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## **TOUR GUIDING PROFESSION IN INDIA TRANSITIONING TO MERE FACILITATION: WILL THE TOUR GUIDING PROFESSION BECOME REDUNDANT?**

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### **ABSTRACT**

A decade ago, tourism in India recognized the tour guiding profession as a prestigious and skill-intensive domain supported by structured training programmes. The Ministry of Tourism (MoT) traditionally held the responsibility for training and accrediting regional-level guides. Over the years, however, a diversification of authorities—including the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change, and several state tourism departments—has led to varied approaches to guide training. On the supply side, a significant proportion of existing guides operate as freelancers, navigating an evolving demand landscape. This paper presents a critical analysis of the emerging gap between professionally trained tour guides and the rise of facilitation-based models. By examining the shift in tourist behaviour, training patterns, and intermediary practices, the paper evaluates whether tour guiding services continue to be effectively utilized or are transitioning toward redundancy.

**KEYWORDS:** Tour guiding, tour facilitation, tourism intermediaries, redundancy.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Indian tourism industry has witnessed a shift in discourse regarding the relevance and demand for professional tour guides, particularly within the rapidly expanding domestic tourism market. While international tourists continue to prefer licensed guides for quality assurance and interpretation, domestic tourists increasingly design their own itineraries and

rely minimally on travel intermediaries. As a result, the demand for professional guiding services appears inconsistent and genre-specific.

Government tourism departments list licensed guides primarily due to statutory and publicity obligations, while Online Travel Agencies (OTAs) and private operators selectively engage guides only when necessary. The challenge for trained guides lies not only in meeting the evolving expectations of Gen Z and tech-enabled tourists but also in adjusting to shifting trends in experience consumption.

Guide training programmes in India vary widely depending on the nature of the attraction. ASI-sponsored trainings aim to promote cultural appreciation beyond sightseeing, while other departments, such as forest and environmental ministries, focus on niche genres like wildlife guiding. However, these programmes are episodic, seasonal, and driven by fluctuating tourist needs.

To understand the perceived redundancy of tour guides, it is essential to interpret trends in domestic travel behaviour, which often substitutes professional guides with informal, contextual, or digital sources of information.

**Table 1: Researcher's Memoirs as Tour Guide Trainer at IITTM.**

<b>Genre</b>	<b>Probability of Hiring a Tour Guide</b>	<b>Themes</b>	<b>Suppliers / Intermediaries</b>
Pilgrimage	Less probable	Temple priests, ritual guides	OTAs, travel intermediaries, hotels, transport companies
Nature & Wildlife	Mandatory / Highly probable	Naturalists, wildlife guards	Forest departments
Adventure	Less probable	Adventure instructors (often ex-service personnel)	Adventure tour operators, ground handlers
Family & Vacation	Less probable	Tour managers lead groups; minimal guiding	Traditional intermediaries
Honeymoon	Very low probability	Privacy-oriented travel; driver accompanies	OTAs, private intermediaries
Heritage	Highly probable	UNESCO World Heritage Sites	International travel companies, DMCs
Educational Travel	Highly probable	Educational tours require guides	Educational institutions via registered operators

### **Codes:**

- Limited avenues for guides across several tourism genres
- Guides essential primarily for heritage, nature, and adventure segments
- Intermediaries and hospitality entities selectively assign guides

## **2. Previous Studies on Tour Guides**

Research on tour guiding varies significantly across global contexts. In India, the earlier three-tier guiding system has now been replaced with an all-India "Tourist Facilitator" framework introduced by the Ministry of Tourism. Asian countries such as Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and Cambodia position tour guiding as a professionalized and regulated occupation, whereas several European nations recognize it as a specialized career due to strong demand from international tourists.

Demand elasticity has created a fragmented professional landscape: guides trained at municipal, state, or national levels now operate as independent entities. Travel intermediaries do not uniformly require guide services across tourism genres, while licensed guides themselves often avoid frequent assignments due to low remuneration or inconsistent demand. Hospitality enterprises also tend to offer lobby-based opportunities for guides to canvas potential clients.

The risk of redundancy is most pronounced among full-time professional guides whose livelihood depends solely on guiding and who are recognized through official awards or district-level certifications. Their deep commitment to heritage interpretation often limits their flexibility to diversify into other tourism roles.

### **Characteristics of Full-Time Heritage Tour Guides (Word Cloud Interpretation)**

- Low tolerance for illegal tourism practices
- Frequent engagement with government authorities regarding maintenance of heritage sites
- Personal financial contribution to conservation efforts
- Regular opposition to commercial exploitation of heritage spaces
- Formation of niche groups focused on history, archaeology, and culture
- Limited network of trade partners
- Reluctance to establish independent tourism enterprises

These characteristics highlight why heritage guides remain deeply invested in their profession and yet face growing marginalization in a shifting tourism ecosystem.

### 3. Research Design

Redundancy in tour guiding must be examined through the perspective of travel intermediaries, who actively design packages and understand tourist expectations. A set of professional tour operators was selected, and an open-ended question was administered to evaluate the future necessity of tour guides:

#### Research Question:

*“In a fast-paced and dynamic tourism environment, will the use of tour guides move toward need-based assignments, or will freelance guiding continue to coexist as a parallel model?”*

Pond’s dimensions of tour guiding were shared with respondents to understand their perceived relevance.

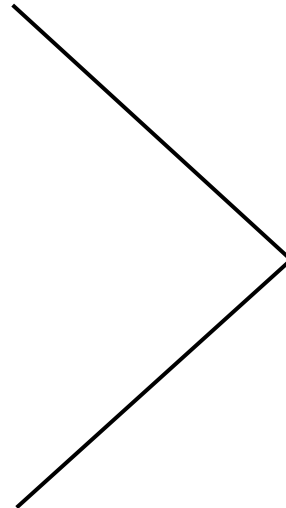
### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Pond’s Dimension	Weightage (Average)	Interpretation
Leader	75%	Facilitation
Educator	5%	Interpretation minimal
Host	10%	Comfort management
Tour Manager	10%	Crisis management

The responses indicate a strong shift toward the **facilitator role**, with reduced emphasis on deep interpretation or educational functions. As tourism transitions toward experience management, the traditional role of a guide—especially one focused on narration and historical interpretation—faces a decline in perceived necessity.

Emerging travel patterns such as staycations, budget-conscious micro-travel, and digital nomadism further reduce the demand for structured guiding. With unpredictable budgets and preferences, travel intermediaries find it increasingly difficult to predict tourist behaviour, leading to inconsistent engagement of professional guides.

**Facilitator**



S.No	Ponds Dimension of Tour Guides	Weightage given in points out of 10-Average	Importance given to the dimensions
1.	Leader	75%	Facilitating
2.	Educator	5%	Interpretation
3.	Host	10%	Making a person comfortable
4.	Tour Manager	10%	Crisis Manager

**Key Inferences for Policy Makers and Government**

- Training programmes for tour guides must align with evolving consumer expectations and digital behaviour patterns.
- Freelance guiding should be liberalised through clear policy frameworks to expand professional opportunities.
- Awareness campaigns are required among tourists and intermediaries to promote the value of hiring trained guides.

In conclusion, while facilitation may increasingly serve the needs of modern tourists, the expertise of trained tour guides remains essential for heritage-based and interpretation-heavy tourism. The profession is not redundant but is undergoing a structural transformation.

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