

Supreme Court Limits Tiger Safaris To Non-Forest Land, Bans Night Tourism

The new directions aim at reversing large-scale ecological damage inside the tiger reserves.

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Tiger safaris must not fall within recognised tiger corridors: Supreme Court

Tiger tourism in India is set for a significant shift after the Supreme Court issued a detailed set of directions aimed at strengthening wildlife protection across the country's reserves. The order, released as part of an 80-page judgment by Chief Justice of India B. R. Gavai, outlines new ecological safeguards that will directly influence how visitors experience tiger habitats. As per reports, the Supreme Court ruled that tiger safaris can only be established on non-forest or degraded forest land located within buffer areas. Crucially, these sites must not fall within recognised tiger corridors, which act as vital movement pathways for wildlife.

The bench, comprising Chief Justice Gavai and Justices A. G. Masih and A. S. Chandurkar, accepted findings from a court-appointed expert panel examining ecological breaches at Uttarakhand's Jim Corbett Tiger Reserve. The judges held "categorically" that no [safari operations](#) will be permitted in core or critical tiger habitats.

Any safari allowed in buffer zones must be linked to a full-fledged rescue and rehabilitation centre for conflict-prone, injured or abandoned tigers, ensuring tourism aligns with conservation priorities.



Clear Framework For Eco-Sensitive Zones

As per reports, on the extent of Eco-Sensitive Zones (ESZs) for the tiger reserves, the court said, "the formulation of ESZs for these tiger reserves will abide by the letter dated 23rd April 2018 issued by the MoEF&CC,

which clarifies that the minimum area comprised in the ESZs will be the buffer or fringe area of the Tiger Reserve."

All states have been instructed to notify ESZ boundaries within one year, a move that will affect future tourism infrastructure planning.

Banned Activities In Tiger Reserves

To protect fragile ecosystems, the Supreme Court prohibited several activities within buffer and fringe zones, including:

- Commercial mining
- Sawmills and polluting industries
- Major hydroelectric projects
- Introduction of exotic species
- Hazardous substance production
- Unauthorised tree felling
- Low-flying aircraft and tourism flights
- Discharge of waste into natural ecosystems

Limited road-widening and regulated night-time vehicular movement may continue, but under strict oversight.

Tourism Development To Be Regulated

Infrastructure in buffer areas must comply with ESZ rules under the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986. As per reports, the court stated that ecotourism "cannot resemble mass tourism".

New resorts may be permitted only if they follow eco-friendly principles, and none will be allowed inside identified wildlife corridors. The order also encourages homestays and community-run establishments, signalling a

shift towards local, sustainable tourism models. For travellers, the ruling brings a renewed emphasis on responsible tourism.

No Night Tourism And No Phones In Core Zones

Visitors should also expect stricter behaviour norms. The Supreme Court has prohibited night tourism entirely and banned the use of mobile phones within tourist zones in core habitats.

Where public roads cut through critical habitats, only emergency vehicles will be allowed between dusk and dawn.

States Asked To Revise Conservation Plans

To bring uniformity across reserves, the court directed states to prepare or update their Tiger [Conservation Plans](#) within three months and formally notify core and buffer areas within six months.

What This Means For Travellers

For those planning a trip to India's tiger reserves, the experience will now be shaped by tighter conservation rules, reduced human disturbance, and an emphasis on sustainability. Safaris may shift towards buffer zones, night access will cease, and the focus will increasingly move from high-traffic tourism to quieter, eco-sensitive exploration.