



## **Tourism Department, Government of Andhra Pradesh: Sustainable Eco-tourism – A Case Study From India**

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### **About Andhra Pradesh**

Andhra Pradesh is a southern state of India that has been bountifully endowed by nature – in the form of hills and valleys of the Eastern Ghats. The state has a population of about 80 million, of which 7% population is of tribes who live in forest tracts. The state has a long coastline of close to 1,000 kilometers. It has immense natural resources in the form of five major rivers and dense tracts of forests. The economy is primarily agrarian, with more than 65% of people living in villages. Nevertheless, the cities are also vibrant, and the capital city of Hyderabad is an international hub for IT, biotech, manufacturing and knowledge-based activities. The state has rich cultural and religious traditions, and also a strong Buddhist heritage. Because of the presence of some of the holiest shrines, the state receives the largest number of domestic tourists in the state.



### **Eco-tourism Initiatives in Andhra Pradesh**

Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation took the initiative of identifying potential eco-tourism spots in the state. It has successfully implemented a number of popular eco-tourism projects by involving the local community, at Belum caves, revamping of Borra caves, and an exotic jungle destination (Jungle Bells at Tyda in Visakhapatnam District). The above initiatives have yielded excellent results, as the above projects support rural livelihoods and provide opportunity to the tourist for interacting with the local communities in sharing the local knowledge about primitive culture and traditions and bio-diversity in the area. The projects also have thrown open opportunities to the local tribal youth, ethnic minorities and women who participate in operating the eco-tourism projects on a community basis and sharing the benefits.



### **Community-based Eco-tourism**

Basically all eco-tourism projects are rural based and provide opportunity to the tourist to know about the environmental assets of the rural communities, local traditions, art forms and ethnic cuisine. Conscious efforts have been made to preserve the natural beauty and environment while creating infrastructure and facilities for tourists that fit in with the natural surroundings.

Andhra Pradesh is encouraging community-based eco-tourism in convergence with various stakeholders from the government departments and the community. The Forest Department under their Community Forest Management Program supports the initiative by providing opportunities for jungle walks, forest retreats, wildlife tourism, bird watching and trekking.

### **New Eco-tourism Initiatives**

Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation (APTDC), in coordination with the AP Forest Department, has identified eight new eco-tourism destinations, namely at Maredumilli (East Godavari District), Nelapattu (Nellore District), Mamandur, Talakona, Nanniyal (Chittoor District), Balapalli (Kadapa District), Ettipotala (Guntur District) and Kambala Konda (Visakhapatnam District). The operation model followed in these projects is as follows:

- Eco-tourism projects, generally would involve nature treks, wildlife tourism and jungle stays.
- Local Forest Protection Committees will provide accommodation, guide services, security and food.
- The AP Forest Department will provide infrastructure under Community Forest Management (CFM) and also help in management of eco-camps through local forest officials.
- Transport to and from the destination will be provided by APTDC/tourists.



All eight new initiatives have been made operational within a period of the last five years, and among them, the Maredumilli Eco-tourism Project has shown the most encouraging results.

### **About the Community-based Eco-tourism Center at Maredumilli**

The Maredumilli Forests of East Godavari District, which form one of the less disturbed forest tracts of Eastern Ghats, are endowed with rich biodiversity of flora and fauna and are home to important wildlife like the tiger, bison, panther, varieties of deer, birds and butterflies. This forest forms catchments for River "Godavari" and River "Shabari." It is



also home to a number of primitive tribes like Konda Reddy, Konda Koyas, Valmikies, Gonds, Nayaka Podus, etc.

The Maredumilli Community Conservation and Eco-tourism Area is situated on Maredumilli-Bhadrachalam Road, nearly four kilometers away from Maredumilli Village, in the midst of undisturbed Eastern Ghats, which are home to rich flora and fauna. The area has many streams flowing over the undulating

rocks in the deep woods and any visitor can feel the thrilling experience by living in nature and visiting the primitive tribal habitations of Konda Reddys and knowing their way of life.

### **Management Structure**

The eco-tourism project is managed by the local, indigenous tribal community (Konda Reddy) of Valamuru Somireddypalem and Addaraveedhi Forest Protection Committees, with the active support of the Forest Department. The project was successfully completed in a short span of time due to the commitment of the highly motivated community coupled with the timely financial assistance from the Andhra Pradesh Community Forest Management Project. This also provided a unique opportunity for the native ethnic community to spread the message of conservation to the masses and provide opportunity to enjoy the nature in its pristine glory.

Community-based Eco-tourism Center infrastructure was created by the Forest Department under the Community Forest Management Project. The operations at this center are totally managed by local community members comprising of tribal community of Konda Reddys. Andhra Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation provides marketing support and training of the tribes in hospitality-related activities like food and beverage service, housekeeping, guide services, etc.

### **Revenue Sharing**

The Forest Department under the Community Forest Management Program has arrived at a revenue-sharing mechanism with the local tribal community. Guide service, food and beverage, housekeeping and security are undertaken by the community members. The above activities are packaged in such a way that the total revenue derived is apportioned between the maintenance of infrastructure and services rendered by the community. The amount for the services rendered is shared equally between the 30 tribal families of Valamuru Somireddypalem and Addaraveedhi Villages.

The members from the 30 families divide the various activities by turns and manage the center, thereby providing a wholesome experience of living with nature to the tourist. The highlight of this rural tourism center, located in the heart of Eastern Ghat forests, is the incident-free operations within the last four and a half years in the extremist-infested forest tracts of Andhra Pradesh. The convergence of the activities by different departments and total involvement of community has paved the way for successful operation of the rural eco-tourism center.

### **Enhancement of Sustainable Livelihood**

The focus of this tourism project is in sustainable livelihoods and addressing issues of poverty eradication through community mobilization around income and employment-generation activities related to tourism. It combines the cultural, craft and ecological dimensions of rural life and holds tremendous potential for income generation and enhancement of the basic quality of life in the rural areas.

This innovative concept of tourism is targeted at two distinct segments: firstly, to create interest among the host communities who are an integral part of the society so that they learn to take pride in their own identity and in their environment, culture and ecology; and secondly, to attract visitors who are interested in and fascinated by the nature, history, culture, artistic skills and lives of tribal societies, and who wish to enjoy and appreciate nature in all its forms without abusing, manipulating or destroying it, thereby ensuring its preservation for future generations.



The main objectives of this innovative tourism project are: to distribute the benefits of tourism; reduce poverty; provide for sustainable development; encourage gender equity; and minimize adverse ecological impacts. It also aims at development of the local economy, revival and regeneration of tribal arts and crafts, preservation of culture and bringing awareness on how tourism benefits the local communities.

Local communities are involved in infrastructure development by using local skills and vernacular architecture; governance and management; setting up and strengthening traditional economic activities and tourism-related enterprises, including host stays, hospitality services, and guiding; and familiarizing tourists with indigenous flora, fauna and medicinal herbal plants. The transformative tourism project also aims at a complete and authentic tourist experience for the visitor managed by the local community from local cuisine to traditional activities (such as archery). Tourists return with a better understanding of the tribal society living in forest areas as well as the culture and biodiversity of Eastern Ghats.

### **Economic Benefits**

The local tribal communities derive many economic and social benefits from this innovative project both directly and indirectly. These benefits can be listed as:

- i) Revenue to the 30 local families involved in the tourism project that is additional to their routine earnings.
- ii) Direct employment for 30 families, including women, in one way or the other through the project.
- iii) Sale of tribal handicrafts made of bamboo.
- iv) Income from sales of forest products such as Honey, Gooseberry, Jackfruits and Toddy.
- v) Tips from visitors while performing tribal folk dances.

### **Forest Department Benefits**

- 1) Effective protection of forest and wildlife with involvement of tribal communities through Forest Protection Committees.
- 2) Weaning away the tribal community from practicing shifting cultivation that is unsustainable and harmful to the environment.

### **Social Benefits**

The local communities also get social benefits out of interaction with the visitors. As tourism activity increases in the area, the local people exhibit their indigenous traditional skills and disseminate these traditional knowledge systems to the visitors.

The local tribes also get trained in interpreting the flora, especially the medicinal plants, as well as the habits and habitat of the wild fauna, traditional therapies and healing systems.



### **Social Change**

The most significant development in the area is a total return to peace. This area was till recently a stronghold of left-wing guerilla extremists operating in Eastern Ghats forest tracts. People used to get scared even to drive through the forest, let alone stay there. Now, with the tribal community taking up the full responsibility of running the ecotourism center, there is an unbelievable change in the safety and security perspective of the

tourists. The tourists have the opportunity to stay in the jungle that was once considered not safe. Jungle Star Eco-camp is now a sought-after destination for birdwatchers, trekkers, butterfly lovers, wildlife enthusiasts and people interested in jungle stays.

### **Marketing Initiatives**

The Forest Department directly markets this rural tourism initiative through their state and district hierarchy. APTDC has developed extensive marketing initiatives through its

Information and Reservation Centers. The destination is also marketed through the APTDC website and several other supporting materials, such as brochures, handouts, etc.

### **Jungle Star Eco-camp**

The highlight of the eco-tourism project is the Jungle Star campsite, which is located adjoining the Pamuleru River with the stream flowing on three sides overlooking the Vali-Sugriva hill that is believed to be the battleground during the epic Ramayana period.

The camp is managed by the local Konda Reddy tribal community, which has been trained in housekeeping, food and beverage production and servicing, guiding and security. The tribal community takes up the whole responsibility of the safety and security of the tourists of the camp. The community also organizes tribal folk dances in the evening and traditional archery for the tourists.

The tourists will get the experience of staying in the deep jungles with basic facilities without disturbing nature. The camp will be managed with a concept of ***“take only memories and leave only footprints.”***

### **Other Places Around Center**

**1. Medicinal Plants Conservation Area:** One gets the opportunity to explore nature and learn about the bio-diversity of Eastern Ghats with special emphasis on the medicinal plant wealth of this area. Local tribes have been trained by the Forest Department in the identification of the medicinal plants and their use. Guided treks are organized for the tourists in an area of 260 hectares of undisturbed semi-evergreen forest. About 203 plant species, including medicinal and rare plants, have been identified in this area. Tourists can have an insight into coffee cultivation through a visit to the luxuriant coffee estates managed by the Forest Department.

**2. Jalatarangini:** The area is rich in springs and rivulets with cascading waterfalls giving an enchanting experience to tourists. One such waterfall, called “Jalatarangini,” which is very close to the campsite, is often the favorite spot of tourists.



**3. Madanikunj:** The Forest Department has also developed a wildlife-viewing place called Madanikunj with tropical plants and bamboo grooves abutting the Pamuleru River. The place is frequented by wild animals like tigers, panthers, bison, peacocks, red jungle fowl and other birdlife in addition to varieties of butterflies.