

# Rafting

(Guidelines & Regulations)

The Department of Tourism,  
The Administration of Union Territory of  
Ladakh



## **RAFTING IN LADAKH**

One of the many wonderful activities that the landscape of Ladakh offers its guests is river rafting. It is one of the most appreciated and adventurous activities in the region. The towering mountains, the chilly winds, the fresh aromas in the air, the freezing waters, and the sense of possibility that hangs in the air, all make Ladakh rafting a peculiarly intense experience. One can choose the rapid based on the level of difficulty since the rivers have range of rapids. The wonderful landscape of Ladakh adds to the delight of rafting. The towering mountains, colorful monasteries, ancient canyons formed by the river, chilly winds, freezing waters, and unrivaled thrill, all make rafting in Ladakh an experience that you do not forget easily.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh to streamline and promote adventure activities in Ladakh in a regulated manner is issuing the Guidelines & Regulations for carrying out Rafting. These guidelines shall extend to the whole of the Union Territory of Ladakh and come into force from the date of its notification.

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh recommends following the guidelines & regulations for Rafting, issued by the Adventure Tour Operators Associations of India (ATOAI) and endorsed by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

These guidelines will act as a defining force with respect to the procedures to be followed, mandatory trainings for guides/instructors, equipment to be used, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), necessary documentation, risk mitigation processes, addressing medical concerns, emergencies, rescue operations, safety briefing, etc. All Adventure Tour Operators (ATOs) shall follow these guidelines while conducting Rafting in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

## **VALIDITY**

The 'Guidelines & Regulation for Rafting' will remain valid for five (5) years, from the date of its notification. All Adventure Tour Operators (ATOs) are advised to strictly adhere to the terms and conditions of these guidelines and follow its best implementation for the sustainable development of the adventure tourism ecosystem in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

## **ENCLOSURES**

- Annexure 1 – Guidelines & Regulations for Rafting in the Union Territory of Ladakh
- Annexure 2 – Implementation Framework for the Union Territory of Ladakh

## ANNEXURE 1 GUIDELINES & REGULATIONS FOR RAFTING

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Rafting is one of the most popular adventure activities in India. Since it is a dynamic sport, instructors/guides must be highly qualified, and the equipment used should be of the highest standard.

### 2. TRAINED MANPOWER

Personnel responsible for conducting rafting activities must be skilled to a high level in rafting techniques, rescue, life-saving techniques, and First Aid/C.P.R. Ability to communicate clearly and deliver a comprehensive safety briefing is mandatory.

### 3. GUIDES / INSTRUCTORS

Lead guides for water sports activities should, as a minimum, hold the following:

1. A minimum 16-hour (2 days) First Aid and CPR (Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation) valid certificate from a recognized National or International body and a certificate from the operator that the individual “has experience of minimum 2 years in assisting in the particular activity and is independently capable of guiding groups and carrying out rescue operations”. A WRT (White Water Rescue Technician) certification is highly recommended for guides on all grade IV and above rivers.
2. A logbook containing an authenticated record of river running experience.

### 4. EQUIPMENT

1. **Life Jackets or Personal Floatation Devices (PFDs)** must meet the minimum buoyancy requirement, be appropriate for the intended activity, and be certified/approved by Indian Standards Institute, US Coastguard, British Canoe Union, or equivalent.
2. **Throw-able Rescue Devices/Rescue Bags** must be available for immediate use.
3. **Safety Kayaks** must be available in the immediate vicinity (within visual distance) for prompt rescue with personnel duly qualified to operate/carry out rescue operations.
4. **Helmets** are mandatory for all rafting trips.
5. **During Cold Weather Operations**, wet suits and spray jackets are recommended.

### 5. OPERATIONS

All rafting activities must begin with a thorough safety briefing. Operators must ensure that clients are briefed about the appropriate dress code, medical concerns, and age limit before the rafting trip. The briefing must highlight the equipment used, do's and don'ts, falling out of rafts, rescue bags, flips, and rescue and emergency procedures. The correct drill for rescue by a safety kayaker must also be demonstrated. A liability waiver and medical form highlighting the risk involved and that those participants are in good health, without any serious medical concerns, must be signed by all participants before the commencement of the activity. Participants with any medical condition making them unfit for participation must not be allowed to participate. All rafts must have a rescue bag and all rafting trips must carry a First Aid kit, a repair kit, and a pump.

### 6. RISK MITIGATION

1. **Lifejackets:** No rafting activity should be undertaken without wearing a lifejacket throughout the time spent on the water. The life jacket must have adequate buoyancy, should be fastened properly and checked by the instructor before the commencement of rafting, and checked again above major rapids (grade III and above). The lifejacket must be of the appropriate size for the intended user.
2. **Guides:** No rafting activity should be conducted without the presence of trained guide/s. No single rafts must be operated, at least one raft and one kayak.
3. **Alcohol/Drugs** during the activity and at least six hours before the activity is strictly prohibited.
4. **Sign Boards:** With rafting rules, medical concerns, age limit, dress code, and safety rules should be put up at a prominent place in Hindi, English, and the local language.
5. **No Rafting Activity** should be conducted in the dark and preferably finish an hour before dark.
6. **Age Limit:** 14 years on all sections of the river and relaxed to 10 years on grade II, easy sections.
7. **Helmets** must be worn by all participants including guides during rafting.

### 7. SOPs & OPERATING INSTRUCTIONS

1. All rafting operators must maintain and update a Standard Operating Procedure for their operations.
2. Besides covering the methodologies that are adopted by the agency in organizing the activity, such as assessing medical condition and experience, the procedure for the conduct of the activity, avoidance of injury, safety precautions, communication, weather, the procedure for emergencies, casualty evacuation, incident and accident reporting and feedback mechanism the following must be included in the SOPs:

- An Emergency Action Plan including rescues, evacuations, and medical assistance must be in position. Staff/Guides/Drivers must be trained in all aspects of the Emergency Action Plan periodically.
- Advertising must give a true picture of the difficulties and risks involved and clients briefed accordingly. Information about guides and their experience should be sent to the clients for multi-day rafting expeditions.

## 8. DOCUMENTATION

The tour operator must maintain, at the minimum the following documentation:

1. Details of all Guides and Instructors including, copies of certifications, a record of experience, and feedback from clients.
2. Copies of all Permits, Permissions, and Insurance required for operations.
3. Copies of identification documents, insurance cover, medical concerns, and details of next of kin for all participants, guides, and instructors.
4. Copy of SOP.
5. Current list of emergency contact numbers and Emergency Action Plan.

## 9. EMERGENCIES AND RESCUES

In addition:

1. A proper First Aid kit must be available with the rafting trip.
2. Evacuation routes must be identified and known to participants, guides and instructors.
3. A detailed and documented Emergency Action Plan must be available along with the closest available emergency services that can be called upon as required.

## 10. SAFETY BRIEFING

All instructors and guides should be able to give a thorough safety briefing that covers all safety aspects and detailed paddling and rescue instructions in detail. This briefing must be clear and must have the ability to be given in English and/or Hindi or the local language.

## 11. MEDICAL CONCERNS

All instructors and guides must be able to ensure that a question regarding medical issues is asked before the activity is conducted. It is recommended that heart patients, those with spinal issues, recent surgery, or any other medical issue of concern, expecting mothers, and underage children do not undertake the activity. It is also recommended to check for epilepsy and asthmatic patients, on the extent of the ailment. Asthma inhalers must be carried by clients and preferably handed over to the guide.

## 12. BASIC MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR GRANT OF RECOGNITION TO OPERATORS

It is highly recommended that any outfit, entity, establishment, or company seeking a grant of recognition must fulfill these desirable criteria:

1. The entity must own specialized equipment commensurate with the needs of undertaking and running such a safe rafting operation.
2. The entity must have qualified personnel on its payroll. This person must have the requisite experience in the activity and have valid First Aid & CPR certification.
3. The entity must operate with the required permits/licenses.
4. It is recommended that the entity is recognized by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India/ State Government, or UT Administration.
5. The entity must have a registered office.
6. The rafting company must follow a strict 'leave no trace policy and conform to high sustainability standards.

## ANNEXURE 2 IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK FOR THE UNION TERRITORY OF LADAKH

### 1. CONSTITUTION OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh shall, by notification/ order will constitute a 'Technical Committee' for Rafting with the following members:

Composition of the Technical Committee	
Director (Tourism), UT Ladakh	Chairperson
Chief Wildlife Warden / Representative, Wildlife Department	Member
Principal ISM, Kargil Branch	Member
Principal FCI/ IHM, Leh	Member
Representative of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF)	Member
Representative of the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) for Rafting	Member
Representative of the Ladakh Association for Rafting	Member
Assistant Director (Tourism), Concerned	Convening Member

### 2. FUNCTIONS OF THE TECHNICAL COMMITTEE

The Technical Committee shall meet once every year before the start of the tourist season in the Union Territory of Ladakh, and shall be responsible for the following:

- Inspect and certify the equipment with the operator from a safety point of view.
- Scrutinize the credential of the personnel responsible for conducting Rafting, the medical fitness of the guide, and conduct their physical test to ascertain their expertise.
- Ensure that the operator and the guide shall follow all safety procedures indicated in their rules.
- Identify new areas/ routes/ tracks for Rafting in the Union Territory of Ladakh.
- Notify the exact stretches on the identified areas/ routes/ tracks where the operation can be safely conducted, considering the area's environmental sensitivity, critical wildlife hotspots and fragile water systems.
- Formulate a plan for containing the environmental impact strictly inside the designated activity area.
- Forecast the potential ecological impacts and ensure a plan for eco-conditioning to minimize the impact and offsetting the potential environmental impact.
- Ensure preparation and implementation of a Risk Management Matrix, and Emergency & Evacuation plan.
- Ensure preparation of a plan for tourist awareness and education.
- Determine the capacity of each track every year before the start of any operation.

### 3. CONSTITUTION OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEE

The Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh shall, by notification/ order will constitute a 'Regulatory Committee' for Rafting with the following members:

Composition of the Regulatory Committee	
Assistant Director (Tourism), Concerned	Chairperson
Wildlife Warden or Representative, Wildlife Department	Member
Representative of the District Disaster Response Force (DDRF)	Member
Representative of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO)	Member
SHO/Choki of the Concerned Area	Member
Representative of the Adventure Tour Operators Association of India (ATOAI) for Rafting	Member
Representative of the Ladakh Association for Rafting	Member
Officer in-charge of the Department of Tourism, UT Ladakh at Sub-Division and Tehsils	Convening Member

### 4. FUNCTIONS OF THE REGULATORY COMMITTEE

The Regulatory Committee shall meet once every year before the start of the tourist season in the Union Territory of Ladakh, and shall be responsible for the following:

- Overall control for regulating the Rafting operations, in coordination with the concerned stakeholders and associations.
- Surprise inspections during the Rafting operations to ascertain adherence of the guidelines, assess the quality & condition of equipment being used and assess the ecological impact, to help develop adaptive management strategies. The Regulatory Committee shall constitute a joint inspection or verification team with the Department of Youth Services & Sports, UT Ladakh and Adventure Sports Association, if any.
- Establish a mechanism for receiving and addressing complaints, concerns, and feedback from local communities, tourists, and stakeholders.

- Any other functions concerning Rafting operations in the Union Territory of Ladakh.

#### **5. CLAIM ON ACCOUNT OF ANY MISHAP**

The Department of Tourism, or any other Department/ Authority of the Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh shall, in no way be responsible for any claims on account of any mishap.

#### **6. SHOW CAUSE NOTICE**

If any operator, guide, or personnel responsible for conducting Rafting operations is found to be violating these Guidelines & Regulations for Rafting, appropriate action shall be taken by the Department of Tourism, Administration of Union Territory of Ladakh.

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