

Code of Conduct for Ground Handlers in India

Overview

Through partnership, cooperation, learning and action, responsible tourism in wilderness areas can play an important role in the conservation of India's natural resources.

Responsible travel operators, their ground agents and representatives can play a critical role in ensuring the provision of sustainable services, experiences and products, without compromising quality.

TOFT UK members agree to:

Instruct their Indian ground representatives and handlers to:

a) Consider their footprint

- Undertake full and proper reconnaissance of each area of operation before sending clients there.
- Use accommodation and services that minimise their environmental footprint and/or enhance conservation of their 'wilderness resources'. This involves questioning lodge owners, management and staff about the following and subsequently amending bad practice:
 - ownership
 - energy, waste and water management
 - local employment and training opportunities offered
 - food purchasing (local produce or shipped in)
 - 'extra' services or tours offered for clients
 - quality of guiding and briefing
 - any local projects/initiatives/enterprises supported directly by accommodation.

b) Ensure client briefing

- Ensure that clients have been fully briefed about the host country, its customs, cultures, sensitivities and sensibilities on arrival by accompanying guide or lodge staff.
- Brief clients to act correctly and with due reverence and respect to cultures and customs, and encourage the learning of basic phrases in local languages to facilitate this.
- Brief visitors as to the official park rules and regulations. Avoid any activity that results in cruel treatment of animals, or interference in their natural way of life, including getting too close to tigers and wildlife, pressuring

mahouts to get too close, or getting drivers to drive irresponsibly, off road or dangerously. Procedures for reporting such incidents should be made available to clients and should be emailed to comments@toftiger.org or by mail to Travel Operators for Tigers, 87 Newland Street, Witham, Essex, CM8 1AD, UK

c) Enhance visitor interpretation & participation

- Maximise opportunities for your clients to visit local handicraft shops and cooperatives or encourage local communities to start such cooperatives as a business venture.
- Ensure that interpretation and guiding offers a real picture of the area, and that visitors are made aware of the issues and concerns facing the communities they visit and the conflicts facing the conservation of wildlife and resources in each area.
- Ensure wildlife guides used by your visitors in parks have a competent standard of interpretation and knowledge of the flora and fauna to enhance your client's experiences. Wildlife guides should carry suitable maps, a mammal guidebook, bird books and other material in their vehicles to show/illustrate what is being seen.
- Engage with local community representatives to identify individuals eager to become trained wildlife guides who can offer independent services to visitors
- Enlighten clients through high quality interpretation to all of India's extraordinary wildlife rather than relying solely on the pursuit of tigers. This will require better training, guiding and language skills.