



DRAFT ASTRO TOURISM POLICY
FOR
ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

CONTENTS

A. Objective for Astro Tourism Policy for Andaman and Nicobar Islands	3
B. The need for an Astro Tourism policy for Andaman and Nicobar Islands	4
C. Provisions for Astro Tourism in Andaman and Nicobar Islands	6
1. Registration of Stargazers	6
2. Astro Spots	8
3. Star Gazing Guides	10
4. Permits	10
5. Documentation	10
6. Database	10
7. Safety	10
8. Conservation of environment	11
9. Astro Tourism Spots to be independent of land use	11
10. Events	11
11. Minimum Standards Checklist for Recommended Astro Spots	11
12. Maintenance of Spots	12
13. Astro Tourism ethics code:	13
14. Savings	13

A. OBJECTIVE FOR ASTRO TOURISM POLICY FOR ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

The objective of an Astro Tourism policy for Andaman and Nicobar Islands is to promote sustainable Astro Tourism activities that benefit both the stargazers and the local communities, while also preserving the natural environment of the islands. Specific goals and objectives include:

- i. Promoting Astro Tourism as an eco-friendly and sustainable activity that generates income and employment opportunities for local communities, especially those living in and around protected areas.
- ii. Establishing guidelines for Astro Tourism activities that ensure minimal disturbance to the environment.
- iii. Developing Astro Tourism infrastructure such as Astro Spots, observation towers and camp sites that are designed to enhance the Astro Tourism experience.
- iv. Developing educational programs that raise awareness about astro tourism and the role of astro tourism in promoting A & N Islands as a preferred astro tourism destination.
- v. Promoting of local Astro-Tourism Operators/ Star Party Organizers/ Dark Sky Tour Operators/ Stargazing Event Planners/ Astronomy Experience Providers/ Celestial Tour Leaders that adhere to the principles of sustainable tourism and conservation.
- vi. Encouraging research and collaboration among Astro tourists, local communities, and scientific institutions to enhance knowledge about various celestial bodies.
- vii. Incorporating Astro Tourism into the overall tourism strategy for the islands, to increase the economic benefits of tourism while minimizing its impact on the environment and cultural heritage of the islands.

B. THE NEED FOR AN ASTRO TOURISM POLICY FOR THE ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

There are several reasons why there is a need for an Astro Tourism policy in Andaman and Nicobar Islands:

1. Maximizing Economic Benefits

- **Tourism Diversification:** Developing Astro Tourism can diversify the local economy by attracting a niche segment of tourists, reducing the region's reliance on traditional forms of tourism.
- **Job Creation:** Astro Tourism can generate new employment opportunities in hospitality, guiding, education, and related services, benefiting the local population.
- **Boosting Local Businesses:** Increased tourism can provide a boost to local businesses, including hotels, restaurants, and transport services, stimulating economic growth.

2. Environmental Preservation

- **Light Pollution Management:** A policy can establish guidelines and regulations to control light pollution, preserving the natural dark skies which are essential for Astro Tourism.
- **Sustainable Tourism Practices:** Implementing eco-friendly practices ensures that the development of Astro Tourism does not negatively impact the islands' delicate ecosystems.

3. Infrastructure Development

- **Targeted Investments:** A policy can help identify and prioritize investments in infrastructure such as observatories, dark-sky spots/parks, and eco-friendly accommodations tailored to the needs of Astro tourists.
- **Accessibility Improvements:** Enhancing transport connectivity to and within the islands to make spots/ parks more accessible to both domestic and international tourists.

4. Collaboration and Partnerships

- **Scientific Collaborations:** Facilitating partnerships with reputed organizations, acclaimed astronomers, astronomy clubs, and educational institutions to enhance the quality of Astro Tourism offerings through expert guidance and events.
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Encouraging collaborations between the government and private sector to develop necessary infrastructure and services for Astro Tourism.

5. Promotion and Marketing

- **Awareness Campaigns:** Developing comprehensive marketing strategies to raise awareness about the Andaman and Nicobar Islands as a premier Astro Tourism destination, targeting specific segments of Astro enthusiasts globally.
- **Events and Festivals:** Organizing and promoting events like star parties, astronomy workshops, and celestial viewing nights to attract tourists and build the brand of Andaman & Nicobar Islands in the Astro Tourism community.

6. Educational and Cultural Integration

- **Educational Programs:** Incorporating educational programs and activities related to astronomy into the tourism offerings, making it an enriching experience for visitors, especially students and amateur astronomers.
- **Cultural Heritage:** Integrating local cultural and historical narratives with Astro Tourism, providing a holistic experience that showcases the unique heritage of the islands.

7. Policy Framework and Regulation

- **Regulatory Guidelines:** Establishing clear guidelines and regulations for the development and operation of Astro Tourism activities to ensure they are conducted sustainably and responsibly.
- **Safety and Standards:** Ensuring that all Astro Tourism activities adhere to safety standards and provide a high-quality experience for visitors.

C. PROVISIONS FOR ASTRO TOURISM IN ANDAMAN AND NICOBAR ISLANDS

1. Registration of Stargazers–

- 1.1** An online portal will collect information and a Registration number will be issued to each registered Astro-Tourism Operator/ Star Party Organizer/ Dark Sky Tour Operator/ Stargazing Event Planner/ Astronomy Experience Provider/ Celestial Tour Leader for a fixed fee of Rs.500/- paid to the Director (Tourism).

All the registered stargazers would be notified through their registered e-mail and by posting on the portal about:

- (i) Existing Astro spots
- (ii) Declaration of new Astro spots
- (iii) Astro tourism festivals
- (iv) Any new development in the Astro Tourism area
- (v) Any Astro trip organized by the department or any Astro-Tourism Operator/ Star Party Organizer/ Dark Sky Tour Operator/ Stargazing Event Planner/ Astronomy Experience Provider/ Celestial Tour Leader.
- (vi) An option would be given at the web portal for the registered stargazers to:
 - a) Give their feedback/suggestions.
 - b) Post pictures of the A & N Islands night sky.
- (vii) Each query, suggestion, and feedback of the registered stargazer will be responded to by the Director (Tourism).

- 1.2 Status of stargazers** – Any person will be able to be a Registered stargazer by registering for the following self-reported categories: -
- i.** Newbie Stargazer: Just starting off
 - ii.** Experienced Stargazer: Has been stargazing, does not require basic guidance or help.

- 1.3 All** Astro-Tourism Operators/ Star Party Organizers/ Dark Sky Tour Operators/ Stargazing Event Planners/ Astronomy Experience Providers/ Celestial Tour Leaders **engaging in Astro tour operations shall be required to be registered with the Directorate of Tourism.**

2. Astro Spots:

2.1 A committee headed by the Director (Tourism) having officers from Science & Technology, Forest Department and representatives of stargazer groups as members has been constituted for listing out existing Astro Spots as well as recommending new Astro Spots in A&N Islands. **(Annex A)**

A list of existing Astro Spots along with details of frequently sighted celestial bodies in the given Astro Spots, how to reach these Spots, basic amenities in and around the Spots, tourist attractions in and around the Spots, google map etc is given in **Annex B**.

2.2 Proposal of New Astro Spot – Any registered stargazer may propose an Astro Spot online to the Director (Tourism).

- i. Astro Tourism activities shall be permitted exclusively within the designated Spots located within the open areas and Eco-tourism Zones of the Protected Areas (PAs). These activities must adhere to the guidelines and regulations outlined in the respective Management Plans of Eco-Tourism Zones of Protected Areas (PAs). It is essential to ensure that Astro Tourism activities are in harmony with the conservation goals of the Protected areas.
- ii. The authority responsible for approving **new** Astro Tourism Spots within Protected Areas (PAs) shall be the Secretary (Tourism) in consultation with the Chief Wildlife Warden.

2.3 Registration of Astro Spot –

The Department will register existing and newly declared Astro Spots along with celestial bodies likely to be found, for the convenience of stargazers and Newbie stargazers. The classification of Astro Spots will be as follows: -

- i. As **open area Astro Spot** – Registered Astro Spots located outside the Protected Areas where any stargazer can visit with or without an Astro Stargazing Guide/ Astronomy Tour Guide/ Astro-Guide/ Cosmic Guide.
- ii. As **Protected Area Astro Spots** – Registered Astro Spots located within the Protected Areas where any stargazer can visit only with Stargazing Guide/ Astronomy Tour Guide/ Astro-Guide/ Cosmic Guide.

The list of registered Stargazing Guide/ Astronomy Tour Guide/ Astro-Guide/ Cosmic Guide guides will be shared with the Department of Environment and Forests by the Directorate of Tourism.

3. STARGAZING GUIDE/ ASTRONOMY TOUR GUIDE/ ASTRO-GUIDE/ COSMIC GUIDE :

3.1

- i. A guide is defined as a person who personally takes stargazers out on Spots to observe celestial bodies.
- ii. All Astro guides must be registered with the IP&T Department.
- iii. While there is no educational qualification for guides, all guides should be certified by passing the course conducted by the Science Centre, Science & Technology Department A & N Administration and any other agency recognized by GoI in this field.
- iv. The guide training and certification will be imparted by the concerned department/ agency.
- v. Guides will also be expected to sign the pledge for ethical stargazing.
- vi. Rates for astro trips/ tours along with guides will be widely displayed at the Astro spots, official website of Directorate of Tourism.
- vii. Guides will receive identity cards issued by the Directorate of IP&T, A&N Administration and will meet with the concerned department to give feedback or report any concerns including their safety etc.
- viii. Availability of Guides: The guides will have to be pre-booked and these guides will be required to be present at the designated Astro Spot at least 15 minutes before starting of the Spot/trip.

3.2 Criteria for Guides:

- (i) Guides will be registered after written and field examinations to be conducted quarterly by the department/ agency authorized by IP & T department through Science & Technology Department.
- (ii) The guides should be able to converse in Hindi and English and have sound knowledge of celestial bodies, environmental issues, identification of celestial bodies, etc.

3.3 Mandatory things to be available with guides:

- i. Electronic and printed pamphlets depicting the celestial bodies to be sighted at the Spot.
- ii. The guide shall also carry a soft copy of the Astro Tourism guidebook/ pamphlets and suitable lights.
- iii. Ethics & manual, Dos and Don'ts
- iv. Read out dos and don'ts every time before starting the activity.

3.4 Dos and Don'ts

DOs:

- i. Respect local environment: Ensure that astrotourism activities do not harm the natural environment and local ecosystems.
- ii. Follow dark-sky preservation guidelines: Implement measures to minimize light pollution and preserve the darkness of the night sky.
- iii. Ensure safety: Implement safety protocols and guidelines for visitors, staff, and equipment
- iv. Support local communities: Engage with local communities and ensure that astrotourism benefits them economically and culturally.
- v. Follow guidelines and rules provided by astro guides and local authorities.
- vi. Be mindful of your surroundings and avoid damaging equipment or property.
- vii. Ask questions and seek clarifications if you're unsure about something
- viii. Dress warmly to keep cozy during your stargazing
- ix. Be patient: Allow your eyes to adjust to the dark, and take time to appreciate the night sky.
- x. Learn about astronomy: Familiarize yourself with constellations, planets, and celestial events.

DON'Ts:

- i. Don't harm the environment: Avoid activities that can harm the natural environment, such as littering, pollution, or destruction of habitats.
- ii. Don't compromise safety: Never compromise safety protocols and guidelines, and ensure that visitors are aware of and follow them.
- iii. Don't neglect local regulations: Comply with local regulations and laws, and ensure that astrotourism activities are legally permitted.
- iv. Don't use white light or flash photography that can disrupt astronomical observations .Use red light flashlights or cover your white light with a red filter to preserve night vision.
- v. Don't make excessive noise that can disturb others or the wildlife.
- vi. Don't misrepresent astronomical information: Ensure that astronomical information provided is accurate and unbiased, and avoid misrepresenting facts for entertainment purposes.
- vii. Don't attempt to operate astronomical equipment without proper training
- viii. Don't touch telescopes or binoculars: Oils from your skin can damage the lenses, so handle with care.

- ix. Don't ignore visitor feedback: Encourage visitor feedback and use it to improve astrotourism experiences and services.
- x. Don't prioritize profit over sustainability: Prioritize sustainability and environmental responsibility over profit, and ensure that astrotourism activities are environmentally friendly.

In case any complaint is received against any guide, the Director (Tourism) will review and recommend for cancellation of registration of the guide and such cancellation will be published in the web portal.

4. Permits

- 4.1** No permit is required for engaging in Astro Tourism activities outside the Protected Area.
- 4.2** Permits for engaging in Astro Tourism within the **existing** Spots located in Protected Areas shall be issued by the Divisional Forest Officer (DFOs) who oversee the specific areas under their jurisdiction. This process ensures proper oversight and management of Astro Tourism activities in these ecologically sensitive regions.

5. Documentation – All registered Astro-Tourism Operators/ Star Party Organizers/ Dark Sky Tour Operators/ Astronomy Experience Providers/ Celestial Tour Leaders will be encouraged to upload the sightings onto online portal of Directorate of Tourism.

6. Database – A database of Astro Tourism Spots shall be accessible to public with all information such as the celestial bodies likely to be seen with links to data base on the of online portal of Directorate of Tourism. A database of guides shall be maintained for the purpose of promotion of Astro Tourism.

7. Safety

7.1. During all Astro Tourism activity the safety of the stargazers shall be their own responsibility and responsible Astro tourism should be undertaken wherein stargazers take into account their own physical limitations, safety from natural and manmade hazards.

7.2 . Safety of Stargazers under 18 years of age shall be the responsibility of their guardians.

8. Conservation of Environment– All stargazers shall promote environmental awareness among all and adhere to the Stargazer's Code of Ethics. Any Astro

Tourism activity in Andaman & Nicobar shall be sustainable and responsible with respect to protection of all natural resources whether living or non-living.

9. Astro Tourism Spots to be independent of land use–

9.1 Astro Tourism Spots can be on road/off road/urban/rural and shall preferably have right of access through any land with appropriate permissions from the recorded tenants/land owner. Any right of access given by a person/department/organization/entity to allow Astro Tourism can be withdrawn by them immediately. In case of dispute, the Astro Tourism Spot shall be de-registered immediately.

9.2 No change in land use -Registration of any Astro Spot shall not entail change in land use or alter the status of land in any way.

10. Events– IP&T Department shall periodically conduct Astro events, Astro Tourism Conventions/ Conferences/Seminars/Lectures on its own or in collaboration with experts to promote Andaman & Nicobar as an Astro Tourism Destination of International repute as well as for encouraging research on the subject.

11. Minimum Standards Checklist for Recommended Astro Spot heads and Spots

Minimum standards for a Astro Tourism Spot that can enhance the experience for stargazers and protect the natural environment :

- i. Clearly marked Astro Spot** - The Astro Spot should be well marked with clear signs indicating the perimeter and directions for Astro Tourism activities .
- ii. Map and literature of the Spot** – Clear map and literature of the Astro Spot should be made available online.
- iii. Safe Spot**- The Spot should be safe and accessible for all visitors. The Spot surface should be stable and free from hazards.
- iv. Accessible Spot** – If an Astro Spot is accessible for specially abled persons it should be stated.
- v. Parking space**- Parking space should be available near the Astro Spot.
- vi. Interpretative signage**- Interpretative signs/boards at the Astro Spot to provide information about the celestial bodies that can be seen along with their key features be displayed.

vii. Appropriate Astro Spot management- The Spot should be managed to support stargazing, including managing light pollution, preventing waste dumping, preventing building on the spot and maintaining healthy ecosystems.

- a) In-charge of the Spot to be designated by Directorate of Tourism
- b) Fortnightly survey of the Spot by the designated officer.
- c) Feedback about the Spot to be reviewed by Director (Tourism) monthly.
- d) Quarterly reviews of the feedback at Secretary level.

viii. Minimal disturbance to environment: The Spot should be designed to minimize disturbance to the environment, with designated viewing areas for stargazers to follow standard protocols to reduce light and disruption.

ix. Manning of the Spot head – A designated staff to be present at the Astro Spot during Astro tourism season.

x. Safety- Provision of First Aid Kit at the Astro Spot with designated staff.

These minimum standards can help create a safe and enjoyable Astro Tourism experiences while promoting Astro tourism.

The Director(Tourism) and DFO of the concerned area will ensure adherence to the above mentioned minimum standards in the Astro Spots within protected areas and the Assistant Director(Admn), Directorate of Tourism will ensure adherence to the above mentioned minimum standards in the Astro Spots lying outside the protected areas .

12. MAINTENANCE OF SPOTS :

- (i) Encroachment, garbage dumping and littering will be strictly prohibited.
- (ii) Anyone found littering will be penalized. Any guide found littering will be deregistered.
- (iii) An officer from Tourism Department will be designated for a Spot who will carry out inspection of the Spot in 15 days. He shall submit the information to Director (Tourism and Director (Tourism) will carry out a monthly review of the Spot.
- (iv) Any suggestions/complaints filed by any stargazers or any other person shall be disposed off by Director (Tourism).
- (v) Quarterly review to be carried out by Secretary (Tourism).
- (vi) A report about the status of the Spots including suggestions, if any, will be prepared and submitted to Chief Secretary. A review will be done at Chief Secretary's level once in six months.

13. ASTRO TOURISM ETHICS CODE:

To be enforceable on all visitors on Astro Tourism Spots-

- i. **Respecting the environment:** Stargazers should not disturb the environment. This is valid even if there is no signage.
- ii. **Avoiding overcrowding:** Stargazers should avoid overcrowding, and should take turns to avoid disturbing or blocking other stargazers' views.
- iii. **Respecting other wildlife and visitors:** Stargazers should respect other wildlife and visitors to the area, and should not damage or disturb other wildlife or interfere with other visitor's enjoyment of the area.
- iv. **Behaving in a responsible and safe manner:** Stargazers should obey local laws and regulations, and should be aware of potential hazards such as cliffs, tides, and weather conditions.
- v. **Sharing knowledge and promoting conservation:** Stargazers should share their knowledge and enthusiasm for stargazing with others, and should promote conservation efforts to protect dark sky and the environment.
- vi. Stargazers should avoid flash at night, so as not to disturb birds and other wildlife.
- vii. As per the guidelines of the National Parks/Parks/Sanctuaries the stargazers may be permitted, however no priority may be accorded to them.
- viii. The guides shall ensure that the tourists should take back organic/inorganic waste generated by them and will not be allowed to litter in the Astro Spots.

- 14. Savings** – This policy will not supersede any policy/law/regulation/rule in force or which may be notified subsequently. This policy shall be void to the extent that it is in contravention with any existing policy/law/regulation/rule etc.

NOTE :

STATUS OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL ASTRO TOURISM POLICY

Currently in India while no state has a dedicated Astro Tourism policy, some states have ecotourism policies that include Astro Tourism as a component.

India's first astro tourism campaign "Nakshatra Sabha" was inaugurated at the George Everest peak in Mussoorie on 1st June, 2024.

The venue of the event, George Everest Peak is a major tourist attraction in Mussoorie which offers spectacular views of the snow-clad Himalayan peaks and the Doon Valley.

Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board in association with Starscapes - India's leading Astro tourism company, has jointly organised the event.

After this, astro tourism events will also be organized in places like Harsil-Jadung, Benital, Rishikesh, Jageshwar and Ramnagar.
