

Tadoba Tiger Reserve Online Booking Suspended Indefinitely Due To Alleged Corruption

Online booking for the Tadoba Tiger Reserve has been suspended indefinitely, causing disruptions during the upcoming Diwali and Christmas vacations. This suspension affects various businesses such as resort bookings, gypsy bookings, and taxi reservations. The reason behind this abrupt suspension is alleged financial mismanagement within the online booking system.

The Maharashtra Forest Department has accused the WCS company, which was contracted to manage online bookings, of a staggering Rs 12 crore corruption. A formal complaint has been filed against the company, and the issue of online ticket booking has now entered the legal arena. As an interim measure, the court has ordered a halt to online booking until the matter is resolved through legal proceedings. This court decision has raised concerns among business owners who rely heavily on tourism.

There is now a growing demand for the government to explore temporary solutions while the legal case unfolds. The Chandrapur Wildlife Connectivity Solution (WCS) was the agency responsible for online booking services. Recent revelations indicate that this agency defrauded the forest department of Rs 12.15 crore. While the agency was obligated to pay Rs 22.80 crore, they only remitted Rs 10.65 crore. Despite efforts to recover the outstanding amount, the agency refused to settle the remaining sum. This breach of contract between the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve and the agency has led to a formal complaint against the contracting agency and its owners, Abhishek Vinodkumar Thakur and Rohit Vinodkumar Thakur. This complaint was filed by Zonal Forest Officer Sachin Shinde.

The repercussions of this financial irregularity have extended to gypsy drivers, whose salaries were impacted by the non-payment. There are 338 gypsies operating in the Tadoba Tiger Reserve, providing transportation services for tourists during jungle safaris. The outstanding amount owed to these drivers is estimated to be in the range of Rs 3 to Rs 4 crore.

The website commonly used by tourists to book jungle safaris for the Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve, Mytadoba.org, had been managed by a private company for the past three years. However, this contract was terminated on June 1 of this year. Gypsy drivers claim that the delay in payment is a result of the funds collected through bookings not being handed over to the Tadoba administration by the responsible party. In contrast, the Tadoba administration acknowledges the delay in fund collection, attributing it to the need to calculate earnings for the year after Tadoba's closure from July 1.