

# New body created to promote eco-tourism

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**Chennai:** Tamil Nadu's vast forest tracts are ideal for promoting eco-tourism. In an effort to propel the state to the top slot in the field, the forest department has formed an organization that will help offer exclusive experiences for tourists/wildlife enthusiasts in a corporate set-up.

The Tamil Nadu Wilderness Experiences Corporation will create quality experiences in a non-intrusive and sustainable manner, with minimal impact on the environment. It will promote the identified destinations on a commercial basis and enhance the liveli-

hood opportunities for local communities, said an official.

The corporation will not look for newer areas or locations as the department already holds eco-tourism events in the four tiger reserves and wildlife sanctuaries.

Under the existing arrangement, a tourist coming to visit the Mudumalai tiger reserve and also planning to go to the Avalanche area has to pay different tariffs at the destinations as there is no uniformity in the events organised there despite the locations coming under the state forest department. Charges vary for guest

houses, the food served. The cost of safari trips varies too.

The forest department should take a cue from the state tourism department at whose facilities the tariff for accommodation, food and other amenities are the same across the state, the official said.

Another problem is that tourists have to obtain permission from too many officials to visit different spots in a place. Again, Udhagamandalam is a classic example, where one needs to obtain permission from the district forest officer to visit Avalanche and approach the field director for ap-

proval to go to the Mudumalai Tiger reserve, both located in the same area.

Such problems can be overcome by appointing an officer of the rank of conservator of forests to look into eco-tourism related booking, cancellation and maintenance of the guest houses for visitors.

At present, range officers in tiger reserves are managing both the tiger reserves and the protection and conservation activities within their jurisdiction.

The new corporation will plug all these loopholes and provide better facilities for tourists, the official added.