

# Challenges of tourist guiding-An assessment of situation in India<sup>1</sup>

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## Methodology

Study makes use of use of exploratory methods to gain an insight of problems faced by them. A panel of experts came up with an initial framework for the research. A protocol was used to return free listing of opinions from 269 respondents on a variety of issues. Panel subsequently discussed the categorization of respondents concerns. Sub-categories were also created.

Findings: The responses of trainees at the Regional level Guide Training Programme were more holistic than expected. They included a lot of ideas and pointed issues those may not directly affect them but may hinder a superior tourist experience which they regarded as a problem for their profession. The responses broadly indicated about five broad problems areas- general framework and tour guiding environment; local authorities including local tourism authorities and local civil administration; employment relationship/ engagement with tour operators and travel companies; handling customers- both foreign and domestic; working conditions. Some issues included more than one problem areas.

Implications: For a superior tourist experience it is important that the contact personnel-the tour guide in this case- has all the necessary support in terms of good working conditions for self and support to return a satisfied tourist. Having identified areas of dissonance, efforts should be directed at finding solutions.

Value: This study provides a useful insight into the problems of tour guides which was hardly researched earlier. The paper also develops a theoretical model of tour guiding context and relationship between different players. The findings could serve as a starting point in taking up more conclusive research based on empirical evidence.

Tourism as a phenomenon and also as a means of socio-economic good is becoming increasingly important for communities and administrative leadership who are aggressively promoting it. Like any other product growth of tourism depends upon tourist satisfaction. Guides play a vital role in bringing satisfaction to tourists visiting a country or region/state. The opportunity of direct interaction with the tourists makes them all the more responsible for projecting the correct image of the country/region, giving factually correct information about the destination, ensuring the safety and well being of the tourists as well as pleasant and satisfying stay for them during their visits. Therefore, while tour guides are expected to assume roles of cultural ambassadors or culture sales persons it is imperative that they get a supportive work environment. Confident, satisfied and elated individuals are better placed to create a superior experience for tourists. Insecure, vulnerable guides would not be able to render good services even with best of intentions.

Ministry of Tourism, Government of India realises the importance of guides as instrumental for a superior tourist experience. "Guides play a vital role in bringing satisfaction to tourists visiting a country or region/state. The opportunity of direct interaction with the tourists makes them all the more responsible for projecting the correct image of the country/region, giving factually correct information about the destination, ensuring the safety and well being of the tourists as well as pleasant and satisfying stay for them during their visits" (Ministry of Tourism, GoI, 2005). Researchers (Weiler and Richins, 1990) have long maintained that tourist guides contributed a better quality travel experience for the tourist.

Searching the internet using various search engines for 'tour guide' and 'problems' with an operand 'and' more than 95% of the search results resulted in problem caused due to guides. In India, many of the news about problems involving tourist are due to untrained and unlicensed, casual or fake guides. Touts, termed as 'lapkas' in India, are a menace to tourists. In general people do not associate respect and pride with the profession of tour guides. Vested interests often do lip services by addressing them as cultural ambassadors without allowing corresponding social esteem. Unfortunately, tour guides in India, are normally looked down with suspicion, specially by domestic tourists.

Authorities responsible for promoting and facilitating tour guiding have over time come up with mechanisms to control tour guide operations and behaviour. Authorities have issued terms and conditions regulating the conduct and performance of approved guides. A code of ethics for Tourist Guides has also been issued by Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. Given the controlled mechanism for tour guiding in India, it is required by law that tour guides must obtain a license before they can accompany a tourist/ tourist groups. Having completed their training and before getting a license, they must sign a

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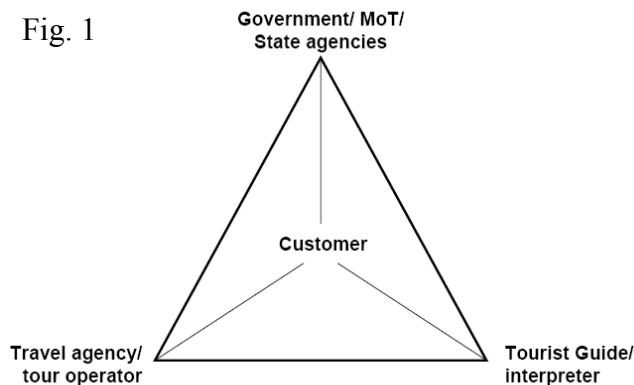
detailed terms and conditions accepting the regulation for conduct and performance of approved guides (See Appendix A). How much of this is enforced and how much do the tour guide follow these in practice could be a subject matter of a different research.

While there are certain expectations from guides it is necessary to assess and analyse the working conditions of tourist guides. It is important to understand their position, role and bargaining power in the tourism supply chain. It is important to assess the amount of control tourist guides vest on certain practices for which expectations are set whether it is competence or ethical work practices. It is important to make an assessment of the vulnerable position of a tour guide vis-à-vis other members of the supply chain for example travel agencies, hoteliers, merchandisers' cartels, government offices, agencies, officials, etc.

**Business scenario for tour guiding**

Any analysis of tour guides would begin with understanding of setup for facilitating tourists. With tourists as the focal point and the *raison d'être*, there are at least three important players (see figure 1) in the scenario with interrelationships and interests that affect the entire setting. In this scenario, Governments act

Fig. 1

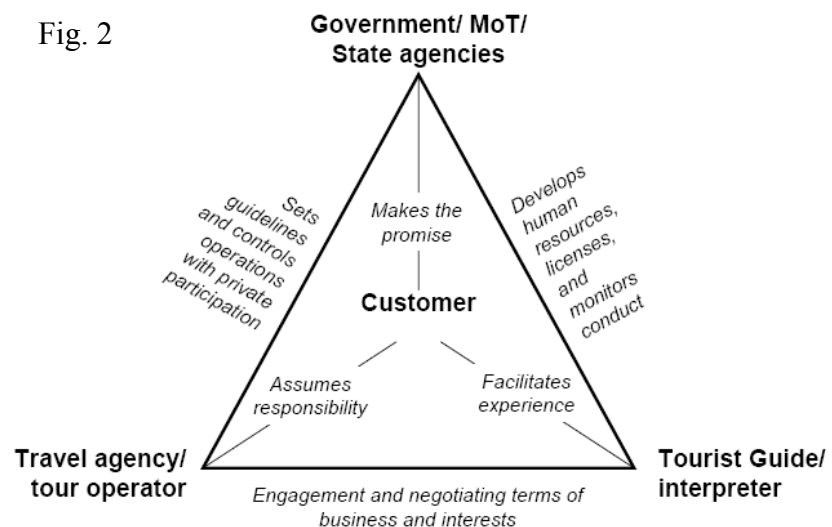


as the main facilitator starting with promoting tourism in the country and/ or region. Brands like Incredible India are created which sends out promises of quality experiences to tourists and potential tourists. Tourism supply chains being complicated and complex, governments often cannot assume responsibilities for entire tourist experience. For facilitating experience for tourists they often have to rely on travel agencies and tour operators who conceive tour products and assume responsibility for delivering them. On the other hand governments assess the demand for tourist guides and interpreters at destinations and various tourism products like safaris,

museums, eco-trails, parks and sanctuaries besides monuments, temples and heritage sites. Central, state and local government agencies trains and licenses tourist guides for the interpretation and escorting. These guides are also engaged by tour companies to deliver their promised itineraries.

Tour and travel companies are key players in the supply chain. The tourism experience promised by national and state governments is organised and responsibility to deliver it is assumed by these travel agents and tour operators in case of group packages and some times in case of FITs also. They mobilise resources which includes engaging tour guides,

Fig. 2



interpreters and escorts to support tourists along the itinerary depending upon the requirements of the tourists- language, subject expertise or any other. Access and accommodation logistics are also taken care of by these operators. It is these players who come in first contact of the customers and effect sales of tourism products as tour packages.

The third important player in this setup is the tourist guides/ interpreters who are the subject of this study as well. Guides in India operate generally as independents. They are trained and are given license by governments and/or their agencies. They are engaged by tour companies and government tourist departments for various interpretation assignments. They can also access them randomly or through Tourist Offices. They are directed and controlled by government regulations on one hand while on other they must address business aspirations of travel and tour companies who are the most important gateways for these guides. Guides are the one who deliver the service by creating an experience as they accompany tourists. Professional interpretation and ethics are rendered vulnerable given the network partners' business interests, business relationships, and also financial returns which to a large extent depend upon the previous two variables. Given the conflicting business interests and government expectations guides often find it difficult to address customer satisfaction in an ethical manner. This inherent conflict faced by tour guides that adversely affect their performance. Theoretically, all three players must work together in tandem to create a superior tourist experience.

### **Work scenario for tour guides in India**

In India there is a three-tier system for guides. At the local level municipal bodies license guides for a particular site/ city. State tourism departments or their tourism development boards license state level guides. These guides can operate with the precincts of a given state (province). At the apex level are the Regional Level Guides who are licensed by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. These guides can operate on inter-state circuits but are restricted to their regions- the entire country being divided into five regions- north, south, east, west and north-east. Ministry is also contemplating having national level guides- but not as of now.

There could be fulltime or part time guides. Select scholars, linguist and proven experts from the fields of Indian history, architecture, and culture can become part time guides. Since there is a shortage of guides speaking languages like Chinese, Russian, Korean, Thai, Arabic, Hungarian, Polish, Hebrew, etc., linguists with specialised training or expertise in these languages can become part time guides and are allowed to hold regular employment in any other field other than in shopping establishments. Both guides and the operators do not prefer a full time employment. For the operators they might not have enough work for a particular type (language) of guide and similarly a guide would like to make optimum use of his capacity by taking assignments from different companies. Whatever may be the code of conduct and restrictions, most guides enjoy and earn when they accompany groups.

To become a regional level guide a person must be a graduate, be at least 20 years of age, fluent in English and preference is given to candidates who know a foreign language other than English. Candidates must be a bonafide residents of the region in which they plan to guide tours. Guides must get training and must pass the exam before they can be licensed to operate in a particular region. As of now, this training is a 16 week programme with 6 weeks of contact classes and 10 weeks of field work. Periodically they must also participate in refresher courses. On successful completion of the course candidates are issued licenses by Regional Indiatourism Offices.

The fees that guides can charge is determined from time to time by Tourist Guide Federation of India (TGFI), in consultation with IATO (Indian Association of Tour Operators)/TAAI (Travel Agents Association of India) representatives.

There is a strict guideline forbidding tour guides to indulge in canvass business of any kind on behalf of the business houses, travel agents, hoteliers, paying-guest houses, shop-keepers, transport operators, etc. nor he/ she would accept commission from them. Guides are also not allowed to enter into any business arrangements with any of the establishments either by way of partnership or on commission basis (this, however may not be the practice).

Guides are obliged not to refuse any assignments given to them by the tourist offices of the central/ state governments or other agencies such as travel agents/ tour operators/ hoteliers, etc.

### **Methodology**

Organised tour guiding in India has been there for quite some time now. There are professional associations of guides at local, regional and national levels. Ministries of Tourism- state and central governments have introduced institutional mechanism for guide training and licensing. However, in India, as also elsewhere there are hardly any studies that have tried to explore the nature and extent of difficulties faced by tour guides on the job. Tour guide associations having been raising their voice for the cause of guides, but it has

been without substantive empirical data to sustain their arguments. The main purpose of this research is to identify the issues and problems faced by the tour guides.

As there were no substantive previous researches on the subject it was decided to start from scratch by having a panel of experts identifying the issues as first step. The panel included senior guides, faculties and researchers at Indian Institute of Tourism and Travel Management, Gwalior, representatives of tours operators and local civic authorities. The purpose of the panel was to develop a potential list of issues. Subsequently opinions on these issues were solicited from respondents using a structured protocol.

Panel felt it was important to have an accepted definition of the job of a tour guide. As a starting point the job description of tour leaders as in Dictionary of Occupational Titles was accepted. It describes the job of a tour leaders as one who “arranges transportation, and other accommodations for groups of tourist, following planned itinerary, and escorts groups during entire trip, within single area or at specified stopping points of the tour; makes reservations on ships, trains, and other modes of transportation, and arranges for other accommodations, baggage handling, dining and lodging facilities, and recreational activities, using communication media, such as cable, telegraph, or telephone. Accompanies tour groups and describes points of interest. May assist tourists to plan itinerary, obtain travel certificates, such as visas, passports, and health certificates, and convert currency to travellers’ checks for foreign moneys. May be designated according to method of transportation used as Guide- Cruise; or locality of tour as Guide- Domestic Tour; Guide- Foreign Tour (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991, p.256). Given the nature of job, it was opined that the job of the tour guide is to return a satisfied tourist and in doing so they must interact and network with a number of authorities. Governments and NTOs are also responsible for creating a tourism business environment that facilitates (or does not) tour guides in creating better tourism experience for their customers. A tour guide typically interacts with local civil authorities including local tourism organisations, police, administrators of monuments and other tourist sites, tour and travel agencies, their employees, colleagues, and customers among others. Each contact could be a potential source of discord. Panel also raised issues like protection, dealing with professional associations, competition, etc.

A protocol was developed to seek information on issues as below. Questions asked herein were at best ‘stimuli for thought’ for the respondents. It was intended to generate a free list of challenges faced by tour guides.

- a. Problem caused because of government policies
- b. Problems due to local authorities
- c. Problems because of employers like tour operators and travel agents
- d. Problems in handling customers- foreign and domestic
- e. Others like competition, etc.

The second step was an exploratory survey of opinion of participants of recently concluded (August 2007 to January 2008) Regional level Guide Training Programme for northern region. 327 guides of Northern India were approached using a structured interview protocol to elicit their opinion about working conditions, challenges and threats faced by tourist guides. It may be noted here that this programme was being organised after a long time and most of the participants of these programmes had significant experience in the trade. As mentioned earlier there was no similar research for guides in Indian settings. It was therefore decided to explore the issue and gather some data. Free listing technique was deployed to generate responses on issues which were identified during the panel discussion.

A set of open ended questions was used to guide the respondents. In most cases a respondent was as to list two or three responses. In some cases it was open to the respondent to give their opinions. These responses helped in generating the lists.

269 people responded to various issues on the protocol. 213 of the respondents (79.18 %) were having experience in industry of more than five years. Lists were developed and logic of analytical replication was used to identify issues and develop explanations. Of the 269 respondents 235 operated on Rajasthan- Agra-Delhi circuits. This included only 9 female respondents.

### **Findings and discussion**

The responses of trainees at the Regional level Guide Training Programme were more holistic than expected. They included a lot of ideas and pointed issues those may not directly affect them but may hinder a superior tourist experience and which they regarded as a problem for their profession. The responses suggested five broad problems areas- general framework and tour guiding environment; local authorities including local tourism authorities and local civil administration; employment relationship/ engagement

with tour operators and travel companies; handling customers- both foreign and domestic; working conditions. Some issues can be categorised in more than one problem areas.

### **Tour guiding environment**

This category addresses the challenges in general environment of the tour guiding business. Responses were further categorised into problems related to management of monuments (MgM); facilitating superior tourist experience (TEx); guide training and capacity building (Cap); Profession (Pro); and tourism industry and infrastructure in general (TIn). It was interesting to note that tour guide trainees were particularly conscious to the general business environment and could establish a correlation between challenges in external environment and how they affect their work. Mention of some of these challenges found place in the responses and so a separate category is created which was not originally thought about.

**Management of monuments:** First of the complaints was against the upkeep and management of monuments. Poor state of affairs at the monuments leads to a poor tourist experience where at the end of the day is difficult to segregate the reason. A perturbed tourist often reacts vitiating the interaction between them and guides. Problems at monuments includes-

- Lack of cleanliness and facilities like clean toilets, sufficient parking spaces, etc.
- Insufficient security at Hindu and Muslim shrines.
- Improper information about timings and at times monuments are not available for longer duration during the day.
- Every monument has separate tickets which results in lots of haggling and wasting of time. It would be better if season ticket or circuit tickets can be issued. Question of sharing of revenues can be separately dealt with.
- More of the separate procedures of entry and visit at every destination (read monument) increase chances for corruption.
- Private monuments do not offer level playing grounds. Management of these must be fair and more transparent.
- Tour guides do not have a rapport with administrations of monuments and the later offer hardly any support. The two must be more engaged.

**Facilitating tourist experience:** Another area of concern is the inadequate facilities to support tourists' experience. Expectant tourists now demand customized and personalized service, and attention. Tourism is no more a mass tourism. Superior customized experience with more choices, more flexibility and more creativity is the order of the day. Customer is expecting for more alternatives in terms of attraction, amusement, amenities and access, and their combinations. Visitor experience is realized through many tourism enterprises which quietly and un-noted provide services and experiences for visitors to a destination (Prakash, 2008). Professionally networked tourism providers supported by a superior infrastructure create good experience for visitors.

- There are few good quality hygienic restaurants offering a variety of (international) cuisine and good quality toilets near the monuments and around destinations. Private players can be motivated to set up these units where they are not enough in numbers.
- Most respondents were dissatisfied with the quality of infrastructure, particularly roads and public transport facilities. Good quality coaches are not available they believe.
- Some respondents even complained of restrictions placed on entry of foreign tourist at certain monuments. This is a sensitive issue in India. It must be discussed/ debated and consensus has to be developed.
- Women tourists are apprehensive of their safety.
- There are fewer facilities for physically challenged tourist. Our tourism system is not user friendly for such visitors.
- Flight schedules are a big problem during winters. Airports are dirty and are not of international standards. However there is a lot of aviation infrastructure development going on in India.
- Further, tourists often face a lot of problems at customs and have to waste time for custom clearance. Custom officials deployed are not very polite and courteous. Ministry of Tourism has an ambitious scheme for capacity building for service providers that include those deployed at Customs.

**Capacity building:** One of the important concerns was the inappropriate and insufficient infrastructure for training and continuous learning for tour guides. Guides realise the importance of professional attitude and training for superior tourist experience. They understand that customer satisfaction is important for tour operators as well. Licensing has become such an issue that tends to vitiate the atmosphere. Learning and capacity building has been relegated to last.

- There are insufficient numbers and varieties of training courses/ seminars/ conferences for the guides. They want to learn more.
- Respondents were not satisfied with the exiting mechanism-
  - Training timings often clashes with peak tourism season
  - Duration of the training programme are too long
  - Content often not relevant and value adding for tour guides
  - Fewer options in terms of locations and timings of the course (so also examinations for entrance to the training programmes)
  - There is no provision of internship/ on-the-job training for trainees without earlier work experience.
- There is no identified system/ content provider that offer authentic information on destinations and monuments.
- There are inadequate facilities for learning foreign languages.
- Paucity of resource centres (libraries etc.) offering information on travel, tourism, hospitality and related industry

**Tourism Industry:** Respondents were weary of the larger tourism policy shaping the industry and in turn affecting them. They felt that-

- There is insufficient budgetary allocation for tourism. Tourism in India has witnessed decent growth during last few years. This is good for guides in particular. Respondents wanted more aggression in tourism policy.
- There is no separate law governing tourism industry.
- Tourism should be priority for government. It is already a priority for Government of India. In fact a lot of state governments are taking tourism on priority. Rajasthan, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh are among a few states pursuing tourism aggressively. There has been new found interest in tourism in North-eastern states.
- There are insufficient numbers of started hotels.
- Tax regime is not very tourism friendly.

### Working conditions

A second important category of challenges constitutes of the working conditions of guides. The panel of expert on the basis of responses decided to sort the problems within this broad category into demand and fair competition (DfC); status of guides (Stt); safety and security of guides (SnS); facilities to guides (Fac); and, general working conditions (GWk).

**Demand and fair competition:** It was interesting to see that the respondents understood the demand and supply gap in the industry. They wanted that there should be more of trained professional guides least this should be filled by lesser trained individuals or touts who damage the cause in the longer run. Some of the important responses in this sub-category include:

- Recruit, train and license more tour guides. Respondents also mentioned specific destinations where more tour guides are required.
- Respondents were not happy about many tour operators using unlicensed guides to cut costs.
- There should be level playing ground and that there should be a mechanism where customers get an opportunity to directly contact the guide. Many of the respondents want a government's role in creating this kind of access. Government or association can create a portal where FITs can independently search for and approach tour guides as is done by Singapore Tourism Board (See Chowdhary and Prakash, 2008).
- There is lot of unfair competitions from touts ('lapkas') and unlicensed guides who would often cut price and also damage the brand by their poor quality of services.

**Status of tour guides:** Many of the respondents were not happy with the respect that tour guides get in the society and in trade. This is often reflected in the treatment they receive at tourist sites, government offices and at the hands of tour operators and travel agencies.

- They take pride in being called ‘cultural ambassadors’. People do call them ‘cultural ambassadors’ but they do not get the kind of respect they expect.
- Government and its agencies and media do not promote awareness about job and dignity of guides.
- There is no tourism act and no policy to establish the importance of tour guides and ensure dignity of labour
- Local civil authorities and administrators at monuments treat them shabbily.

**Safety, security and well being of guides:** Tour guides in India are a vulnerable lot. There is hardly any statutory provision that ensures equitable and just working conditions for tour guides across the country. There were a lot of concerns in this category:

- There is no job security. Guides are loosely attached to tour operators and travel agencies on an assignment basis. Further there is a lot of seasonality of demand in this trade and guides are at times out of job for almost 4 to 8 months in different cases. There is always a fear of poor tourist season. However this has not happened for last few seasons and the mood is upbeat looking to the upcoming commonwealth games in 2010.
- Another important concern was low remuneration. Though guide fees are determined by their association in consultation with tour operators’ and travel agents’ association, yet at times there are reports of guides being not fairly remunerated.
- By the very nature of their job of travelling with tourists, at times on long itineraries, makes them vulnerable. Being loosely associated with travel and tour companies, there is no protection in terms of life and medical insurance and/or provident funds. Government and trade associations must look into this matter and devise some scheme for group insurance of tour guides.
- Guides are also vulnerable to criminals and anti-social elements as they accompany foreign tourist in particular.
- There are no pension schemes for guides who have served the industry for long.
- In case of some untoward incident, the local police and authorities often mal-treat them.
- There is no grievance-redress mechanism for the tour guides.

Some respondents have also demanded for ‘arms licence’ and ‘transfer of license to dependent in case of death of a guide’. These demands reflect the sense on insecurity with which tour guides often live whole of their lives.

**Facilities:** Support and good working conditions would only help tour guides serve tourists better. Some of the concerns in this category include:

At times, entry at monuments run by trusts and private operators is difficult.

- Guides do not get subsidised accommodation at destinations. This often leads to guides accepting hospitality of agencies (hoteliers, restaurants, sales outlets, etc.) with vested interests
- There is restricted entry for guides in certain forests. Certain arrangements like special training and certifications can be worked out to facilitate special permits to some selected guides.
- The present environment is restrictive for female tour guides. Special efforts should be made to make this profession inclusive.

**General working conditions:** This section presents problems faced by tour guides primarily because of work place practices. These practices may have different reasons and origins. Problems arise because-

- No powers and rights of tour guides are spelled.
- They were not fairly represented at forums those designs policies for them. They believe they should have more representation.
- There are threats from local shopkeepers, local police, hawkers, beggars, local licensed guides, touts, monument staffs, etc.
- There are disturbance due to VIP visits to monuments which often disrupts’ their (tour guide’s) itinerary.
- They get last minutes information about cancellations by tour and travel companies and FIT’s.

### **Relationship with local authorities**

In the immediate work environment of the tour guides there are three important players who affect their working to a certain extent. These are local tourism authorities, local civil administration and the private tourist property owners.

**Local tourism authorities:** These are of immediate concern to tour guides. They are expected to coordinate tourism at local levels with tour guides being one of the important players in this scenario. However there has been a love-hate relationship between the two. On one hand some of the tours guides see them as coordinators and regulator whom they would like to play a role in their relationship with tour operators and travel agencies as well. Still much is needed to be done. Most of the issues can be divided into three- approach and attitude of authorities (ApA), corruption (Crp), and their work practices (WPr):

- Local tourism authorities were expected to play a role of facilitators of tourism. They are expected to be voice of tourism industry, guides and other players in the tourism business. But this is not the case. Instead of being facilitators local tourism authorities are playing a role of controllers and police. They approach guides with a negative disposition and the relationship is not smooth as it should be.
- These authorities are best placed to look into the day-today problems of tour guides. They must take up these problems.
- Local tourism authorities must coordinate between the tourism department, Archaeological Survey of India (who is responsible for properties of archaeological importance) and private property owners.
- Many respondents have little faith in authorities who they view as resorting to corrupt practices- restricting some and favouring others.
- They should initiate action against bogus travel companies and fake guides.
- Local tourism authorities must introduce rotation system for engaging guides.

**Local civil authorities:** Local civil authorities have an important role to play in supporting tourism activities at a destination. Police has an important role to play. For quite some time there has been a talk of having a separate tourist police. Respondents believe that:

- Police is not doing enough to control hawkers and beggars to continue to cajole and irritate tourists.
- CISF personnel are a threat themselves. There has to be dialogue between CISF and tourism providers.
- In case of a doubt, police often harasses tourist guides. They opine that they deserve a better treatment.

**Private property owners:** Relationship of tour guides with these stake holders of tourism has not been without hiccups either. Respondents believe that there should be level playing. Private property owners' practices have to be transparent. Also the fee payments at private properties are not guide friendly.

#### **Relationship with tour operators and travel agents**

Tour operators and travel agents are of direct relevance to guides. Guides get their customers through tour operators and travel agents. In fact in most of the cases guides operate on their (tour operator's) behalf and are engaged to entertain their customers. An overwhelming 198 respondents (73.61%) said that their employers do not take any undue advantage of them. Respondents believed that operators make a fair assessment of their capabilities and they are awarded assignments accordingly. However there were issues to be addressed. These related to payments (Pay), management (Mgt), and ethics (Eth).

- Some respondents feel that payments are not transparent and guides are harassed by tour operators. Payments are not as prescribed by government offices.
- There are not any written agreements or contracts and transactions are far from clear.
- Payments are often delayed
- Often tour operators use unlicensed guides to cut costs.
- Some respondents have reported corruption. Managers at tour operators and travel agencies demand kickbacks for awarding assignments. Often assignments are awarded on 'personnel equation' and not on expertise or following some policy.
- Tour operators and travel agents tend to over promise so as to sell travel. However when tourists arrive with high expectations, they are disappointed.
- Often guides are pressurised to take up assignments for which they are not prepared or are experts. Operator would make a false promise to tourists and would send guides on circuits they are not familiar with.



- At times guides get information on last minute which does not allow them opportunity to organise themselves for the assignment.
- While government expects guides to be free lancers, companies expect them to work for only one company without a regular appointment, no security of minimum job or any insurance cover.
- At times operators pressurise to patronise particular outlets and persuade tourist to visit them. If for some reasons accompanying tourists do not visit the suggested outlets, their (guide's) jobs are at stake.

### **Handling of customers**

Interaction with tourist is an important part of tour guides job. This interaction by itself offers a number of challenges. Challenges vary with the type of tourists- domestic (Dom) or foreign (Fgn). However, tour guides felt that it was the domestic tourist who is more difficult to handle.

**Domestic tourists:** There are many plausible reasons for discord during interactions with domestic tourists.

- Punctuality is a big problem. They are often late, do not follow schedule and cooperate less. They also take more time than is advised.
- Many domestic tourists have little faith in guides and may decide not to hire their services.
- In case they hire, they often bargain a lot on fees. Free independent domestic tourists tend to bargain and often end up patronising unlicensed guides who might be available for a lower fee.
- They pay less attention to what guides tell or advice. They have prejudiced opinions and are poor listeners.
- Their sense of responsible tourism is often poor. They have little regard for heritage artefacts. They also tend to jump rules and regulations.
- They have their own bias due to religious and traditional backgrounds.

**Foreign tourist:** Foreign tourist is more aware and well read. They are better prepared. Still there are a few areas of concern. Respondents felt that:

- Guides have to spend a lot of time protecting their foreign guests from touts, hawkers, beggars, etc. Local authorities must do more than what they have been doing. Large numbers of respondents have reported this problem.
- Foreign tourists often face a cultural shock specially when they have to interact with shoppers, administration and frontline staffs at museums, railway and bus stations, and priest and service men at religious places. Their way of dressing, especially the female tourists, attracts some attention and they have to be advised.
- Foreign tourist also report problems with food. As far as drinking water is concerned they are almost always advised to use bottled water. Tourist report health problems. At time climate does not suit them.
- Tourists also report dissatisfaction with the accommodation arranged and the room comfort.
- There are not enough trained guides on different tourist circuits to handle tourists from different linguistic backgrounds.

Many of the abovementioned problems are beyond the control of guides. Still they have to face dissatisfied tourist because of any of these problems and have to make alternate arrangements almost immediately. Respondents believe that many of these issues can be resolved by proper dialogue between the various providers involved in the process. They also believed that many other problems can be anticipated and resulting crisis can be avoided.

### **Summing up**

Importance of tour guides cannot be underestimated for quality tourism experience for tourists visiting a destination. As destinations compete it becomes increasingly important for tourism administrators and organisations to facilitate guides in carrying out their roles. This can be achieved by creating a work environment that helps guides perform. Superior quality of work life, pride in work, safe and secure jobs, good relationships with stake holders, and enjoying their jobs and professionalism are some of the issues those must be facilitated. Understandably, there has to be more communication amongst the stakeholders and greater appreciation of a guide's job.

As for the government, it is expected that they have a re-look at guides job and working conditions as they design tourism and tourist friendly policies to attract more tourists in India. Tourists will often see and feel what guides would paint for them. From a narrow perspective of ‘how to control and regulate guides’ they should have a bigger question before them, ‘how to help guides help visitors?’ This will require them to address issues like creation of ownership of guides in visitation process, increasing their stake and listening to their voice. Perhaps the pyramid has to be turned upside down. Tourists’ experience has to be the most important thing and also the role of guide therein. All others in the supply chain should act as the back office support to the guide who is like an internal customer. Guides have been expecting a few facilities/concessions:

- There has to be a tourism act that regulates the industry, defines relationship between stake holders and delineates rights and duties of all involved.
- Tourist police to protect visitors and guides. Tourist police may also ensure that guides perform professionally and that touts and unauthorised guides are kept out of the system. At times these touts can physically harm the guides. So also cartel of hawkers, local shoppers, and even beggars are a menace.
- Some provision for group insurance for guides. It must be insisted that tour and travel companies may buy guides travel insurance when they travel with groups especially out of station. There can be some pension schemes for aging guides.
- There should be some security of job in terms of contracts. This is a difficult issue and must be negotiated with tour and travel companies, who in that case might have some expectations in return.
- There has to be a mechanism for redressing tour guides’ problems and grievances. There can be help lines monitored by associations or LTO/RTOs.
- There should also be a mechanism for listening to their suggestions. Tour guides are best placed to understand the expectations, requirements and problems of visitors. This important knowledge is lost if not properly managed.
- Some respondents have suggested classification/ categorization of tour guides based on their language proficiency or subject expertise as in done by Singapore Tourism Board (See Chowdhary and Prakash, 2008).
- Prompt issue of licenses and/or identity cards. There is already a mechanism for the same.
- Some concession in rail and road transport.
- Frequent review of fees and provision for cancellation charges if the tour gets cancelled.

Respondents have also suggested interventions which require further debate and deliberation like fixed salary and regular jobs, gun license for protection of self, reducing age for guides (while governments encourage senior and serious guides also), written contracts between travel companies and guides, etc.

It is time that guides get duly represented in forums and their voice considered important and is heard. Professional associations of guides must be more decentralised with the marginal guide also being heard. Many respondents believe that so far associations have provided only moral support to them. Associations must be more proactive. On one hand they have to be given due recognition by central and state governments and recognised as instruments for collective bargaining for tour guides. On the other hand they must play more enlightened role in helping in competence building. There has to be more coordination among the various tour guide associations in the country, and government must facilitate this. Within the associations there has to be a strong voice for young and new guides. Their professional expectations are often different from seasoned guides. Expectations from professional associations of tour guides include-

- Creation of more tour guiding jobs. This is different from a myopic view that more jobs would create lesser opportunities for existing guides. Better guiding and superior visitor experience would create a better brand which in turn will result in more in bound tourists and more professionally trained guides would be required to entertain them.
- Negotiate better training for guides. Must give desired inputs and ensure quality training. Training is investment of time and so money by individual learners with an expectation of getting benefited. Training or part of it cannot be a mere ritual or less value adding activity. Instead of administration forcing guide training, it should be associations who should demand training and encourage use of only trained and licensed guides by tour operators and travel agencies.
- Support continuous learning and improvement of guiding quality by creating shared resources like libraries and portals for dissemination of information. They must also engage market researchers and

- educate members about change in trends, new markets, and researched information about visitor segments. Portal can also be used to promote guides, their expertise and competencies.
- Some respondents also believe that they learn a lot from interaction with senior guides and association can be an opportunity for this learning by socialising. Socialising also facilitate relationship building both among the guides and by providing leads for relationships outside (with other stakeholders). Regular meets may be encouraged.
  - Associations must also ensure that payments are transparent, and that guides are not harassed. In fact this is the basic idea for having an association. But respondents feel that associations by themselves are not transparent and some individual are more equal. They must meet more frequently, listen to member grievances; ensure that rotation policy is enforced; there is near equal distribution of work; payments are as prescribed by LTO/RTO; there are good relationship with employers.
  - Associations may also consider creating help lines so as to allow greater cross-section for support, even when a guide is away from station with groups. This will extend a sense of well being and moral support to a guide on tour. They can approach help line when in crisis and can be connected to right person/ resource.
  - It will be better if guide associations play a more visible role in ensuring ethical guiding and responsible tourism. Else other agencies and stake holders would do it. Guides associations should negotiate protection, better working conditions, and facilities for guides; and at the same time also see that members are professional in their attitudes and approach. They may consider a uniform or dress code for guides and ensure that guides display their licenses. This will also facilitate visible differentiation between licensed and unlicensed guides.
  - Associations must suggest ways and act so has to give this profession due social recognition.

Another important dimension of guides' work life is competition they face. Competition is more on select circuits. Respondents were from northern region and understandable more competition was reported on golden triangle (Delhi-Jaipur- Agra). There is a cut throat competition and new service providers join the ranks every now and then. Competition at times turns unethical and unprofessional. Tour and travel companies specially the smaller ones bargain on fees, not willing to pay the prescribed fees. Compromises have to be made and this adversely affects the quality. There is also a chance for unauthorised tour guides to get an entry by cutting on fees. They hardly bother about their fees because they intend to earn from commissions offered by shoppers, restaurants, hoteliers and like. Incidents of guides having to pay bribes to travel agency managers, influential guides and LTOs to get the assignments have also been reported. Licenses are not issued on times and there are vested interests that manage these delays. This results in chaos and confuses the customer. Young professionals in the trade have reported harassment at the hands of senior guides, lobbies and cartels, restricted access to market information and work opportunities. Summarizing there is a huge demand for professional guides yet the market is largely unorganised and is imperfect giving an impression that supply of guides is more than demand. Supply is swelled by unauthorised, less educated, untrained and unlicensed individuals who are subtly promoted by vested interests. Many guides have become more of sales agents for merchandisers. There is a parallel system of commissions and networks. Guides usually get 'chabisi' which means '26' or 26 percent kickback on sales. This has now increased to 30%. Interpretation takes a back seat.

There is need to organise the market. More destination and products along the circuits need to be developed. Innovative products for visitors with non-routine product expectations must come up. Specialist guides must be trained for these products and information about these guides and access to these guides must be more readily available.

However, most respondents feel that they are prepared to face competition in terms of quality work. They understand the principle of 'survival of the fittest' and are ready to improve their knowledge inputs and service skills. Respondents overwhelmingly asked for quantitative and qualitative improvements in guide education and training programmes. They look forward to flexible learning.

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## APPENDIX A:

## Terms and conditions that regulate conduct and performance of approved tour guides in India

1. The approved guide will wear on his person the laminated card issued to him/her by the Ministry of Tourism and also wear the name tag while accompanying tourists.
2. The approved guide will not lend his/her identity card or any other document which may have been issued to him/her by the Ministry of Tourism to any other person(s). Any violation of his rule will make him/her liable to disciplinary action and withdrawal of the license granted to him/her.
3. In case of loss or damage to the identity card the guide will immediately inform the tourist office concerned and the nearest police station. He will apply afresh for the duplicate card on the basis of first information report and statement that the card has been lost. The guide will be responsible for the safe custody of the identity card/license.  
A nominal fee to be determined by the concerned Regional Director in consultation with the Department of Tourism from time to time will be charged for issue of duplicate ID Cards.
4. The guide will not solicit tips or testimonials from tourist. In cases where the foreign travel agent of his own accord includes gratuity for the guide in payments, the guide will be entitled for gratuity in addition to his normal fees. The guide will not solicit any kind of testimonials or valuable material or other wise such as free passage overseas, scholarships or subscriptions to any religious classes, etc. for himself/herself or any other person in his/her family dependent on him/her.
5. The approved guide will dress in a presentable manner to uphold the dignity and honour of the profession to which he/she belongs and of the country.
6. The guides will charge guide fees to be fixed from time to time by Tourist Guides Federation of India in consultation with Indian Association of Tour Operators.
7. The guide will not canvass business of any kind on behalf of the business houses, travel agents, hoteliers, paying-guest houses, shop-keepers, transport operators, etc. nor he would accept commission from them or indulge in any other unethical practices.
8. The guide will not enter into any other business arrangements with any of the establishments either by way of partnership or on commission basis.
9. Guides can take up employment with Tour operators/ Travel Agents/ Hotels/ Airlines/ Service providers except shopping establishments. Guides found to be canvassing for shopping establishments like shops selling handicrafts etc., the guide license stands cancelled with immediate effect.
10. The guide will take tourists only for sightseeing to monuments and public buildings, which are part of the sightseeing tour included in the itinerary of the tourists. Under no circumstances should any guide accompany the tourists to shops. In case any guide is found to have contravened this provision his license will be cancelled.
11. The guide will not refuse without valid reasons any assignments given to him/her by the tourist Offices of the Central/State Governments or other agencies such as travel agents /tour operators/ hoteliers, etc.
12. The guide will not act as driver for the vehicle while acting as guide.
13. The guide will maintain good conduct and courteous behavior towards tourists or other officials with whom he/she comes into contact during the course of his/her assignment.
14. The guide will be liable to following penalties in case of late arrival:-
  - (a) First late arrival warning in writing.
  - (b) Second late arrival deduction of 25% of fees.
  - (c) Third late arrival disqualification for one month when the second and third late arrivals are within a period of six months.
  - (d) Total absence-disqualification for a period of three months.Note: The above penalty will apply to a guide who after having accepted an assignment does not report for duty at all except in such cases where late arrival/absence was due to circumstances beyond his/her control. In such cases if the Regional Director/Director/Manager concerned is not satisfied with the explanation given by the guide, he is fully empowered to withdraw the identity card and name tag issued to the guide. Complaints regarding habitual late arrivals for assignments, etc. will be viewed seriously and can lead to cancellation/withdrawal of approval.
15. The guide will accept all assignments including those for FIT's, groups, coach tours, excursion, etc. These will be accepted as per the rules and on prescribed proforma.
16. The guide will submit a quarterly statement indicating the number of assignments handled including

- handling of VIPs, groups, FITs in the prescribed proforma.
17. An approved guide will be compulsorily required to attend any short-term training, refresher courses that may be directed by the Indiatourism Office concerned Director, IITTM from time to time.
  18. The guide will be required to submit a medical certificate of fitness on entry into the profession and thereafter whenever required by the Indiatourism Office.
  19. Absence of more than one month from the guiding profession must be reported to the Tourist Office in writing.
  20. The guide will report to the Indiatourism Office in the event of their trips abroad for a period exceeding three weeks.
  21. The identity card of a guide who is arrested by the police for offence of misconduct involving moral turpitude shall be withdrawn during the pendency of the case against him/her. In the event of his conviction by a court of law the identity card will be forfeited forthwith.
  22. The guide will be responsible for warning foreign tourists against taking photographs of places which are prohibited by law or which may reflect adversely the country's image.
  23. On receipt of any complaint against an approved Regional Level Guide, the concerned Indiatourism Office will issue a show cause notice to the said guide giving him/her an opportunity to submit a representation in defense of the allegations leveled against him/her within a period of 30 days from the date of receipt of show cause notice. In such cases, the show cause notice by the concerned Director/Manager of Indiatourism Office would be issued with the prior approval of the concerned Regional Director.  
The final decision on such representation would be made with the prior approval of Additional Director General, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India within 45 days from the date of receipt of the reply to the show cause notice. In case the guide is found guilty, his/her Identity Card shall be suspended for a period of six months. In case any guide is held guilty for the 2nd time his/her identity card shall be suspended for one year and in case of 3rd default, the identity card shall be withdrawn permanently. However, final decision on all such occasions would rest with the Additional Director, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.
  24. The approved guide will accept assignments only to the region for which a guiding license has been granted by the Indiatourism Office. He will be entitled to accompany tour groups on all-India basis as on escort on payment of fees by travel agents to be mutually negotiated. On escort duty, a guide will only conduct sight-seeing of monuments under the area of jurisdiction which will be spelled out in his guiding license. At all other places the services of approved guides of that relevant region/area shall have to be engaged.
  25. If a guide remains absent from active guiding service for a period exceeding two years due to reasons of health, absence from country, etc. he/she shall be deemed to have left the profession and in that event the identity card/license issued to the guide shall stand cancelled. However, in case a guide wants to rejoin the profession after an absence of up to 2 years he/she will have to undergo a refresher course to be conducted by IITTM or its chapters in coordination with the Ministry of Tourism will determine the fee for the refresher course.
  26. The guide will abide by the existing rules and any other rules and conditions that may be framed from time to time by the Ministry of Tourism and the Archaeological survey of India, failing which the identity card issued to his/her shall be withdrawn.

“I hereby solemnly agree to abide by and accept all the above ‘Terms & Conditions’. I have also read and understood the ‘Code of Ethics for Tourist Guides’ annexed hereto and I undertake to uphold them faithfully in the discharge and conduct of my profession.”

Place :

Date :

Signature :

## APPENDIX B:

## Code of ethics for tour guides in India

The Tourist Guide shall always be aware of projecting a good and positive image of India adhering to the ancient Indian concept of “Atithi Devo Bhava”.

The Tourist Guide shall consider himself a friend of the tourists, be courteous and helpful and never betray the trust placed in them by the tourists and carry out his ethical and moral responsibilities with dignity.

The Tourist Guide will, therefore, bear in mind that “word of mouth” publicity and comments have a tremendous impact on the creation of an image for the country. This is several times more valuable than the most expensive advertisement that can be put out.

The Tourist Guide will always be courteous, efficient, tactful, kind understanding and project the warm and hospitable nature of Indians.

The Tourist Guide will ensure that he will give correct and all possible information of the latest developments in the country and keep himself up to date. He will understand and convey the positive aspects of his culture and tradition, and be well versed with matters relating to local customs, habits and traditions to ensure that both the tourists and the local people respect each other.

The Tourist Guide will always be punctual, well groomed, presentably dressed, well mannered, sober and cultured. His dedication and conduct should ensure that the image of the profession or that of the country is never tarnished.

The Tourist Guide shall at all times be reliable with the entrusted duties and be of exemplary conduct, not only, in dealing with tourists but, with others such as Govt. Officers and members of the public.

The Tourist Guide shall refrain from unethical or discriminatory conduct and deal with proprietary and impeccable honesty. He will not refrain from entering into shady deals for monetary and other gains nor will he intentionally mislead the tourists.

The Tourist Guide shall refrain himself from all possible arguments and remember that the customer is always right.

The Tourist Guide shall uphold his/her status and reputation with a view to foment closer cooperation, understanding and collaboration with his/her counterparts through out India.

The Tourist Guide will respect and safeguard our heritage, monuments and ecology.