



(An initiative of Caritas-Goa and Council of Justice and Peace)
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In solidarity with
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Proposed Operational Policy for Tourist Taxi Owners and Drivers in Goa

Introduction

Tourism is one of the biggest revenue earners for the Government of Goa. However, the facts show that those who really make the tourism industry work are not the main beneficiaries of tourism in Goa. The tourist taxi owners and drivers constitute a significant part of the local population employed in tourism and provide an essential, dedicated and preferred transport service for the industry, and should therefore be given an equitable and fair share of the benefits of tourism.

In this charter we are conveying a set of Operational Proposals on the behalf of the tourist taxi drivers and owners, which address some pressing issues concerning them, and which need to be adopted and implemented by the Government at the earliest. These measures will undoubtedly have a positive effect on the quality of the transport system serving the tourists, thereby improving the image of Goa as a tourist destination.

The Centre for Responsible Tourism and the Federation of Associations of Tourist Taxi Owners and Drivers are prepared to enter into a dialogue with the Government, if necessary, to help resolve these long pending issues of significant social and economic importance.

Background

Background of Tourism in general

In the mid seventies, the State Govt. realized the tremendous potential of developing the Tourism Sector. With the backing of the Central Govt. and the support of the 'Tourism Barons' and other promoters, Tourism was promoted as a 'Zero Pollution', high income generating industry.

After the 80's, the Tourism Industry flourished as is evident in the increase in the number of hotels, flights and tourists over the years. The 'Backpackers' and 'Chartered Tourists' rushed to Goa, which was promoted as the "most sought after tourist destination". Table No. I¹ traces the growth of Tourist inflow into Goa. It can be seen that in 1970-71 the figure for total tourists visiting Goa stood at 1,11,040, of which foreign tourist were merely 5,960 and domestic tourist were 1,05,080. There has been a continuous growth of Tourist inflow since, and in 2007-08 the same figure stood at 25,97,443. The number of domestic tourist were 22,08,986 and foreign tourist stood at 3,88,457. Most of the tourist flow is concentrated in the months from October to May, with a peak during December and January.

Table I

Year	Tourist Arrivals in Goa			Share of Foreign Tourist
	Domestic	Foreign	Total	
1974-75	1,71,239	10,400	1,81,639	5.7
1979-80	3,24,814	30,778	3,55,592	8.7
1984-85	6,07,727	62,265	6,69,992	9.3
1989-90	7,71,013	91,430	8,62,443	10.6
1994-95	8,49,404	2,10,191	10,59,595	19.8
1999-00	9,60,114	2,84,298	12,44,412	22.8
2000-01	9,76,804	2,91,709	12,68,513	23.0
2001-02	11,20,242	2,60,071	13,80,313	18.8
2002-03	13,25,296	2,71,645	15,96,941	17.0
2003-04	17,38,330	2,91,408	20,29,738	14.4
2004-05	20,85,729	3,62,230	24,47,959	14.8
2005-06	19,65,343	3,36,803	23,02,146	14.6
2006-07	20,98,654	3,80,414	24,79,068	15.3
2007-08	22,08,986	3,88,457	25,97,443	15.0

¹ - source of table I

A significant growth in the number of hotels in Goa has also been seen². Their number has increased from 508 in 1989 to 1,933 in 2003 (p) to 2,444 in 2008. The room capacity has increased from 6,660 in 1989 to 17,342 in 2003 (p) to 21,869 in 2008, and the bed capacity has increased from 10,369 to 33,139 to 41,031 over the same period.

Today, there is a significant growth in charter flights³ also. Their number increased from 24 flights per annum in 1985-86 transporting about 3,568 tourists, to 690 flights and 1,58,993 tourists in 2004-05, and to 720 flights and 1,69,836 tourists in 2006-07. Most of the Chartered Flights and foreign tourist arrivals are concentrated between November and March.

Background of the Transport Services for Tourism

At the nascent stage, tourism in Goa was serviced by local buses, black-and-yellow taxis, and a few motorcycle pilots on select routes. Gradually, as a result of the rise in numbers of tourists, the existing modes were found inadequate to meet the demand. In addition, the typical foreign tourist had changed from being a 'hippy', to a conventional holiday maker, who now demanded better transport services. Hence, in the early 80s, a new form of taxi called the 'tourist taxi' was successfully introduced. The tourist taxis have remained the mainstay of the transport services for tourists in Goa ever since, in spite of the various difficulties faced by this predominantly local group of stakeholders.

The advent of tourist taxis was not only a boon for the tourists, but also the only avenue for self-employment for a number of local youth, who were left without their traditional means of livelihood, as a result of tourism. Many locals ventured into the tourist taxi sector successfully and whole-heartedly. Today this sector employs more than 1000 persons directly, thereby securing the lives of an equal number of families.

In the early 90s, Goa witnessed laissez-faire, free for all, uncontrolled growth of a new mode of transport, supposedly to improve transport services to the tourist – namely, tour and travel coaches. Over the years the number of tourist coaches has increased substantially, primarily as the buses also carry out local tours and other services traditionally provided by the tourist taxis. The tourist taxis have to face restrictive and unfair practices, thereby severely diminishing the earning opportunities promised to the self-employed, local, tourist taxi owners and drivers. Thus, the benefits of tourism are being denied to the local community, in whose name the tourism was advocated in Goa in the early 80s. This also goes completely against the policy of the Department of Tourism, expressed as 'Involvement of local people to the maximum extent possible in the tourism related development activities'⁴. Equally importantly, the misuse of buses to maximize corporate gains has considerably lowered the quality of transport services to the tourist, while charging double the rates offered by the tourist taxis, thereby damaging the image of Goa as a tourist destination.

The tourist taxi owners and drivers face a number of other hurdles also, which are also substantially addressed in the operational policy proposed below.

² - source of hotels data

³ - source of charter flights data

⁴ - 'Tourism Master Plan : Goa – 2011' of the Tourism Dept, Goa Govt, Ch. 17, Sheet 13, Sec 17.5.9 (i)

Objectives of the Proposed Operational Policy

The objectives that have guided the preparation of this proposal are :

- To promote harmonious relations among the various stakeholders involved in the tourism sector
- To safeguard equal opportunity and other constitutional rights, and to promote just and equitable State policies, especially with regard to tourism
- To safeguard the livelihoods of the self-employed locals employed in the tourist taxi sector, and to create further self-employment opportunities for the locals
- To have wider diffusion of gains amongst the local community
- To create social security and recognition for the lower placed participants in tourism industry in general, and for tourist taxi owners/ drivers in particular
- To promote sustainable and responsible tourism based on local culture, ethics and moral values

The Proposed Operational Policy

1. Equal treatment by Hotels

After the recent growth of charter tours and tour operators, hotels have started creating unfair conditions favoring the tour operators, thereby adversely affecting the interests of the tourist taxi drivers. Instead of recognizing the tremendous service given by the tourist taxi drivers over the years, the hotels are now subjecting them to unequal and unfair practices. For example,

- “Reps” (foreigners carrying out travel related business in Goa, see 2 below) are allowed full access to the Hotel lobbies, where they freely carry out deals and negotiations, completely excluding the taxi drivers.
- The hotels encourage counters for the tour operators, while the taxi drivers are denied equal opportunity. The Leela Hotel, Majorda Beach Resort and Cidade de Goa have even removed taxi counters that were existing earlier.
- Tourists are denied access to taxis. Only the offers of tour operators are exhibited within the hotel lobbies. It is essential that prices and offers of both taxi drivers and tour operators are displayed at the same place within the lobby in order to end the ongoing discrimination against taxi drivers.
- Sometimes hotels go to the extent of warning tourists not to travel by taxis. For example, tourists have been told in the past that they would lose insurance cover if they travel by taxis.

As a result of the discrimination by the Hotels, not only are the local, self-employed tourist taxi drivers denied their legitimate interests in the Tourism industry, but the tourists are also denied their

legitimate rights as consumers. This has reduced the quality of local travel services, which is so important to the success of the tourism industry.

The hotels shall start treating the taxi drivers equally vis-à-vis tour operators, especially with regards to counter space, exhibition of prices, and opportunity.

2. Illegal business by foreigners

Tour operators are generally companies that offer package tours to a particular destination. As a result of the rapid growth of charter tourism, many foreign-based tour operators have opened offices in Goa.

The “rep” is a recent creation of this charter tourism, which has badly hit the legitimate interests of locals, especially the tourist taxi owners and drivers. “Reps” are persons, usually of foreign origin, such as Russians and Britons, who carry out the business of local guides and holiday managers within Goan territory. These “reps” are promoted by the tour operators and monopolise large chunks of the local travel-and-guide business. Legally speaking, the “reps” do not have any work permits and hence are not entitled to carry out business, trade or profession within India. The large number of local, self-employed taxi owners and drivers are being deprived of their legitimate means of sustenance due to Government inaction, which is also aiding the siphoning of substantial local revenue to foreign countries. As this illegal siphoning is adversely affecting the State revenues, it is imperative that immediate measures are taken to stop this illegal business.

It is also pointed out that “reps” charge exorbitant rates and dupe the tourists. They never use tourist taxis from the taxi stands at the hotels, as the taxi-drivers would satisfy the needs of the tourists without charging excessive rates. Instead, they employ coaches, or other taxis, or private vehicles operating without necessary licenses. The presence of the “rep” allows the vehicle to pick up other foreigners from any hotel, which is otherwise not allowed. In addition, the “reps” exploit the private car/ non-tourist taxi drivers by paying meager amounts, thereby further starving the local economy of its rightful income.

On the other hand the tourist taxi drivers, being locals, are far better equipped than the “reps” to guide the tourists. The tourist taxi rates are much cheaper and end up being about half of what is charged by the “rep”. While the local taxi driver has always been and shall always be honest, the “rep” does not have the same sense of belonging and ownership. The taxi driver invariably assumes the role of a tour guide as necessary, and also gives the tourist the advantage of his local knowledge, leaving him feeling truly satisfied.

Stop the illegal business carried out by foreign “reps” within Goan territory by strictly enforcing the existing provisions of law. No such activities shall be allowed in the forthcoming season, especially in view of the siphoning of State and National

revenue to foreign countries. Hotels and tour operators must take necessary measures to stop the tourism-related business activities of unlicensed foreigners.

3. Financial assistance

A need for new and luxury taxis is being felt by the tourism industry today. This financial demand has been directly placed on local, unemployed youth, who depend upon financial institutions for finance in order to enter the tourist taxi industry. Banks are generally reluctant to finance an applicant in the absence of adequate security, thereby forcing the prospective taxi owner to approach finance companies instead. These institutions charge exorbitant rates of interest, sometimes in the range of 15-16 %, and the taxi owner is also subjected to additional hidden costs. This adversely affects the tourist taxi owners' ability to succeed in his endeavour. Further, failure to pay often leads to 'lifting of the vehicle'. As a result of this, the tourist taxi owners are always under financial stress, leading to the following problems:

- Distress sale by helpless taxi owners.
- Encourages unethical means of earning.
- Discourages genuine prospective tourist taxi owners, and thereby increases unemployment in the coastal areas, creating other social problems, such as alcoholism, illegal trade, drug peddling and prostitution.

The subsidy currently given by the Government for the purchase of tourist taxis is about 5 % only. The procedure for availing of this subsidy requires the taxi owner to pay the entire amount first, after which he has to file an affidavit and follow other procedures, which take another three months or so before the subsidy benefits can be availed.

In line with the current Government policies, we propose that the following financial assistance package⁵ be provided to the taxi owners:

- **30 % subsidy for upgrading taxis and taxi services**
- **Subsidy benefits to be available at the time of the purchase**
- **6 months repayment holiday for finance received towards upgrading taxis**
- **Interest rates to be 3 % lower than normal bank rates**

This financial package shall be made available only for owner-driven taxis. The badge issued by the Directorate of Transport shall also be mandatory for getting the benefits of the financial package.

4. Equal opportunity for taxis

Since the 1980s, the tourist taxi industry has always been show-cased as a successful avenue for the local youth, who have been economically displaced by tourism, for self-employment. However, the reality today is that the policies are not implemented. Due to the uncontrolled growth of the number of coaches, their operators have started the practice of herding assorted tourists from 5-star hotels

⁵ It is suggested that EDC be selected as the agency to provide the financial package.

and resorts together for local 'tours'. As a result, both the quality of high-end tourism and the income of the local youth employed in the taxi industry have dropped steadily. Today, the use of coaches by illegal foreigners, also called as "reps", and who are actively promoted by tour operators, is resulting in low quality, high priced services being forced upon unwitting tourists, while denying equal opportunity to the local taxi industry. Every coach that collects 15 to 30 honeymoon couples and takes them on a day tour, denies 15 to 30 local self-employed youth their livelihoods as promised under the Tourism Policy. Further, each tourist ends up paying double the fare in spite of the lower quality of service.

Large-sized tour operators and some hotels carry out a variety of tourism-related services to supplement their main activities, often competing with local interests, such as tourist taxi owners and drivers. The local communities, who have already lost their traditional means of livelihood to the tourism industry, are now again losing their legitimate rights, only due to corporate greed. Further, taxis are a much superior mode of transport than coaches, offering flexibility, privacy and independence. In order to change the cheap image of Goa generated by the tours conducted by tourist buses, so that quality tourists come to Goa in the future, taxis must be allowed and encouraged to provide these specific services, without unequal competition from the coaches.

In order to maintain and improve the quality of transport service to the tourists, and to safeguard the legitimate interests of the tourist taxi drivers and owners, it is necessary that the use of coaches be confined to airport departures and arrivals, and for engagements by single groups of tourists only.

5. Social Security

The tourism industry employs a large number of lowly paid workers in various sectors such as hotels, restaurants and transport, who form the backbone of this industry. These workers are often employed only for the tourist season and therefore left unemployed for more than half the year. These workers have no guarantee of work the next year and are also not provided with any of the mandatory benefits or safeguards against exploitation guaranteed under the Constitution of India and by the United Nations Charter. Taxi drivers come under the class of tourism industry workers and must be included as beneficiaries of a social security system to be implemented in order to benefit all such workers in the tourism industry.

It is therefore urged that the taxi drivers, who are providing yeoman services to the cause of the tourism industry of Goa, be provided with Social Security in general, and, pension similar to the Dayanand Social Security scheme, health benefits such as ESI and insurance including mediclaim or similar medical cover, in particular.

6. Facilities and amenities at taxi stands

Taxi stands are mostly situated outside hotels and resorts. The taxi drivers wait at the stands for the entire day, except when engaged.

The relevant authorities, or the relevant hotel/ resort, must provide reasonable basic provisions such as toilets, wash rooms, rest room and parking spaces at tourist taxi stands with which they are concerned, before the beginning of the coming season. New hotels must be required by law to provide for these basic needs from inception.

7. The Transport Department's requirement for affidavits

The transport department has an unusual requirement that a prospective tourist taxi driver must make an affidavit stating that the taxi shall be operated from his residence only. This requirement is obviously arbitrary, causing unnecessary harassment to the taxi owners.

The requirement for the said affidavit shall be removed by amending/ revoking any legislation or order in force providing for such a requirement, or by issuing orders to the relevant authorities, or by taking any other steps, as necessary.

8. Badges

The prerequisites to be fulfilled by an applicant for the grant of a tourist taxi driver badge shall be three years experience after obtaining driving license, good character and a residence certificate.

9. Grant of NOC

Presently the concerned hotel is required to give a NOC to prospective taxi drivers in order for him to apply for a permit. This places undue discretion in the hands of the hotels, who may use it to exact revenge on persons who have asserted their rights, or to force the taxi drivers to support the hotel's private interests in local social, economic and environmental issues. It is necessary that this discretion in the hands of hotels is replaced by the consensual wisdom of the concerned association, guided by clearly understood principles based on equality and justice.

The NOC for the use of a taxi stand by a taxi driver, which is required to be submitted for obtaining a tourist taxi permit, shall be issued by the taxi association responsible for that particular stand.

10. Airport Operations

The parking fee at the Dabolim airport starts from Rs. 60/- for three hours. This is many times more than the national standards, as the fees at Delhi, Bangalore and Bombay airports for the same time duration are Rs. 10/-, Rs. 5/- and Rs. 5/- respectively. The parking facility is inadequate and below average standards, and therefore does not justify such a steep amount.

A second problem with the Airport operations is that the existing taxi counter within the terminal building is not managed by any local taxi association.

- **Airport parking fees shall be reduced to Rs. 10/- per 3 hours for a normal tourist taxi and shall be proportionately reduced for larger taxis.**
- **The Airport Arrivals taxi counter shall be handed over to the black and yellow taxis association, in view of their traditional rights.**

11. Harassment by Traffic Police

The taxi drivers, when carrying passengers, are sometimes targeted by the traffic police for harassment. The helpless taxi driver is then forced to oblige the demand for a bribe, as he is faced with the policeman's threat to hold back the taxi and delay the tourist(s), thereby ruining the driver's business and reputation.

Harassment by the traffic police must stop, and must be replaced by trust arising from the recognition of the discipline and dedication generally associated with tourist taxi drivers.

12. Regulation of coaches, private car and other operators

Though the tourist taxis which have all legal permissions are strictly regulated by the RTO, private cars which illegally carry tourists, coaches and other operators fail to be prevented, or adequately regulated. Even though instances of illegal tourist taxi business being carried out by private cars have been brought to the notice of the authorities in the past, no action has been taken. The failure to regulate these other modes of transport for tourists has led to the proliferation of some legally and morally questionable alternatives, at the cost of the genuine interests of the taxi drivers.

The alternate transport services for tourists as provided by private cars, coaches and others shall also be strictly regulated by the RTO and other relevant authorities.

13. Tourism tax

The present procedure for collection of the tax is unnecessary and inconvenient, as it requires payments at regular intervals.

Tourism tax shall be collected every ten years.

14. Uniforms

A change from the present full white uniform is demanded, which shall better suit the local weather and the ubiquitous red mud.

The present taxi uniform shall be replaced by a new uniform, which shall be a white shirt and a black trouser.

Social Obligations

This is not only a declaration of the commitment of the tourist taxi owners and drivers to continue upholding high standards of ethics and responsibility towards tourists and the society, but also a testimony of their resolve to attain new standards of customer service, mutual co-operation, fraternity-towards-all and self-respect within the tourism industry. This 'dawn' heralds a fresh beginning, where hope, diligence and creativity promise to bring new vigour into the lives and livelihoods of these local, self-employed, responsible entrepreneurs.

It is a fact that all the associations of tourist taxi owners and drivers maintain disciplinary and ethical rules for themselves, which are strictly enforced, thereby resulting in the uniformity of standards currently maintained by the tourist taxis. In addition to these rules and regulations, the following social obligations have been agreed to be accepted and honoured by all the associations and their members. This declaration of substantive and procedural provisions, which shall be implemented through the existing associations and supportive institutions and mechanisms, reflects the current need for heightened awareness of new challenges and duties that are incidental to the tourism industry and its future growth.

1. Helpline

It is agreed that in order to meet international standards of customer service, to achieve a greater sense of security in the minds of the tourists and the others, and to provide a speedy response to complaints, queries and feedback, all the tourist taxis shall clearly display the 'helpline' telephone number. This telephone number shall be attended to by trained operators on a 24x7 basis and, once operational, shall provide an easily accessible, accountable and independent contact point for registering specific complaints and suggestions.

2. Self-regulation and Discipline

This policy document declares the decision of the taxi owners and drivers to constitute a mechanism for self-regulation. Every association shall adopt and implement the social obligations listed in this policy as amendments to their current rules and regulations. Further tiers of the self-regulatory mechanism shall be provided through bodies created by FATTOD, with the help of the Centre for Responsible Tourism and the Tourism Department.

All internal disputes, as well as other disputes concerning tourist taxi operations, shall be resolved by the concerned Association. FATTOD shall be called upon for mediation, if necessary. Further, the above described regulatory bodies shall be called upon for arbitration or for redressal by alternate means, as far as possible.

3. Fare Rates

Approved fare rates will be displayed/ made available on request in each taxi. Uniform rates shall be levied across all Associations for similar services.

4. Zero incidents of drinking-and-driving

It is solemnly resolved that all the taxi associations shall adopt and strictly implement stringent rules related to drinking on duty, and ensure that not only are offences related to drunken driving completely eliminated, but that necessary thought, beliefs and customs are encouraged within the fraternity.

5. Pedophilia

The taxi drivers shall keep an active watch for pedophilia and report any suspicious behaviour immediately to the 'helpline' number, which shall call 1098 for the necessary intervention. NGOs such as CRG and Jan Ugahi shall provide necessary assistance and training.

6. No drugs and narcotics

No taxi drivers shall allow his taxi to be used for drugs/ narcotics dealings and shall inform the authorities in all such cases. Awareness programs shall be held for all tourist taxi drivers as necessary.

7. No Sex Tourism

In order to help the authorities control and regulate the threat of growing prostitution-tourism nexus, all tourist taxi associations shall ensure that no drivers are involved in, or actively abet or aid prostitution.

8. Training and awareness

FATTOD and all the Associations, with the help of Centre for Responsible Tourism and the Tourism Department, shall arrange training for language and other skills, as necessary. Awareness programs shall also be arranged to ensure the successful implementation of the policy.

Policy Implementation

It is necessary to form a working group which shall facilitate and supervise the implementation of this policy.

The working group shall consist of five representatives of the tourist taxi owners and drivers, two representatives of Caritas, Goa and CSJP, and five representatives of the Government and its relevant agencies. It is suggested that the Director of Tourism be the ex-officio Convener of this working group.

Conclusion

One of the fundamental principles shared by FATTOD and the Centre for Responsible Tourism is affirming the imperative to 'democratize tourism'. In other words, we seek to place the planning and implementation of tourism policy and practice in the realm of a government-people partnership. Our intent is to work with the various stakeholders of tourism to protect and advance their genuine interests. By creating rallying spaces, we seek to promote and find solutions through dialogue with the government.

Goa could well be the popular tourist destination which acts responsibly for both the hosts and visitors. This policy is one more step in this direction.