

Andaman Chronicle

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To

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The Hon'ble Lt. Governor

Andaman & Nicobar Islands

Sub: Submitting suggestions of our readers on various issues relating to Islands' development reg:-

Your Excellency,

Andaman Chronicle takes this opportunity to welcome you to the islands.

We also take this opportunity to submit various proposals, suggestions and demands of our readers (Islanders) for a holistic development of the Islands.

Tourism plays a vital role in development of the islands. Though Fisheries & Tourism is considered to be the only industries in the islands at present, that can generate large number of employment opportunities, yet the fact remains that not much has been done to boost the fishery sector. Tourism though has been booming in the islands and provides employment to hundreds of islanders, but it is strongly felt that the Industry needs to be organised to tap its full potential.

On many occasions, we had invited suggestions/ opinions of our esteemed readers through Social Media (Facebook - Andaman Chronicle Group) on what they feel should be done to develop tourism industry in a holistic way. Enclosed along is a printout of the suggestions, which is self explanatory.

To start with we wish to submit the following suggestions/ demands of the islanders

1. Bridge Connectivity Between Bambooflat and Chatham:

According to a rough estimate approximately 15000 passengers including students, office goers, daily wage earners, patients, industrial workers and about a thousand vehicles comprising 2 wheelers, Auto rickshaw, 4 wheelers, cars etc. commute in the route between Bambooflat and Chatham.

With increase in population, passenger as well as vehicular traffic has increased manifold in the route. But the ferry services operated in the route surprisingly remains insufficient, irregular and inadequate both in terms of capacity and frequency as well. Every ferry, be it day or night, rain or sun, sails jam packed with commuters huddled in every available space. Nobody seems concerned about the safety or convenience of commuters.

On the other hand for a commuter the urge to cross over to the other side takes precedence over everything else. Since failure to board the ferry, however risky it may be, would mean long wait.

If bridge connectivity is provided between Bambooflat and Chatham, it would directly benefit those daily commuters and indirectly to the entire population of Andamans.

2. Short term: Construction of Additional Vehicle Ferry Ramps at Bambooflat and Chatham:

The Directorate of Shipping Services is trying its best to augment passenger services by deploying additional ferries between scheduled ones during peak hours to ease congestion but could not help much since the existing jetty at Bambooflat and Chatham does not support berthing of more than one vehicle ferry at a time.

Thus construction of additional vehicle ferry ramp at Bambooflat as well as Chatham could facilitate berthing of multiple ferries simultaneously. This would facilitate deployment of additional ferries in a fruitful manner, which presently seems not feasible with single ramp jetties.

The space adjacent to the passenger hall at Bambooflat jetty could be utilized for construction of a second vehicle ferry ramp for berthing of additional ferries. The said space is presently not utilised for anything proper but is guarded by walls causing hindrance and obstructing free flow of traffic in the area.

Similarly at Chatham another vehicle ferry ramp cum jetty could be constructed near the existing jetty or at the spot where there used to be a wooden jetty (not in existence anymore) used for berthing of forest department boats and logging rafts etc. This side on the western side of Chatham Island is protected from wind and waves thus well suited for construction of additional infrastructure.

3. Weekly Visit of Medical/ Surgical Specialists at CHC Level Hospitals:

Presently the entire population is depending on GB Pant hospital for availing one or the other health care facilities. This is putting lot of pressure on GB Pant besides un-necessary crowding at the lone referral hospital. As a result, the existing facilities at GB Pant is under duress.

If medical/ surgical specialists visit the CHC's (at least once in a week) in outlying areas, it would benefit the entire islands. On one hand patients could be screened at the CHC level, on the other hand, it would ease the patient load on GB Pant, which is the lone referral hospital of these islands.

4. Augmentation of Inter-island Ferry Service by Inducting Large Capacity Speed Boats:

On an average there are 3-4 trips of speed boat to Havelock island, which is the most sought after tourist destination. Tourists, who so ever visits these islands surely visits Havelock. Due to this huge rush, DSS is operating 3-4 trips to Havelock, since the speed boats can carry only a little above 80 passengers per trip. This is un-necessary wastage of time, fuel and money. It would be beneficial if larger capacity boats are inducted in the route (MV Ramanujam type which could carry 400 pax at a time) so that wasteful expenditure could be curbed and the route could be operated efficiently.

Similarly for long south and Little Andaman, larger capacity boats are required to be deployed regularly.

5. Augmentation of Data Connectivity, Expediting Under-sea Optical Fibre Connectivity to These Islands

This has been a long pending demand of the islanders, which can open up scope to develop the islands as an IT Hub. The BSNL and other service providers though have opened up the channel to bridge the gap between the remote islands and outside world, yet the services are not up to the mark. The proposal for Under-Sea Optical Fibre has been pending since long, which has also been brought to His Excellency's knowledge.

We hope that the project will soon be accomplished, which in turn will open up many job prospects to the islanders, who at present are running around in search of employment. As per the Employment Exchange, A&N Islands has more than 40,000 unemployed.

6. 911 Type Centralized Helpline for Islanders which could play a vital role in disaster situations.

Your Excellency might be aware that our Islands falls under Seismic Zone V and is highly prone to disasters. The Boxing Day Tsunami of 2004 is still fresh in the minds of the islanders. To support the islanders during such emergency times, a 911 type Centralized Helpline would go a long way.

It would be appropriate to mention that the Police Control Room (100) is very active and has proved to be life savers on many occasions. If the PCR is expanded and clubbed with the Disaster Management to make it Centralized it would be of much help.

7. Formulation of a Proper Plan for Sand Extraction Locally:

Sand required for construction, which was hitherto collected locally has been phased off. Consequently, unlike other essential commodities Sand is also being imported from mainland in containers.

It would be interesting to note the entire quantity of Sand required for construction is currently being imported from Andhra Pradesh to the islands through Chennai port.

Obviously the sand which has its origin in one or the other river banks at Andhra Pradesh or elsewhere in mainland India, travels several thousand miles on board, truck, containers, ships etc and also change hands at many places before landing in a port at Port Blair. The kiloliters of fuel spent in Sand excavation, transportation, repeated loading and unloading at various depots, ports and the commission at every point the consignment changes hand, is finally added to the imported

sand and sold at a premium to the islanders. The imported sand thus poses a gigantic Carbon Foot Print which is certainly not desirable from environmental point of view.

Therefore if a proper plan is formulated for extraction of sand locally, the problem could very well be taken care of.

8. Formulation of a Proper Plan for Plantation and Harvesting of Timber for Local Use:

With the Apex Court's ban in 2002 on felling naturally grown trees in the islands, the islanders have been dealing with crisis of timber.

In an Island system which is prone to earthquakes and similar disasters, Timber has been considered ideal for construction of houses. Wooden houses though still existing at few places including the Govt. Bungalows, the exorbitant maintenance cost makes it next to impossible for people to imagine constructing wooden houses.

If a proper plan is formulated for plantation and harvesting of timber for local use, it will go a long way in solving the issue of timber crisis. This will also help reduce the cost, thereby making timber affordable for the islanders.

9. Suggestions to Develop Tourism Industry In an Organised Manner:

Kindly refer the link

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/244951808856397/permalink/639846882700219/>

Some of the key suggestions given by our esteemed readers are as follows:-

a) Healthy competition and awarding the best tour operators operating at different levels for different types of stakeholders i.e. Small, Medium and high level can be added by setting some parameters.

b) Monitoring on price of hotel and other water sport activity. Its touching heaven n sky ..we need more development we cannot live on our past glory left by Ex-LG Shri Vokkam. More of parks like Marina, Gandhi etc. is needed. Good and nicer clean Roads. Bars should have lounge facility for family too.

Every hotel is sold to major travel guru for entire year. A state of the art advertisement should be broadcasted in every major channel. something like Big B incredible India Ad.. Good bus to travel to places like Wandoor and Chidya Tapu a must required.

Development of Diglipur should and must happen. Few other island should also be opened for tourist. Exporting of fish should be stopped as its effecting local fishermen and also general public. One cannot think of having prawns and lobster price so high..

c) On one hand tourism provides self employment to the youths on the other hand if you need to buy a vehicle for tourism purposes then you need a parking place. So the opportunity is getting restricted to few people who have the facility and all other cannot take the opportunity of self employment.

d) Need for Dedicated Help Line 24 X 7 and Administration's future strategies, plans for at least 10 years.

e) All spots of tourist interests should be provided with adequate infrastructure: at least 2 lane roads to reach there, water and toilet facilities, educated and trained guides, health facility for emergency and adequate parking and pick up and drop space. A few facilities such as Cold drink/ coconut shops etc. could be handled or auctioned to local entrepreneurs or co-operative societies.

f) The prices offered for hotels and activities at the Andaman Islands and especially Havelock is quite high. Many of the people whom I know say "I can go visit Thailand for this price". The resort standards are OK but not the best when compared to the Mainland standard, still the prices are so high. Let the government support travel operator in Andamans and people from outside can only book through travel operators in Andamans and not from outside travel operator.

g) Tax holiday for the tourism industry in Andamans will help the industry in whole and also keep us competitive with the mainland based travel agencies and tour operators.

h) The visitors of this islands should be respected, and provided with the basic amenities such as water...

i) Sport tourism is one more thing that ANI can work on. Like organizing Country Level, Asia Level for sports events so that it would attract lots of sports icon, politicians, media and this will eventually force to improve the infrastructure.

j) The CRZ zone problem is also a bar for boosting tourism...Very hard even to get Clearance of CRZ for tourism too.

k) The only reason tourists come Andaman is to see, feel, play in sea. When they see big banners of warning "stay away from sea, there is a crocodile". Why would anyone come to the islands if they can't even swim in sea without fear? "CROCODILES ARE NOT MORE IMPORTANT THAN HUMAN LIFE"

l) For Tourism Boom, Commuting to individual destinations should be Comfortable, Faster, Affordable. That should be the Job of Administration. Once that happens rest will automatically be taken care off.

m) All the departments work at cross purposes and there is no able person heading any of the departments. Almost all days, meetings are conducted which have no positive outcome. For example, one dept issues the approval for setting up a hotel/resort, another dept the Bar license, then again another dept puts a stop to everything by creating a Buffer Zone. Too many cooks spoiling the broth.

n) A Self made researched Soft copy of North and Middle Andaman brochure with maps of all location was submitted to tourism dept by DARTED on Feb 2011 for promotion and printing of the same, but till date after many reminders it has never materialized.

A shared space with another travel agent was provided for DARTED in IITF Delhi 2012, where the purpose was to promote North and Middle Andaman tourism but on another hand many other private players were having their own counters. The irony of the story is, you have to bear that 1,27,000/- expense for the job, which should be actually done by the tourism department because you have to put your word across as it was a shared counter.

m) The basic need is infra structure development, which can be faster by privet investors. Andaman needs a "GREEN CHANNEL" to do all tourism related paper works timely manner. Most of paper

works has to be online submission. The "Green Chanel" should be monitor by an educated officer and appealing authority should be LG.

o) Tourism in Andaman needs proper planning taking into consideration all the stake holder's interest in the Short & Long Run and goals must be fixed. This would require bringing all the stake holders and the Government machinery. Other similar destinations like Thailand / Sri Lanka would sound cheaper and we may lose out a major part of our business to these destinations over a period of time if we do not upgrade the destination.

At least, the bare minimum amenities are made available at all tourist spots. The infrastructure plays major role in the growth of any destination and we are no different to it. It (infrastructure) helps in sustaining and retaining the growth. The best example is Makruzz and increase of tourist flow into Havelock. Support should be provided to enhance it from all quarters. Though there are many components to it, I feel infrastructure should be the prime factor that we should insist to ensure that our guests presently visiting us should go back with HAPPY EXPERIENCES & MEMORIES for our positive future in Tourism.

p)- Ensure the problem of Water scarcity during summer in Port Blair. A&N administration must act as regulatory authority for all purpose of tourism activates in A&N Islands. Proper inter departmental coordination, with Police, forest, industries. Ensure safety & security during normal & disaster period. Categorize the standard of lodge/hotel/ budget hotels/start hotels at par with mainland. (in order to avoid confusion, misguide, misconception in tourist & tour operators etc.).

q) Tourism can be a major industry to put most of our unemployed youth in track as well. Say for example people with profiles such as customer management, hotel management, good communications skills, scuba skills and many more areas just to name a few can start a business of their own locally and established travel operators at Andamans can give them some business as well.

Why not open dedicated camping grounds, trekking spots. People in today's world like to see more than the normal package tours offered by major travel giants globally.

Yes, the issue of CROCODILES is again a mess, why the tourism department not doing anything for this mess. Many forums are going on online discussing crocodiles in Andamans. Well, these issues have considerably hampered tourism at Andamans. Can the government take steps to lower the Airfare as well.

It has been observed that package price for 4 Nights and 5 Nights are usually lower than return airfare cost. After having mentioned so much, not sure if anything would be taken into consideration..

r) Why do I always come away from Govt offices feeling that we are not working together(the Govt. & us Island entrepreneurs) but are more like enemies at opposite ends of the battlefield? This attitude has first to change. Only then can we make things happen.

s) A tourist could feel comfortable only when they get value for money. The tourist should be charged at the airport for once, not in the name of national park, national reserve and so on as govt charges, as all the tourist attraction places are all either of them. The boat connectivity to all the tourist bound Islands should be cleanly webbed, as Neil, Havelock, long island, Rangat, Diglipur, Mayabunder, Hut bay.

t) A very good opportunity for an Administrator (LG) to convert these islands from being a central fund eater to a contributor towards National economy through fisheries and Tourism. Why be a scum of the nation when we can be the Jewel.

u) From times immemorial it has been declared in black and white that tourism is the only surviving profitable industry of this archipelago, why then corbyn's cove, jolly buoy, red skin cellular jail are the only attractions of these islands for more than 4 decades... Basic amenities like towels, beach wear, decent c hanging rooms, fresh water bathing places should be made available at all places. Why Neil Island with more lovelier and beautiful beaches is not that accessible as that of Havelock?

v) Tourism policy was released by tourism dept. on 2011 but still we are waiting for implementation. Once the policy is implemented lot of the grievances of the stake holders will be sorted out and I also feel there is lack of coordination between the dept and stakeholders.

10. Periodic interaction of HOD's or designated officer with the media/ Equal Opportunities for Private Media:

It is a fact that the Andaman & Nicobar Administration has been trying their best to suppress the private media in the islands. Starting from govt. advertisements to which the private media solely depends, to information from the Administration, the private media has been deprived.

In the absence of Statehood, the Andaman & Nicobar Administration is the sole decision maker in all aspects. The islanders need updated information of govt. programmes, announcements, new appointments, change of offices etc. which is restricted to the private media. A periodic interaction of HODs or designated officers with the media will help bridge the gap and reach information to the islanders.

As far as advertisements are concerned, the Administration has been granting advertisements to the tune of Rs. 30 Lakhs (plus) per month (apart from payment of the employees, which is borne by the Administration) to the 'Daily Telegrams', a mouthpiece of the Administration. At the same time, private dailies are restricted to govt. advertisements to the tune of Rs. 40-50,000/- per month (which is a salary of a Group B Employee of the Administration). With this meagre amount, the private dailies cannot imagine of growing or for a healthy competition.

If equal advertisements are allotted to the private dailies like that of 'Daily Telegrams', we will be able to have a wider reach. At the same time we will be able to generate employment opportunities for many, right from newspaper delivery boys to scribes.

Sir,

We would like to conclude with this for the time being. We hope that you would make a note of the suggestions. Andaman Chronicle would like to extend all support to you with a hope of a new era for Andamans.

Yours Faithfully

(DENIS GILES)

Editor