



COURTESY: PAUL GOLDSTEIN/EXODUS TRAVEL

Paul Goldstein of Exodus Travel, which won the International Tour Operator of the Year award, has run over 13 marathons in a now famous 15 kg. tiger suit.

The TOFTigers Wildlife Tourism Awards 2016

The TOFTigers Wildlife Tourism Awards 2016, in association with *Sanctuary Asia*, were held at a well-attended dinner on September 23, 2016, at the residence of the British High Commissioner in New Delhi. Under the Chairmanship of world-renowned wildlife cinematographer, Mike Pandey, the judging committee said they had a really difficult task honing in on the handful of awards presented. This is a good sign, as it indicates a steady mind-shift towards responsible wildlife tourism. The theme of the evening was 'rewilding' and the centre-point of the event was the birth and potential of Community-owned Nature Conservancies that assure local communities a livelihood and dignity from tourism, while also offering wild species that most vital of all gifts - extra space as farms are slowly converted to forest status.

The Billy Arjan Singh Memorial Award for Wildlife Guide of the Year

Sponsor: Taj Safaris

Radhika Prasad Omre from Madla, Panna Tiger Reserve
Radhika exemplifies the qualities needed in a wildlife guide in India today. The ability to excite and enthuse visitors, great knowledge and a willingness to put extra time and energy into supporting the park, be it vulture surveys, nature training, or teaching visitors to respect these precious assets.

Lodge Naturalist of the Year

Sponsor: Indian Wildlife Experiences

Dhan Bahadur Tamang from Tiger Tops, Chitwan, Nepal
Dhan is recognised as one of Nepal's best and longest-serving naturalists, with world-class knowledge of tiger populations gathered over 40 years of field research, contributing to the work of pioneer wildlife researcher, Dr. Chuck McDougal. His commitment to communicating his love of nature to his many visitors is second to none in Chitwan and Bardia.

Dr. Chuck McDougal Visitor-friendly Wildlife Destination of the Year

Sponsor: Trans India Holidays

Chitwan National Park in Nepal and Pench Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra
These winners, with contrasting histories, shine a light on how tourism is helping to protect wildlife. Chitwan, a pioneer in nature tourism in the 1960s, has declared a zero-poaching record for the second year running with growing tiger and rhino populations. With a wonderful range of activities to enjoy, on foot, boat and jeep,

the main park has now expanded by over 90 sq. km. thanks to 68 community-owned buffer forests that are changing lives for local communities, through small-scale ecotourism activities.

Pench, Maharashtra, newly opened to tourism and soaking up an overflow from its neighbouring park in Madhya Pradesh, has seen rapidly-rising tiger numbers and prey base through successful protection measures and new water conservation efforts that are transforming this park back into a thriving wilderness. Visitors are offered an increasing variety of ways to experience the reserve's undulating terrain, from walking to night safaris. Their presence acts as a deterrent to illegal activities. Bordering communities are benefitting from new livelihood incomes from this nascent tourism.

Wildlife and Tourism Initiative of the Year

Sponsor: Singinawa Jungle Lodge

Jabarkhet Nature Reserve in Mussoorie, Uttarakhand

The Jabarkhet Nature Reserve is a shining example of a citizen-action conservation project. The Reserve is rewilding part of a rapidly-diminishing middle Himalayan ecosystem. Set up just over two years ago by Sejah Worah and her team, the Reserve has restored a 110-acre wasteland and rubbish dump back into thriving forest habitat with over 300 species of birds, large mammals including goral and bear and over 300 species of wildflowers. The Reserve aims to cover its running costs through private membership and revenue from visitors who can spend their time immersed in forests with trained guides on carefully-planned nature trails.

Wildlife Tourism Related Community Initiative

Sponsor: Jungle Sutra Wildlife Journeys by Creative Travel

Pakke Jungle Camp with Help Tourism in Arunachal Pradesh
A heart-warming story of the transformation of *Nyishi* hunters into fierce

wildlife protectors. Catalysed by the Nature Conservation Foundation in Bengaluru and the local forestry officer, village chiefs coming together under the Ghora-Aabhe Society joined forces with Help Tourism to set up Pakke Jungle Camp, thus providing much-needed alternative income to the villagers. With four species of hornbill on the verge of extinction just a few years ago, this successful partnership between communities, tourism, forestry and conservation, has helped to turn around hornbill numbers as well as a cascade of other creatures including the tiger, clouded leopard and binturang.

International Tour Operator of the Year

Exodus Travel from London, United Kingdom

Exodus Travel has taken over 10,000 people to see Bengal tigers over the last four decades, in small groups offering immersive nature experiences using sensitively-run lodges. Under the guiding light of one of its most indomitable leaders, Paul Goldstein, who has run over 13 marathons in a now famous 15 kg. tiger suit, Exodus and their clients have raised over 1.5 crores for tiger projects including a school in Bandhavgarh, community work in Ranthambhore and now in Tadoba.

Up and Coming Excellence in Nature Award

Sponsor: Cox and Kings India

Mela Kothi, The Chambal Safari Lodge, Chambal, Uttar Pradesh
In 2015, the Chambal Safari Lodge owners, Ram and Anu Pratab Singh, conceptualised and hosted the first-ever Bird Festival in Uttar Pradesh (UP), home of the Chambal gorge and its fabulous birdlife. Shining a light on UP's importance for birdlife and also sensitising the local population to the natural gem they have in their midst, the Festival was attended by many of the world's best birding experts, conservation NGOs and over 2,000 visitors and 400 school kids. Opened by the State's Chief Minister, and supported by its Forest Department, it was a resounding success

that demonstrated how partnerships can create a win-win situation for wilderness destinations and local communities.

Wildlife Promotion Company of the Year

Abercrombie & Kent India

One of the oldest and best-known wildlife safari brands in the world, Abercrombie and Kent continues to deliver high-quality safaris and tours across India, using quality eco-sensitive and PUG eco-rated lodges and new glamping sites to get their safari goers off the beaten track. Its A&K Philanthropic Foundation funds projects across the globe and an Indian school, with support for TOFTigers Village Wildlife Guardian scheme in Ranthambhore from its India office.

The John Wakefield Memorial Award for Most Inspirational Eco Lodge of the Year

Reni Pani Jungle Lodge, Satpura Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh and Singinawa Jungle Lodge, Kanha Tiger Reserve, Madhya Pradesh

These lodges exemplify the very best in lodge operations, community service and environmental accountability today, achieving TOFTigers' highest PUG eco-ratings. More than this, both have set out to rewild most of their property, turning back the clock with their habitat restoration over the years, so visitors feel they have already arrived at their nature destination.

Singinawa has continued to showcase the unique art and culture of the original custodians of the land, the *Gonds*, opening a new Kanha Museum of Life and Art in their grounds in 2015. Reni Pani continues to raise the bar for best practice, not only with its low-impact and aesthetically-pleasing buildings, but also the quality of its guiding services, its numerous visitor experiences and its ongoing work with local communities, and support for Satpura Tiger Reserve.

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