



Bonbibi's Journey

An Experiential Tour Script: From Sundarbans Tiger Conservation to Nodi-Matrik Bangladesh and Global Warming

Last Updated: September 2023

Total Tour Duration: 1 hour

Tour Location: Stationary setting, ideally aboard TOAS boats in main communal/dining areas

Tour Summary for EcoGuides

Bangladesh has always coexisted with water. At least 230 rivers crisscross a flowing landscape and the largest river delta in the world, the Ganges-Brahmaputra or Sundarbans Delta, empties into the Bay of Bengal. As global warming intensifies, nonetheless, floods, monsoons, cyclones, tidal waves, sea level rise, and saltwater intrusion also intensify in a region already famous for an intermingling of riverways and some of the highest human population densities in the world. Consequently, the government has responded in part with numerous expensive engineering projects to hold back and harness the forces of nature (hydro, coal, megabridges, embankments, mass irrigation and flood control). These projects have been in large measure less productive than expected. True development, however, requires more than just building things. It also requires changes in individual minds and skills as well as culture. These changes can be seen very clearly in the Sundarbans where the culture and relationship between humans and tigers has been evolving to accommodate the needs of both. The changes in mind and culture in this largest mangrove system in the world with the national icon should inspire Bangladeshis as the country confronts the increasingly powerful effects of global warming.

Tour Introduction

1. **Play** the audio of a tiger roar starting from silence.
2. **Introduction** with a dramatic narrative of a tiger attack.
3. **Say**, “One day while collecting honey in the woods, Sanjay heard the sudden take off of several egrets not more than 20 meters away....”. Tell the rest of the story.
4. **Ensure** that fear emerges from the story. The hook should instill the fear and violence of tiger attacks as seen prior to any work by WildTeam.
5. **Say**: “The tiger may be even more fearsome, more evil than it first appears. Tradition has it that the Sundarbans were once ruled over by a demon king named Dakshin Ray who could take the form of tigers and attack people. He ruled and controlled the forest for a long time. But his rule, as you will see, would come to an end.”

Stop 1: Introduction: Feared Demon of the Forest

Principal idea: Tigers were once feared demons of the Sundarbans forests.

Time: 10 minutes

Tour Objects & Visual Aids

- Photo of Bengal Tiger & Parts in Trade
- Photo of illegal Tiger products
- Tiger roar audio on phone

Tour Script

1. **Say**, “Welcome aboard the [name of boat], [name of tour operator] is very glad to have you. My name is [state your name] and I am going to take you on an adventure and you don’t even have to leave this room. This trip will last about 60 minutes and if you need the bathroom [points in the right direction]. Are you ready?”
2. **Say**, “And just in case you people from the city thought that real tiger attacks only happened long ago, do know that there are about [300 people and 46 tigers have been killed](#) since 2000 in human-tiger conflicts in Bangladesh’s Sundarbans. For a very long time, people were very fearful of tigers. They stayed inside at night and if by the bad luck of Dakshin, one of your family members was killed by a tiger, you wouldn’t dare try to retrieve his body. That would take you exactly to a location you know a tiger prowls. This relationship based on fear was not only bad for villagers who lived around the Sundarbans, but it was bad for the tiger as well. Any tiger who wandered into a village was sure to attract the attention of armed villagers bent on killing the tiger. Sometimes tigers didn’t even have to go into a village. The villagers would go after him or her with weapons or sometimes they would leave poisoned food.”
3. **Say**, “But villager conflicts with tigers were not the only problem the striped cats had to face. They had to face poachers, loss of their habitat, and even cyclones and tidal waves. For example after the tidal wave in 2007 washed through the forest, some tigers were found drowned....
4. **Ask the question...**” Speaking of poaching, do you know which parts of the tiger people can use and sell?” Wait for the guests to give their answers.
5. **Say**, “*All* tiger body parts have a market value; their bones are used in traditional medicines or boiled down to make tiger bone glue or steeped in wine, their skins are used as rugs or clothing, their teeth and claws are made into trinkets and amulets, their meat consumed, even their whiskers are highly prized in illegal markets.”
6. **Say**, “Though the tiger may be perceived as the king or demon of the forest, still, in the past 20 years its population has dropped from somewhere around 440 to 114 today. It is still safer to be a villager than a Royal Bengal Tiger!”

Transition

Say, “Though villagers around the Sundarbans felt fear because of the tiger, that state of affairs would come to an end, and just in time for the survival of the TRUE king of the forest.”

Flip Chart

Tiger Parts in Trade

WHISKERS | gifted as small trinket
toothache remedy

TEETH | talismans, jewellery & gifting
remedies for rabies and asthma

BRAIN | cures laziness & pimples

FLESH | in high-flying circles, tigers
are known to have been
displayed and served at
opulent banquets
nausea, malaria, vitality

BILE | cures convulsions in children

“Wealth”
has overtaken ‘health’
as the major driver for demand of
tiger parts. The insatiable demand is
one of the greatest threats facing wild
tigers, with “tigers farms” only
fuelling demand.

BONES | steeped in wine in decorative
bottles, these are gifted or
consumed to indicate status
bones are ground into powder
and used in pills, plasters and
other remedies for rheumatism,
arthritis, impotence & poor libido

SKIN | decorative wall hangings, rugs
and taxidermy
treating mental illness

TAIL | treating skin ailments

CLAWS | talismans, jewellery &
gifting

BLOOD | strengthens constitution

Stop 2: Tiger Conservation in the Sundarbans

Idea principal: Humans have adapted culturally and individually to coexist with the tiger.

Time: 10 minutes

Tour Objects & Visual Aids

- Sundarbans honey candy
- Pots & pans for the VTRT “theater production”
- Photo of EcoVillage Destinations

Tour Script

1. **Say**, “No one likes to be fearful, right? Especially if that fear ends up destroying something important and beautiful like tigers. That’s why several organizations such as the [Bangladesh Forest Department](#), [WildTeam](#), and others decided to do something to change villagers' perception of tigers.”
2. **Say**, “One important innovation came from the non-profit WildTeam whose mission is to conserve wildlife, especially tigers. Now, as I said, one big problem has been when tigers come into villagers and harm people. That really got people mad enough to kill. So WildTeam decided to create **Village Tiger Response Teams**.”
3. **Ask** for 1 volunteer. EcoGuide asks that person to be the “tiger”. EcoGuide asks the volunteer to make their best Tiger “roar”, and can even jokingly **Say**, “maybe I picked the wrong tiger” so everyone has a friendly laugh.
4. **Say**, “Here we are in a village on the border of the Sundarbans. It is in the middle of the night. Suddenly a tiger wanders into the village and roars.” He points to the volunteer “tiger” to ROAR. “People jump out of bed in terror, except for the members of the Village Tiger Response Teams who jump into action! They are racing to get their tiger response weapons. What do you think it is? A gun? An explosive? A net?”
5. **Do**: Instead, the EcoGuide holds up a pot and a pan in each hand.
6. **Say**, “The members of the Village Tiger Response Teams run outside and instead of running away from the tiger they run to him. Once they see him, they begin banging their pots and pans and yelling as loud as they can at the tiger (EcoGuide bangs the pot and pan together, not TOO loud). “Now tigers usually live in the forest all alone and at night. They are actually timid and not accustomed to this racket. So they get scared and leave.” The guide gestures. “The whole village depends on the response team to be ready at a moment's notice and armed with nothing more than kitchen utensils. And for this bravery, they are rewarded with something. Do you know what it is?” EcoGuide encourages the audience to answer.
7. **Say**, “Yes, they are rewarded with respect. Villagers respect not just that they are crazy enough to take on a tiger with pots, but they have knowledge, training, and yes courage. They are highly

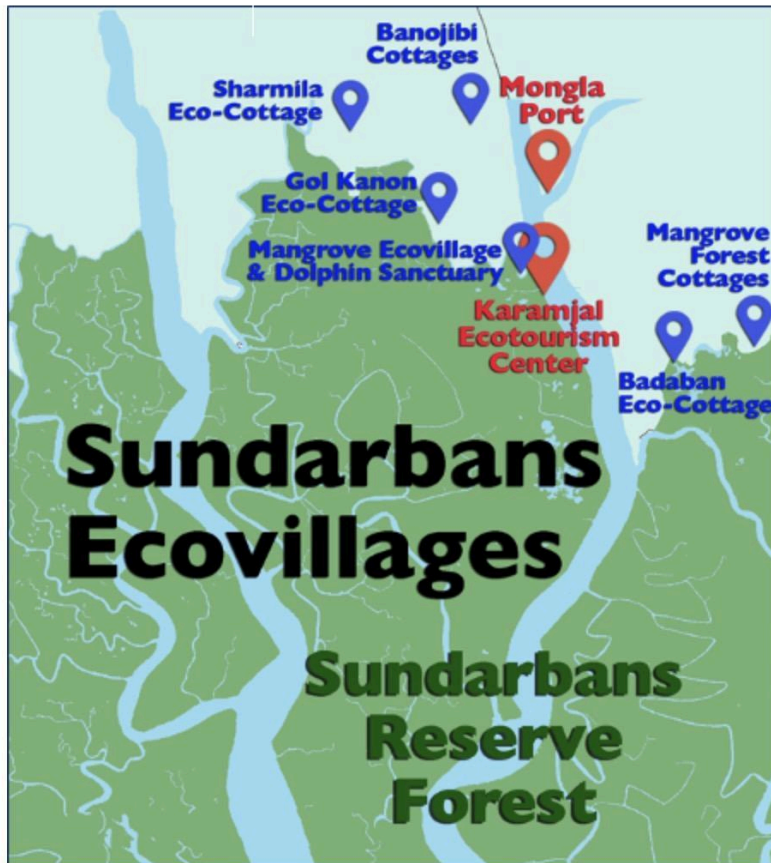
respected. Their training comes from WildTeam and now there are 49 teams in 76 villages. Pretty impressive, right?”

8. **Say**, “WildTeam and the Forestry Dept do other things that reduce the impact of tigers on people. For example, the Forestry Department will compensate people if tigers eat their animals. WildTeam also established a **Forest Tiger Response Team** who, in the unfortunate event a person is killed, will go into the forest and recover the bodies. In the past, people were too scared to go into the forest, so they left their family members to be consumed by the forest.”
9. **Say**, “Villagers haven’t changed their minds and behaviors just about tigers either. In the Sundarbans, people who used to hunt and collect plants illegally now participate in a range of non-destructive activities such as collecting nipa palm, and of course tourism. In fact, here in the Sundarbans we have a whole network of community-based tourism destinations called “EcoVillages” where you can stay in comfortable EcoCottages, experience delicious local foods, and go on nature tours and see traditional cultural performances of local songs, dance and drama.
10. **Show** photo of EcoVillages map and EcoCottages
11. **Say**, “Another organization worked with honey collectors to create a cooperative and create new honey-based products.” Guide takes out a bag but doesn’t show the contents. “Guess what I might have here?”
12. **Do**, After people guess, the guide passes around the bag of honey candy and tells everyone to try one.

Transition

Say, “Though the villagers had been fearful of tigers and now are cautious and even a little proud of the tigers. While their pride might be recent, the Royal Bengal Tiger outside has been an icon of Bangladesh for a long time. I am quite sure you might have seen more than one tiger lurking in Dhaka, no?”

Sundarbans “EcoVillage” Destinations



Stop 3: Tiger, Icon of Bangladesh

Idea principal: The Bengal tiger has become the icon locally in the Sundarbans as it has been around the world.

Time: 5 minutes

Tour Objects & Visual Aids

- Photos of logos & merchandise from National Cricket Team and other professional teams and products and the Sundarbans DMO.

Tour Script

1. **Say**, “The very power of the tiger that had scared villagers so much has also been cherished by many cultures up to and including modern Bangladesh. What is it about tigers that makes them so iconic?” Wait for answers.
2. **Ask**, “Can you name places, sports teams or products that use the tiger as its logo or inspiration in Bangladesh or abroad?” Have people respond. If they name any of the items that the guide has, take out those items at that moment. If they can pass them around, even better.
3. **Ask**, “Which is the most famous Bengal Tiger ever?” If they say Shere Khan, take out the image of him. If there is another example in Bangladesh or the world, take out that image or statue or some object representing it.
4. **Say**, “Many think it’s Shere Khan, the fictional Bengal tiger made famous in Rudyard Kipling’s “Jungle Book” and the 1967 Disney movie. The name Shere Khan roughly translates as tiger ruler, with *Shere* being the Persian word for 'tiger' and *Khan* being used as a title of distinction among the Turco-Mongol peoples, usually meaning chief or ruler. Clearly, the Bengal Tiger is a highly revered and respected animal by people around the world.”

Transition

- **Say**, “As popular as Royal Bengal Tigers are, there would be none left if not for the conservation of the forests where they live: The Sundarbans.”

Flip Chart

Bengal Tiger – A Global Icon



Tiger Brands



Stop 4: Sundarbans Conservation

Principal Idea: Conservation of the Sundarbans, especially in light of global warming, also protects tigers. (Transition from Sundarban tigers to the entire nation).

Time: 5 min

Tour Objects & Visual Aids

- Artwork depicting the battle between Bonbibi and Dakshin Ray's ghost and goblin army.
- Storytelling of the battle, perhaps reading text from famous poem, *Bonbibi Johuranama*
- Satellite image of interface between human population and Sundarbans

Tour Script

1. **Say/Read**, "God sent Bonbibi and her brother Shah Jangali to earth on a divine mission. They took the form of children abandoned in the Sundarban forests. Bonbibi was raised by a doe. Her mission was to protect people in the forest from the evil demon king Dakshin Ray who took the form of a tiger and ate people who entered the forest to collect honey or wood. Because people were so fearful of him, they erected small shrines under a tree near their homes and prayed to Bonbibi for her protection when they entered the forest. When Dakshin Ray found out what they were doing he flew into a rage. He decided to kill her. As he readied for battle, his mother Naranyani Devi calmed him and said only a woman could fight a woman. So she took her army of ghosts and goblins and attacked. Finally Bonbibi defeated Narayani who fell at her feet asking for protection and forgiveness for herself and her son. Ray did the same. Bonbibi embraced Narayani Devi and called her 'soi', (a term used to signify close friendship between women in Bengal). From that day on the two became close allies and Bonbibi said that the people would worship both of them.
2. **Say**, "In time people came to see Bonbibi as the ecological protector of the forest, a forest goddess representing ecological knowledge and a religion of the forest worshipped by both Hindus and Muslims. Her divine protection has evolved into multiple forms of protection seen today."
3. **Ask**, "What are some forms of protection here in the Sundarbans? Well, let me tell you!"
 - 3 reserves in Bangladesh (Forest Dept) and [Sundarbans National Park](#) (India)
 - [World Heritage](#) sites by UNESCO in both countries, totaling 10,000 km²
 - [Ramsar Site](#) by IUCN for the Sundarban Wetland. India and Bangladesh together make the largest mangrove forest in the world, and Ramsar Sites are recognized as wetlands of global importance.
 - The Forest Department is the principal caretaker as the government agency in charge of 60% of Sundarbans inside Bangladesh.
4. **Explain the story or history of the role of the tiger in having the protected areas declared.**
5. **Say**, "There are numerous threats to the Sundarbans. One is the massive population that lives on the border." Show a satellite image of the human masses right up against the park.

6. **Continue**, “Another principal threat to the Sundarbans is global warming. Global warming has damaged the area through tidal waves, stronger monsoons, cyclones, and saltwater intrusion.” Illustrated by photos, videos, or stories of destruction.
7. **Ask**, “Obviously the area is worth protecting for so many reasons beyond tigers and tourism! Intact mangroves provide many benefits. Can you name any?” Mention them if the audience cannot.
 1. Protection against storms
 2. Habitat for fisheries
 3. Store carbon to protect against global warming
 4. Produce oxygen
 5. Sustainably harvest non-timber forest products such as honey, wood, nipa palm, what else?

Transition

Say, “As much as global warming can threaten the Sundarbans, it is even more of a threat for the whole nation. Bangladesh is blessed and cursed with so much water.”

Flip Chart

Bonbibi



Stop 5: Nodi-Matrik Bangladesh

Principal Idea: Bangladesh is both blessed and cursed with so much water, especially considering global warming.

Time: 5 min

Tour Objects & Visual Aids

- Satellite image of the 1970 Bhola cyclone and the damage it caused.
- River water already collected in a clear glass.

What to say and do

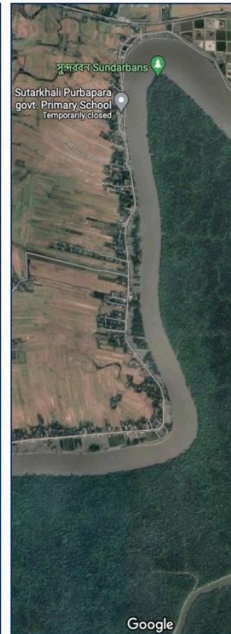
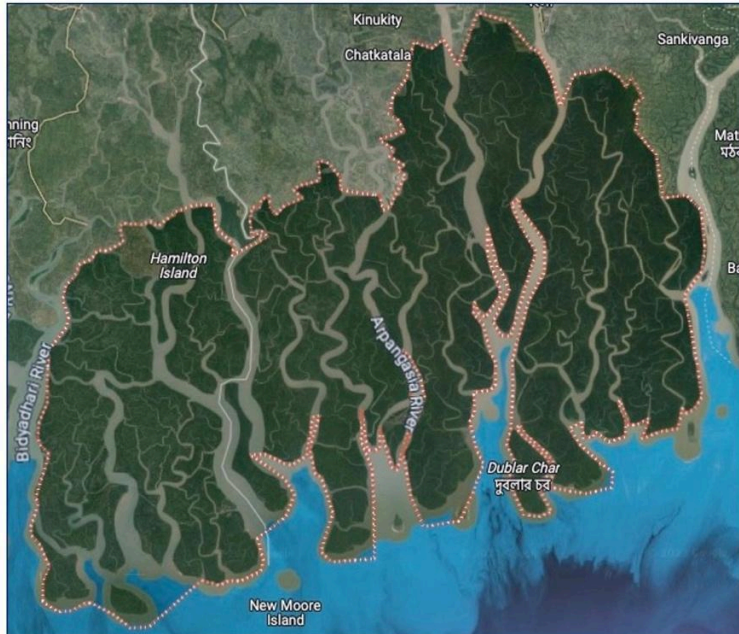
1. **Do:** In view of the audience, collect water from the river overboard of the boat. If not feasible then show the jar of river water previously collected.
2. **Say while holding up a jar of river water,** “Bangladesh is blessed with water: It has at least 230 rivers that crisscross the country. The holy river of the Ganges joins the Bramaputra to create the largest river delta in the world that empties in the Bay of Bengal. This delta is one of the most fertile areas in the world for agriculture. Thanks to the blessing of water we call our country Nodi-Matrik Bangladesh.”
3. **Say while handing the jar to someone.** “Please drink it.” When the person rejects, **say,** “Of course you wouldn't drink this water. Not all water is good to drink. Bangladesh is also cursed with so much water: With so many people living so near rivers, the monsoons can cause rivers to overflow and flood. Cyclones and tidal waves flow up rivers and global warming makes the entire water situation deadly and destructive. Global warming causes sea level rise which will displace millions of people who live on the coast and cause wild animals like crocodiles to move into villages. It makes storms even more powerful and erratic, less predictable.”
4. **Say,** “The worst cyclone in Bangladesh’s history was the Bhola cyclone in 1970. At least 300,000 people died in the storm, possibly as many as 500,000, primarily as a result of the storm surge that flooded much of the low-lying islands of the Ganges Delta.
5. **Show** satellite image of Bhola cyclone and the damage it caused.

Transition

Ask, “How can the curse of too much water be managed?”

Flip Chart

Sundarbans Protected Borders



1970 Bhola Cyclone



Stop 6: Overengineering Bangladesh

Principal Idea: Bangladesh has relied on flood control and irrigation projects to control nature in the face of increasing global warming.

Time: 5 min

Tour Objects & Visual Aids

- Images of big construction projects in country
- Images of the river's tankers, coal-fired plant, shipping channel improvements

What to say and do

1. **Ask**, "What unnatural elements did you see when we started our trip on this river?" Hopefully they will remember tankers, coal-fired plants, and shipping channel improvements.
2. **Say**, "These developments are designed to control or overpower nature in some ways. We generate energy with fossil fuels to overcome night and replace the sun and the wind. We move up the river in massive ships and we manipulate the channels to make them more stable."
3. **Continue**, "In fact, Bangladesh has had many large engineering projects to control floods, massive irrigation, and stabilize river banks." [See here for general examples.](#)
4. **Show pictures of some famous examples that ended up failing.**
5. **Say**, "While some worked, many failed and most are very expensive. With global warming Bangladesh has to make tough choices. But one choice the country doesn't have to make is only to build and try to control nature with engineering, concrete, and billions of dollars in loans."

Transition

Say, "Dakshin Ray chose to control people and the forest and look where that got him! Bangladesh too will fail if it only tries to control nature, unless its people can also change their culture and behavior. They can learn from the humble villagers of the Sundarbans."

Overengineering Bangladesh



Stop 7: Changing Attitudes in Bangladesh

Principal Idea: Development requires not just engineering and control, but cultural and individual adaptation for global warming.

Time: 5 min

Tour Objects & Visual Aids

- Images of national level global warming adaptation

Tour Script

1. **Say**, “Certainly big engineering projects can be useful.” **Give an example in Bangladesh of a successful and expensive water control project.**
2. **Say**, “But we can’t build our way out of all of our problems.” Great place for a joke of some popular cultural idea that flopped.
3. **Say**, “Building infrastructure is only one part of development. What other aspects are there to development? How else do we make a stronger country?” Brainstorm ideas.
4. Point out examples of those mentioned that indicate cultural adaptation rather than building. Note that cultural adaptation (new ways of thinking) and new skills for people are other faces of development.
5. **Say**, “Bangladesh has done well for example in increasing literacy, diversifying products, and other improvements that don’t require much if any infrastructure. Bangladesh also invented Flood and Cyclone Forecasting and Cyclone Shelter programs to increase resilience.”
6. **Say**, “Indeed, we need only consider the cultural and individual behavior changes of villagers around the Sundarbans with respect to tigers to understand what else is needed in development. How people moved from fear to pride in only 07 years. They did that by changing their behaviors with Village Tiger Response Teams, by understanding tigers, by 2013. None of that required building. It required new ways of thinking and new skills.”
7. **Ask**, “Can any of these ideas be applied to the whole country?”
8. If no one answers, **Say**, “How about better emergency response teams after floods nationally? Greater resilience of people through organization and helping each other to reduce the fear of flood, like reducing the fear of tigers.”
9. **Say**, “Consider another Sundarban cultural change that could be of value nationally is mangrove planting to protect against storms. [BEDS](#) worked with [fishermen to plant mangroves](#) and protect their villages from storms.”

Transition

Say, “Now what would Bonbibi do to strengthen the whole country?”

Changing Attitudes in Bangladesh



Stop 8: Conclusion: Bonbibi's Conservation Ethic

Principal Idea: Conservation of both the Sundarbans and Bangladesh require both engineering and cultural and individual adaptation to global warming.

Time: 10 min

Tour Objects & Visual Aids

- Artwork depicting story of Dukhe
- Acting out of the prayer to Bonbibi requesting protection
- Image of WildTeam in action with locals if donation is for them
- Something for national support for climate cultural adaptation. Need to specify action before we can illustrate
- Written material about the project to be supported
- [Bonobibi lyrics](#) by Coke Studio Bangla. If the video is available, the [music video](#) (7 min) is very good and has English subtitles, you can see a beautiful woman acting out Bonbibi. The [story behind the song inspired by Bonbibi](#) if the guide is interested.

Tour Script

1. **Say**, “One time Dakshin Ray told a honey collector who recently had fallen on hard times trying to find honey that if he handed over Dukhe, a boy on his collector team, then Dakshin Ray would reward the collector with a boatload of honey. When the collector made it to the agreed upon location to hand the boy over, Dukhe screamed when he realized he was about to be given to Dakshin Ray who would eat him. At that moment Bonbibi and her brother arrived to save him. After he was returned to the village, Dukhe popularized the worship of Bonbibi.”
2. **Say**, “Dukhe like other villagers came to worship Bonbibi as the forest protector of the Sundarbans. She represents the conservation ethic. Her befriending Dakshin's mother was a symbolic reconciliation of Dakshin's nature control approach and Bonbibi's loving culture of conservation and adaptation. Both are needed for development locally and nationally.”
3. **Say**, “The work of the Greater Sundarbans EcoTourism Society (GSETS) is doing something similar. It both seeks to change people's beliefs and cultures about **X** while also helping to build in the infrastructure necessary for sustainable tourism such as **X**. It also teaches new skills such as being a liveaboard boat guide. I am a product of the Society's guide training and this talk is what I learned!” (Matt can fill in the blanks on how the DMO combines both building, cultural change, and skills)

Visitor Action

1. **Say**, “The EcoTourism Society (GSETS) is also supporting tiger conservation through **X** project and we would like to ask for your help in supporting tiger conservation.” Guide now explains what the project does and then how the donation can support it. **Guide also explains administratively how it works to ensure transparency.**

2. Say, “Also nationally, you might consider these ideas to take action, because this kind of support requires many Bangladeshis to act together, to change behavior, to change culture.” XXX

Evaluation

After song ends, ask the audience the following to see what they understood of the talk.

1. So what is the most important message you took away from this talk?
2. What can the country of Bangladesh learn from the Sundarbans in terms of development?
3. What are you going to do as a result of this talk, if anything?

Last instruction/guidance/invitation to continue interacting with the site

1. Guide will remain for discussion for 10 minutes.
2. Tell them what follows on today’s itinerary.

Flip Chart

Support the Sundarbans!





bedsbd.org



wildteam.org.bd



greatersundarbans.org