UNIT 9 VISITING NATIONAL PARK: A GUIDE’S PERCEPTION

Structure

9.0 Objectives
9.1 Introduction
9.2 Profiling A Wildlife Tourist
9.2.1 Purpose of Travel
9.2.2 Behavioural Characteristics
9.3 Problems In Wild Life Tourism
9.3.1 Timing
9.3.2 Transportation
9.3.3 Accommodation
9.3.4 Photography
9.4 Harmonising Nature
9.4.1 Ecological Awareness
9.4.2 Nature Walks
9.5 Economic Benefits—An Agenda
9.6 Let Us Sum Up
9.7 Key Words
9.8 Answers To Check Your Progress Exercises

9.0 OBJECTIVES

In this Unit our aim is to:

• familiarise you with the characteristics of wildlife tourists,
• make you aware of the problems in wildlife tourism and discuss ways to overcome them,
• provide you hints about developing ecological awareness among the tourists, and
• discuss the economic benefits of promoting wildlife tourism.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Wildlife Tourism is potentially one of the most viable and economically rewarding areas of tourism. Hence it is imperative on a tourism professional and more so on a wildlife guide.

National Parks and Wildlife Sanctuaries
Coutesy: Deptt. of Tourism, G.O.I.
or escort to understand its intricacies and use this information to his/her fullest advantage. Most of the tourists visiting a wildlife area are innocent and therefore willing to learn from you and follow your instructions. Hence, unlike several other situations, as a wildlife guide or escort you are located in an enviably privileged position. But this simultaneously entails upon you the additional responsibility of being thoroughly familiar with the peculiar features of wildlife tourism. In this Unit we have made an attempt at giving you the vital information on wildlife tourism and your role therein as a guide or escort. Certain details pertinent to wildlife have been dealt with in another Unit (No. 16 Block 4). You should see these two units as complementary to each other.

9.2 PROFILING A WILDLIFE TOURIST

We must understand that your tourist is a visitor who is visiting the area for reasons other than business. In all probability he is travelling on a holiday. He may want to:

- experience, learn and understand the area,
- involve in activities other than his routine,
- pass on this gained knowledge about the area to his friends.

Therefore if you want to be of use to him you must know in detail a profile of your tourist.

9.2.1 Purpose of Travel

In today's time when the world focus is on Green Tourism or Eco Tourism, there is more focus on visiting National Parks. People want to get away from the concrete jungle to the jungle of the Gods. They want to experience peace and tranquility, something different, something new, something adventurous, and learn and understand nature and its importance.

They want to see creatures of nature, insects, butterflies, lizards, snakes, birds and animals. They not only want to see but understand them, feel them and appreciate them.

They want to be in Landscape, absorb the environment and remember it for ever.

There could be not better culture which can understand them than our own culture which teaches us so much respect for nature.

9.2.2 Behavioural Characteristics

The purpose described in the preceding Sub-sec. may be a motive for travel to a wildlife sanctuary by anyone. Thus a tourist can be anybody—a businessman, industrialist, professor, doctor, engineer, bureaucrat, lawyer, journalist, politician, and you yourself outside your area of responsibility. Can we afford to ignore any one of them? We should therefore, strive to get at the behavioural characteristics of all our clients. Admittedly it is a very difficult task. Fortunately, however, there are a few common traits that most of these tourists possess and thus help us profile them to our advantage.

A tourist visiting a wildlife sanctuary is simple and will do what he is told to do. He is often innocent and quite often not aware of the traditions and customs of the area. He is also inquisitive. However, there are tourists—particularly the new rich who intend to treat the jungle as their drawing room. Such tourists have to be firmly told that a national park or sanctuary welcomes guests so long as they respect the laws and have come to experience nature and wildlife. However let us start with the assumption that a tourist is correctable. If he is told of what to do what not to do, he accepts and learns fast. He is also keen to help in any manner possible.

A tourist is accommodating and tolerant. He will do up with inconvenience if the situation demands. He will stand in a queue to get an entry, (how many of you stood in line to get yourself tickets to come here, and how many will not do on your return journey or when you are on a holiday) he will not smoke for hours, he will not eat if required, he will stay in basic accommodation, eat simple food, no TV etc. While at home he might be having a stream of servants to do his work, live in a centrally air-conditioned house, and have a feast each day and watch his most popular TV programme.
Guides and Escorts

The same tourist, in return, demands

- peace and quiet environment,
- something new to see or do,
- some adventure,
- the assurance that all is safe and that he will not have difficulties,
- information of the area—what the place has to offer, what is the flora and fauna, what is the ecology and what kind of difficulty it is facing, (this will also motivate him to think how he can help), and
- freedom of doing things. Wake up late and have his leisurely breakfast, or wake up early to do an activity and have an afternoon nap, go for a walk or sit beside a waterhole all day to watch birds and animals.

You would thus understand that guiding a wildlife tour is a specialised skill that you must acquire to be successful in your profession. Readings in zoology, botany and ecology help in attaining these skills.

Check Your Progress 1

1. Why do tourists visit a wildlife sanctuary?

2. What are the common behavioural features of wildlife tourists?

3. What do wildlife tourists generally demand?

9.3 PROBLEMS IN WILDLIFE TOURISM

Now that you have had a profile of wildlife tourist and underscored for yourself the significance of specific skills, you should get a peep into some of the dark areas of wildlife tourism in India. This, we hope, will enable you to sharpen wisdom of finding
alternatives and increase presence of mind. A fair amount of it, we recommend, is a must for guides and escorts involved in this area of tourism.

9.3.1 Timing

It is only in India that we have developed a unique concept of timings—morning and evening—as if wildlife tourism is an entertainment show. There are things happening all the time in nature, then why this restriction. There are some people who would like to see some animals and return back, there are other who would like to see some birds and spend time photographing. Wildlife photography takes lot of patience and those who know this will understand. Some will like to visit different ecological zones while some would like to wait at a water hole to see the day's activity in the jungle. There are others who would like to study the insects and their nest or study a pond. The present timings do not allow us to do these activities.

9.3.2 Transportation

A tourist will like to travel in a comfortable transport suitable for the area. He wishes to feel the environment, be able to see clearly the jungle, the animals and birds flying. He would like to photograph what he sees with ease. The ideal vehicle is undoubtedly the Gypsy/Jeep open from all sides which gives him what he needs.

What is of concern to us presently is the introduction of unthoughtful vehicles at our National Parks—Ranthambore with its canter trucks, and Madhumalai with its closed vehicles like the interstate transport buses with dysfunctional windows. These are just a few examples. Madhya Pradesh Tourism has done a very good job in providing Jeeps in the National Parks.

It is the dream of anyone who visits a National Park to ride an elephant. This is true for all Indians but more true of foreign tourists, who get this opportunity once in life time. The elephant excursion is a slow ride through the forest listening to the sounds of the forest, observing the vegetation and noticing the insects and other inhabitants of nature. It is an ideal way to slowly absorb and appreciate nature. It is also important because it allows accessibility to areas where otherwise one cannot go. The beauty is that it does not make an impact on the land. It makes every rider love its experience and you instantaneously convert the visitor into your strongest supporter.

We find some trends coming in the National Parks which discourage such experience and elephant ride is becoming extinct. This will disappoint many people. The strongest point Nepal has to sell to compete with Indian Wildlife Tourism is that they guarantee elephant rides. Some of the private camps are allowed to have their own elephants and others are hired from Indian contractors. Why can we not retain them in India?
9.3.3 Accommodation

Tourists look for simple basic accommodation which would offer:
- ideal environment to the purpose for which they have come,
- neat and clean accommodation,
- efficient management, and
- friendly staff.

You should therefore ensure your tourist groups the minimum standards of comfort and cleanliness. In some wildlife reserves there is a paucity of such accommodation. There you should look out for suitable places in the vicinity or at a short distance from the park. Remember you earn a lot of reputation by being careful about the accommodation.

9.3.4 Photography

Every person these days on travel likes to document the scenario through photographs. Quite often people hold special parties in the house and invite friends and show them photos, slides or videos of places where they have been which motivates others to think of the same. Sure you realise the multiplier effect this tendency has on tourist traffic. Similarly filming and TV documentaries help in selling the destination, understanding it and appreciating what we in our forest service do thereby adding to our interest. It is therefore, important that we make prior arrangements in this regard by paying necessary fees wherever applicable. It is also a good idea to keep a daylight film and colour rolls and transparencies handy with you in case someone needs it. You earn a lot of goodwill as the photography enthusiast will never forget the timely help that saved for him precious memories of the day.

Check Your Progress 2

1) What are the problems relating to timing in a wild life preserve?
9.4 HARMONISING NATURE

Guiding a wildlife tour is essentially harmonising it with nature. Away from the din and roar of urban life, your primary effort should be to sensitize the finer senses of your tourists in the midst of nature. If done carefully it will earn you a responsible and environmentally conscious citizen.

9.4.1 Ecological Awareness

A wildlife tour should be planned in such manner that it does not interfere with the ecology of the region. The tour can begin with a briefing on the ecological characteristics of the region. Small but interesting details on the flora to be found in the preserve helps develop this awareness in a big way. You may do well to keep handy notes on it for ready reference.

Another important area deserving your attention is obtaining a map of the preserve with pathways, waterholes, sighting platforms and other foliage clearly marked. You must read the map very carefully and if possible make an advance round of the preserve so as to be thoroughly acquainted with its topography. A copy of the map may be handed out to each member of the tourist party.

There are dos and donts to be observed in wildlife region. You should teach the tourist ways of enjoying the nature with as little interference with its system as possible. For example, any other act except watching the animals is interference. Similarly the slightest act of vandalism with the flora is again considered interference. A forewarned tourist in the wildlife preserve tends to obey the advice.

9.4.2 Nature Walks

Nature walks are one of the finest ways of experiencing wildlife. They make one understand the use and importance of the forest. Unfortunately, they are almost non-existent. In Nepal a Nature Trek is fascinating to tell the tourists about the various plants—trees, shrubs and bushes and give information about their economic and other benefits to humans, animals and environment. It is like a Botany Tour for short durations but a fascinating one. During the visit one can observe how spider traps its prey, the lizard catches insects, birds make nest and feed young ones. One also learns how to track different animals and how to identify them. How the foot prints of one deer differ from the other or that of birds. It is in fact educating one through first hand experience.

In national parks of Africa they have Walking Safaris and they camp out at different sites. They go with professionals and see antelopes, zebras, giraffes, lions and elephants.
We in our National Park have no provision of doing such activity. This will help keep people off the game drives and crowding and keep them occupied. It will increase the visitors length of stay and make them more friendly with nature.

### 9.5 ECONOMIC BENEFITS—AN AGENDA

The wildlife preserves and National Parks are a resource which tourism utilizes without consuming it. Truly an area set aside for wild animals brings in rich economic benefits. But a substantial work in this direction needs to be done to make wildlife tourism an economically viable prospect. We would like to suggest that the carrying capacity of our preserves cannot be judged from the number of jeeps or cars that enter the areas. In fact it can be increased several folds by carefully working on the following suggestions:

1. **Increase entry point for a good dispersal of tourists.**
2. **Putting up of hides and watchtowers at Water Holes or other important places.** This helps to keep substantial number of visitors off the road and also keep them very constructively occupied.
3. **Walking:** This again will use only about five sq. km. about the maximum but will again keep many people off the road.
4. **Boats:** Where Boats are possible, this will again help in additional activity and help in diversifying the activity.
5. **Elephants:** This will cover a small area. A maximum of 5 sq. km of area but will make the visitor satisfied. At the same time keeping the noise and pollution by vehicles away.
6. **Excursions to near by Archaeological site such as Forts, Geological Sites, Landscapes or culturally important places.**
7. **Excursions to near by site such as lakes for water birds or fields for deer and antelope or any other subject of such importance.**

There is an opinion that the most numbers of animals are found in tourist zones and also most breeding takes place in tourist areas. This is because the animals find security in the area from poachers. Examples cited in support are Ruwanda, Kenya and South Africa. But on the other hand poachers find it convenient to operate in these areas because of availability of animals in one area. Ranthambhore and Kaziranga are some examples of it. Forty two rhinos were killed by poachers in Kaziranga during 1993. As a solution it is suggested that the entire Park should be opened to tourists so that constant patrolling is done at no cost to the Park and poachers will be deterred to plunder the Park. Tourists can also be used in time of need by the forest guards. Tourists are not only Friends of the Park but can also be made protectors of the Park. You can bank on them and take them on your side.

### Check Your Progress 3

1) What is the importance of ecological awareness in wildlife tourism?

We have seen how wildlife tourism is different from other forms of tourism. As a tourist guide/escort you must know the profile of your tourist. This will help you in organizing
the trip better. There are also several problem areas in wildlife tourism. It is your responsibility to sort out such problems and provide alternatives wherever feasible. Also of interest to you is the ecological aspect of wildlife tourism. Sensitising tourists on such issues and conducting tours in accordance with the dictates of ecology will earn you a tremendous reputation and goodwill.

9.7 KEY WORDS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Profile</td>
<td>A concise sketch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>Manner of conducting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excursion</td>
<td>A short journey</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transparency</td>
<td>Colour slides</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harmony</td>
<td>Agreement of thought</td>
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<tr>
<td>Water hole</td>
<td>Deposits of water where animals come to satisfy their thirst</td>
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9.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1
1) See Sub. sec. 9.2.1.
2) See Sub. sec. 9.2.2.

Check Your Progress 2
1) See Sub. sec. 9.3.1.
2) See Sub. sec. 9.3.4.

Check Your Progress 3
1) See Sub. sec. 9.4.1.
SOME USEFUL BOOKS FOR THIS BLOCK

Nirmal Ghosh and Rajpal Singh, The Jungle Life of India New Delhi, 1990
Shobhita Punja, The Museums of India, New Delhi, 1990
Y.D. Sharma, Delhi and Its Neighbourhood, New Delhi 1987

ACTIVITIES FOR THIS BLOCK

Activity 1

With the help of guide books, information leaflets or booklets issued by the Department of Tourism and maps and other records, prepare two alternative itineraries for a day long tour of your town of residence.

Activity 2

Write a two page note on the history of the most renowned monument located in or near your town. Also collect all the anecdotes pertaining to that monument and list them on separate sheets of paper.

Activity 3

Find out the details about the nearest museum and write a two page note describing its acquisitions.

Activity 4

Prepare a list of different kind of museums located within your state and fill in the following information against each entry.

a) Distance from your town
b) How to reach
c) The managing authority
d) Prize collection

Activity 5

Prepare a note on the wildlife sanctuary/national park nearest to your town giving the following details:

a) Accessibility
b) Accommodation
c) Important species of animals and birds to be seen there.

Activity 6

Take a group of local school students to the most famous historical monument in your town. Explain to them the monument keeping in mind the categories described in Unit-5.

Activity 7

Along with your friends make a visit to the local museum. Describe the museum to your friends as you would do to a group of tourists.