

# THE TELEGRAPH

January 2018

NEWS WEBSITE OF THE YEAR

## The Telegraph

Travel · Safaris and wildlife

### The safari holidays that could genuinely save the world's wildlife



If communities can be shown that tourism pays there is hope of saving endangered species. CREDIT: GETTY

Follow **By Richard Madden**  
11 OCTOBER 2017 · 10:28AM

The Rabari goat herder is waving at us from the valley below. Through my binoculars, his red turban seems to be glowing in the morning mist. Dotted around him, his goats graze in the surrounding fields. We are high up on a massive granite outcrop with a panoramic view over the Indian state of Rajasthan.

Suddenly, the engine of our Jeep roars into life. Yusuf, our guide and founding partner at Suján Jawai, is on a mission and we are soon bouncing over uneven terrain down into the valley. When we meet up with the goat herder, he takes us to a field where one of his goats lies dead. It doesn't take a pathologist to conclude that the bite marks around its neck are those of a leopard.

"Our relationship with the Rabaris is critical," Yusuf explains. "They have lived here for centuries and without their co-operation the leopards will not survive. That's why we take so seriously projects such as improving sanitation in the local villages, sponsoring local schools and our wildlife research facility. That farmer will be compensated for his loss immediately."

Opened in 2013, Suján Jawai is a luxury tented camp with exemplary low-impact eco-credentials. With Yusuf and his partners at the helm, it has pioneered a business Wildlife holidays that make all the difference beauty spots Guests at Suján Jawai directly support leopard conservation and can see the animals in the wild; tigers at

"The safari holidays that could genuinely save the world's wildlife."

Ranthambore, right model of engagement with the local community that is proving remarkably effective. During my three nights at the camp, we had multiple leopard sightings on every game drive including one of a mother and four cubs.

"More farmers are turning away from agriculture to return the land to wildlife corridors for both the leopards and their prey species," Yusuf told me. "It's only when they have a sustainable financial stake in the wildlife that there can be a vision for the future. It is this vision to which our guests contribute when they stay at Jawai."



Guests at Jawai Leopard Camp CREDIT: SUJÁN JAWAI

In Africa, the most successful examples of wildlife conservation are mostly achieved through community involvement where tourists have a chance to see, and sometimes participate in, the projects they are helping to fund. In India, the picture is not so simple. Government management of its 50 tiger reserves is too often driven by damaging financial objectives rather than environmental considerations. Outbursts of poaching are frequent and efforts to prosecute the guilty often frustrated.

India's most famous and largest tiger reserve is Ranthambore, which surrounds an old royal hunting ground - a magnificent setting of lakes, forests, forts, temples and palaces. I had been there on a previous trip and the wildlife experience left much to be desired, with tip-obsessed guides making it feel like a zoo.

I am glad to report that things are improving. Tiger numbers are increasing (now around 55-65), and quieter zones have been opened to tourists, which helps reduce the pressure. There is still a cacophony of shouting and revving engines whenever a tiger is spotted, but initiatives on the ground, which depend on tourism for funding, are having a positive effect.



A tiger in Ranthambore CREDIT: EROMAZE

Tofts (Tiger Operators for Tigers) rates, assesses and promotes tourist operators and accommodation providers on the basis of their environmental and wildlife credentials and is a useful resource when planning a tiger-viewing trip to India. It also supports a number of inspirational projects. One of these is Tiger Watch, led by Dr Dharmendra Khandal. "This was all started by local villagers, who realised they had an interest in protecting the tigers they have lived alongside for generations," he tells me.