4.7.6 The zoning shall be carried out under the Ecotourism Management Plan, taking into consideration the potential of the eco-tourism site, visitor experience, sustainability and security.
- 4.7.7 The Ecotourism Management Plan unit shall identify possible source of funds to be used for infrastructure and supporting activities for development of ecotourism. Funding may be by a government agency, a local community or even by one or more private partners.

- 4.7.8 The Ecotourism Development Plan will be submitted by the DCF to PCCF (HOFF) for approval, and once approved; the plan will be fit for implementation by RFDC. The Development of Ecotourism site and all such initiatives proposed to be undertaken shall be based on eco-friendly principles.
- 4.7.9 The DLEC shall submit the annual action plan for the district to the RFDC by June 30th of each year. RFDC will then appraise and approve the annual action plans



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allocating them priority, as per the recommendation of DLEC, by 31st August of the year and provide funds to the concerned DCF (Wildlife or Territorial) in whose area the ecotourism initiative is being undertaken. The concerned DCF (Wildlife or Territorial) shall be the Project Implementing Authority (PIA) for the Ecotourism initiative and carry out the development and management of the Ecotourism site as per the approved plan.

- 4.7.10 The RFDC would endeavour to enter into an understanding with the custodian of the potential ecotourism destination for developing an integrated and holistic project for development, execution and management of the ecotourism destination.
- 4.7.11 RFDC would endeavour to develop a multi-stakeholder framework involving community members, concerned government department, relevant civil society organisation, possible private partners and experts, based on the specific characteristics of each project, to build, operate and maintain the destination as desired and to ensure long term economic, social and environmental sustainability of the project.
- 4.7.12 A comprehensive operational guidelines and a detailed manual on various aspects of ecotourism would be issued to facilitate easy and smooth development of ecotourism destinations in the State.

4.8. Ecotourism Product Development, Promotion, Publicity & Marketing:

The ecotourism sites identified and developed will have its uniqueness and values in terms of aesthetic, natural, cultural and landscape characteristics which will be recognized and developed into an ecotourism product with which the site will be recognized. 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, agricultural products, local handicraft, promoting festivals, interpretation centre visit and adventure sports. In the wetland /riverine sites, activities like walks and boat rides for viewing and appreciating the rich and special flora and fauna can be taken up. The marketing of ecotourism destination requires establishment of a cell and networking with the Tourism Department and other departments, promote branding of products and evolving marketing strategies and dissemination through media. The pricing and appropriate packaging and branding of ecotourism destination is important to the success of ecotourism. The marketing of ecotourism destination requires dissemination strategies and the aid of digital technology and other conventional means. The prime task of marketing and promotion of sites shall be done by the Tourism Department.

4.9. Capacity building: Despite wider and growing attraction to ecotourism, the challenges emanating from the field such as geographically fragmented and small nature of sites, small

business structure and high seasonality and the consequent visitor number fluctuation, are significant. With increased numbers of ecotourism sites, the ecotourism sector may throw new opportunities but even then the low tourist volume will pose a serious challenge in making it lucrative for the private entrepreneur. As a result, the capacity of different stakeholders, especially the ecotourism site managers, field staff and the local communities, needs to be steadily up scaled to innovate and meet the present and future challenges of the sector. The policy envisages providing opportunities to local communities by provisioning for specialized training on management of such destinations. Field functionaries will also be imparted specialized training on management of ecotourism activities. Capacities of local communities will be built to act as nature guides and to provide hospitality management services. This will be achieved by taking the assistance of Tourism Department and the services of Hospitality Management Institutes like Institute of Hotel Management in the State. This shall include training to discharge specialized tasks such as tourist guides, natural science interpreters, patrol partners for protection work, entrepreneurs for small scale homestead-based hospitality industry, small business operators (like souvenir shops, equipment for hire, photography etc).

4.10. Funding and Budgetary support: Identification, development, marketing of ecotourism initiatives will require a consistent and assured flow of funds on a regular basis. This can

only be ensured if funds are apportioned by way of budgetary provisioning. The Forest Department shall allocate funds from annual departmental budget available under various schemes for development of ecotourism. Funds apportioned for ecotourism activities and will be made available to the Rajasthan Forest Development Corporation (RFDC). The funds will then be provided to the district units on the basis of the approved annual action plans. Apart from budgetary support RFDC will also free to raise funds, grants, donations etc from other sources to fund ecotourism initiatives in the state.

4.11. Sharing of Revenue benefits: The main beneficiary from the ecotourism initiative shall be the community involved in the management of the destination and a small component of the revenue shall go to the government. The community shall be responsible for upkeep and maintenance of the facility in a guest worthy condition and carryout the routine maintenance of the site. Any major modification/upgradation at the site will be done by Rajasthan Forest Development Corporation (RFDC). The ecotourism sites/attractions developed by RFDC may be ticketed. The revenue generated will be deposited by RFDC in an escrow account and shall be used for development of ecotourism activities of that area. The funds accrued from eco-tourism activities will be utilised for community development, conservation initiatives and running of ecotourism facilities. The Forest Department will develop a model for revenue sharing in consultation with RFDC. A separate model of revenue sharing will be developed for facilities

such as Tiger reserves/Biological Parks which are already ticketed facilities. The RFDC shall ensure that part of the revenue generated will be used to address local livelihood development issues, human wildlife conflict management and conservation through eco-development. The Forest Department will issue guidelines for the same.

4.12. Monitoring Mechanism: The Forest Department will be the Nodal Department for implementing the Ecotourism Policy. It shall evolve a multitier monitoring mechanism to ensure that the projects undertaken operate within the broad framework of this Policy and are able to achieve the mission and objectives without compromising on the overall mandate of the department. The ecotourism projects shall be monitored on a quarterly basis by the RFDC, on a half yearly basis by the PCCF (HOFF) and annually by the Rajasthan Ecotourism Development Society (REDS). RFDC in consultation with REDS will draw a detailed monitoring framework to assess the success of the various ecotourism initiatives.

