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# SHANTINIKETAN DECLARATION

30th March 2010

Attendance at the Policy Workshop 'Peace through Tourism in historically changed Cross-borders' at Museum Hall, Department of History, Visva-Bharati, Shantiniketan on 29th & 30th March, 2010. Organized by Department Of History & Help Tourism.

- 36 participants from all over India, specially Northeast, West Bengal and Orissa with delegates from Bhutan and Bangladesh.
- Included Government officials, NGOs, Academicians, tourism industry representatives, tourism activists, film makers, social activists and travel writers.
- 30 Students of the Department of History, Visva-Bharati.

## The Cross-Border description

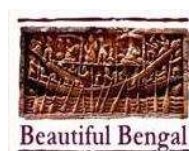
- Borders are human-made, both physical and in the minds.
- Capitals far away from the borders should understand and address the sentiments, livelihood and basic needs of the people living in the borders and constantly seek cooperation of neighboring countries.
- Tourism should be seen as meaningful tool to bring our borders and communities out of isolation and create better people to people participation along the borders.

## Cross-Borders within country

- We must first confirm our inter-district and inter-state cooperation in regard to tourism and have common tourism circuits.
- Permits at gates or on the internet for the various districts or states (wherever may be necessary) within a country to confirm National citizenship.
- West Bengal & Orissa with eight Northeastern states of India should be brought under a single brand of Northeast for tourism purposes.
- Interstate transport Permit to be simplified for the implementation of integration as one region.



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## Cross-Border with neighboring countries in the Indian subcontinent.

- We must reciprocate among the different neighboring countries each others respect in regard to entry permits, visas etc.
- Armed forces, customs and other Government personnel at at borders must display good behavior as they are the face of the country.
- Online Visa and Visa on arrival at the borders is a priority for the countries of the Indian sub-continent joining south and southeast Asia to promote more land and water based travels.
- Medical Tourism potential for people across border should be brought under a more organized sector through a policy.
- Education Tourism should also be a priority to attract students and scholars from across the borders.

## Direct Stakeholders

- The local people must be direct stakeholders of all cross-border initiatives.
- The local people should be empowered ownership on the local natural & cultural resources, which are to be protected.
- The local natural and cultural heritage should be part of the school curriculum at site.
- There should be cross-border relation development through tourism festivals and several tourism events.
- Establish 'Cross-Border Tourism Peace Parks' in Inter-District and Inter-State within a country and also across neighboring countries.
- Appreciate & support the local community initiatives in tourism and help to set up local bodies to advise the district officials on tourism matters.
- Local traditional beliefs, legends, rituals, myths etc to be a part of tourism.
- Low Cost & Simple local information brochures at every village with maps.
- Rural trails through river walks, boat rides.
- Also the same for the wetland conservation tourism initiatives.

## Proposed Areas to open specially for tourism exchange (including foreigners)

- Ultapani, in Bodoland, Assam with Sarpang in Bhutan to access the other areas of Bhutan.
- Upper Assam & Eastern Arunachal Pradesh through Pangsau Pass on the Stilwell Road with Myanmar.
- West Bengal-Assam-Nagaland-Manipur through Tamo-Morreh Border with Myanmar, the existing arrangement to be made more active.

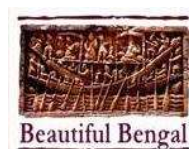


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- Connect Paharpur World Heritage Site near Joypurhat in Bangladesh with Darjeeling Himalayan Railway in Darjeeling District India through the Hilly Border.
- West Bengal-Assam-Meghalaya to Bangladesh through Dawki and Dalu.
- Orissa and West Bengal-Nepal through Panitanki and Pashupati Fatak in Darjeeling District.
- West Bengal-Sikkim to Tibet through Nathula Pass.
- Open up the route from Agartala through Bangladesh to Kolkata for transit of tourist, saving both economic resources and carbon emission.
- South Tripura, Sabrrom-Agartala to Chattagong which existed should be re-established for Buddhist circuit with Pilak Heritage site as the main attraction.
- Re-establish the Bali/Java/Sumatra-Orissa sea relation initiated during 1992.
- Include similar old Buddhist ties of Orissa with Cambodia and Srilanka.

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## Cross-Border Tourism Circuit proposals

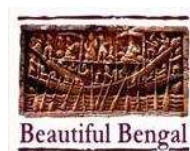
- Land-route Religious (Buddhist & Hindu) circuits through contiguous Northeastern states to Myanmar and on to Thailand, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and China.
- Connect the Common Heritage sites of the countries across borders.
- Following the historic trails of Lord Buddha, Guru Padsambhava and early travelers to India.
- Nepal-India-Bhutan Heli-Tourism on the Guru Padmasambhava trails to start discussions immediately.
- Connect West Bengal-Orissa through water route with India's Northeast, considering the Brahmaputra to Sea route.
- India-Bangladesh Sunderbans through water route.
- Andaman Islands with the Malayan Peninsula and Myanmar by water route.

## Infrastructure

- Consider immediate upgradation of Kolkata Airport for International Tourist in all respects including making it tourist friendly.
- Consider the same for Bagdogra and Guwahati.
- Improvement of the existing airports and air traffic for the Northeastern states with existing air terminals.
- Multiple Permits from a single window at the airports and railway stations like NJP, Guwahati, Dibrugarh, Jorhat and Tezpur.
- The future is in Heli-Tourism and immediate introduction of Inter-state services among the tourism Northeastern states.
- Protected Area Permit system for Manipur is the major hurdle for any kind of tourism and is stopping the Cross-Border International tourism through Myanmar.
- For other India's Northeastern states ILP, RAP and PAP should be abolished or made easier through internet or permits at gate.
- Bhutan is already planned two domestic air terminals which will be a new opening for Northeast India.

## Waterways have great tourism potential in Orissa, West Bengal and Northeastern states

- Silting of the rivers makes it impossible during low tide, same for Namkhana, Bhagwatpur etc in Sunderbans. IWAI to look into desilting.
- Too many restrictions on waterways route by security forces and Forest Department, the matter to be considered to make a policy.
- The common circuit for the legendary Barahmaputra-Ganga cruises connecting through Bangladesh can make the subcontinent the most popular River Cruise destination to be made possible.



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## ACTION

- Circulate the ‘Shantiniketan Declaration’ widely across countries and all International developmental organizations.
- Constant endeavor through a committed volunteer team to follow up after this workshop.
- The first action will be going into Myanmar through Manipur to be organised by Mr.R.K.Shivachandra with workshop at Imphal and Myanmar.
- The other action will be arriving Paharpur through Hilly with a workshop with Rajsahi University and Joypurhat Municipality by Mr.Apurba Sarkar.
- Dr.R.Panth offered the next International Festival of the said countries in cooperation at Nalanda Deemed University in November 2010 to make a basis for confidence building.
- The action with the title of ‘Peace through Tourism’ to be continued as a part of the 150 years of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore with the support of Visva-Bharati Study Circle was proposed by Mr.Sandip Basu Sarbhadhikary.
- The UN bodies including ADB working in the Indian subcontinent will be requested to nurture the agenda of ‘Cross-Border Tourism for Peace’.
- Mr.Ajoy Roy suggested the Natural, Cultural and Economical status Audio Visual documentation of all the border areas.