

It's Time Tourism Industry Took Difficult Decisions To Stay Responsible And Sustainable: Experts

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Tourism industry experts, industry watchers and advocates of responsible and sustainable tourism have asked travel and tourism industry to adopt difficult measures to ward off ill-effects of tourism on the natural environment of the destinations. Speakers at the recently concluded Responsible Tourism Summit and Awards at the aegis of Outlook Traveller magazine outlined how climate change can harm the prospects of travel and tourism in coming decades.

Inaugurating the summit, renowned writer Amitav Ghosh cautioned travel and tourism industry across the world to be prepared to face music as a result of increasing effect of climate change. Being an industry which is highly dependent on favourable climate, Ghosh said that impact of climate change will be quite disastrous for tourism.

Rising temperature, growing desertification, glacier retreats, rising sea levels, etc., are grave threats to tourism, he said. He added that 2% rise in temperature will prove fatal to many popular ski resorts in the world. 'Rising sea level would result in disappearance of many scenic islands in Pacific and Caribbean. Even Indian cities like Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, etc., are in danger. Beaches in Goa are going to be invaded by strange marine creatures making tourism activity unsafe', he cautioned.

He said that countries will be forced to regulate air travel as air travel contributes heavily to climate change. Air travel will also become dearer and dearer going forward. In order to make tourism sustainable, Ghosh said that the destination developers should pay heed to the indigenous wisdom and experience of the local people.

Speaking on the occasion, Dr Venu V, Secretary Tourism, Kerala asked the tourism industry to "get out of the comfort" zones and address the issues of responsible and sustainable tourism proactively. He advocated "mainstreaming" the ethos of responsible tourism, instead of doing things "here and there" and proclaiming them in a self-appreciating manner. Citing the Kerala experiment, Venu said that it is time the tourism industry took difficult decisions collectively and move forward. He expressed satisfaction, the way the tourism industry in Kerala owned up the responsible tourism initiative.

Harold Goodwin, Emeritus Professor and Responsible Tourism Advisor to WTM asked the industry to wake up to the realities of the world and stop the "declining" attitude. There is a relative inactivity on the part of airline and cruise industry on matters related to environment, which is worrying, he added. In the name of Green Tourism what is actually happening on the ground is 'green washing', he said.

Ananya Dasgupta of Equations, an advocacy organisation which tracks the socio-cultural, economic and environment impact of tourism came out strongly against the mainstream tourism industry and the lack of vision of the governments in framing stronger frameworks for tourism in the country. Citing the way unrestrained tourism developments are taking the toll on destinations like Mandarmani in West Bengal, Dasgupta said that "mainstream tourism industry" would not change without "strong whipping" on the part of the government. However, rules have been simplified or diluted by the government to favour the organised industry in the past. She cited how tourism projects were taken out of the preview of EIA and how CRZ norms have been diluted more than 25

times by the government since its promulgation in 2001. “What we have today is a comprehensive sustainable tourism criterion, which is a toothless tiger,” she said. She also questioned the decision of NITI Aayog to open islands in Andamans for resorts in the lines of Thailand and Maldives.