

**70 years of Independence**

**Special Feature – I-Day 2017**

## Swift Surge Forward in Tourism sector



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Alongside rapid strides on other spheres, the Tourism sector in India now is surging forward; swiftly and surely. Gradually, our country with rich cultural heritage, dotted with many spots with nature's bounty and charms, sublime environs and numerous other attractions, pilgrimage places depicted as "Incredible India" is gaining popularity for its destinations. Tourist traffic is attaining new heights with this sector in top gear and still moving ahead to gradually tap its vast potential. Our nation is carving out its due share and status in the global tourism industry.

Tourism, a pivotal sector as a driver of social integration and economic development, is growing at impressive pace in recent years. Domestic travels for pilgrimages, business and varied other factors, is as old as our society. While there were just 17, 000 inbound tourists on the eve of our Independence, presently the figure for tourist traffic has shot up very significantly. But keeping in view the high potential, there is more scope for giving further boost to India's tourism industry. Due to some tangible bold initiatives and promotional schemes taken by the present regime, this sector will certainly go up carving out its due share in the global tourism and travel sphere.

Ever since achievement of Independence, keeping in view the vital importance of tourism, concrete policies and elaborate plans have been implemented in a phased manner with the result that steadily there has been growth and development in tourist trade. More sustained endeavors are required to secure larger share in global tour and travel sectors.

Latest figures indicate that tourism generated 14.02 lakh crore (US\$220 billion) or 9.6 per cent of the nation's GDP in 2016 and supported 40.343 million jobs, which is 9.3 per cent of its total employment. This sector is predicted to grow at an annual rate of 6.8 per cent to 28.49 lakh crore (US\$440 billion) by 2027, which is 10 per cent of our GDP. To quote an instance, India's medical tourism estimated to be worth US\$3 billion, which is projected to grow further to \$7–8 billion by 2020. It is pertinent to point out that in 2014 nearly 184, 300 foreign patients traveled to India to for medical treatment. About 88.90 lakh foreign tourists arrived in India in 2016 as compared to 80.27 lakh during the previous year, recording a growth of 10.7 per cent. Domestic tourist visitors numbered nearly 1,036.35 million in 2012, an increase of 16.5 per cent from 2011. Pilgrim-tourism too is registering ever-increasing numbers every year. The Prime Minister,

Narendra Modi has underscored need for involvement of youth power in projection and promotion of tourism industry.

As per the report of World Economic Forum on global travel and tourism, India ranks 40<sup>th</sup> out of 136 nations across the globe. Now with the present Government's emphasis on improvement of roads network, high-speed railway and air services, higher hotel accommodation, business opportunities, cashless payment system, clean environ and liberalized visa system and suitable human resources, the tourist traffic is expected to further grow up swiftly.

The Union Ministry of Tourism and all the States have to work as partners for working on suitably- designed national policies and plans for sustained growth of tourism. Visa policy has been rightly liberalized and vigorous world-wide campaign of "Incredible India" is yielding encouraging results. It is envisaged to give a further fillip to tourism sector and upgrade India's status in the global tourist traffic. E-tourist visa facility extended to over 150 countries and UDAN scheme among others, will go a long way in promoting domestic and foreign tourism.

There are well-designed tour packages and tourist-cum-pilgrim-circuits to suit all sorts of visitors. The Indian tourism and hospitality industry is key driver of growth among the services sector. Tourism is also a potentially large employment generator besides being a significant source of foreign exchange for the country. Every citizen has to abide by spirit of "Aatithi Devo Bhava" (every tourist is our honoured guest) and act as voluntary ambassador of tourism to attract more tourists.

India's rising middle class and increasing disposable incomes has continued to support the growth of domestic and outbound tourism. Domestic Tourist Visits (DTVs) has grown by 15.5 per cent year-on-year to nearly 1.65 billion during 2016. Foreign visitors have significantly gone up and India's foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) have through tourism increased by 32 per cent and touched US\$ 2.278 billion in April, 2017. India is expected to move up five spots to be ranked among the top five business travel market globally by 2030, as business travel spending in the country is expected to treble until 2030 from US\$ 30 billion in 2015. Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) in India have witnessed an impressive growth in the last three years. During April, 2017, it stood at 7.40 lakh compared to 5.99 lakh in April 2016 and 5.42 lakh in April 2015. There has been a significant rise in Non-Residential Indians (NRI) travelling to India as well.

In the Union Budget 2017-18, more initiatives have been taken to give a boost to the tourism and hospitality sector by setting up five special tourism zones, special pilgrimage or tourism trains and worldwide launch of Incredible India campaign among others.

The Union Tourism Ministry and State Governments, Private sector, NGOs and each citizen must jointly put in their best to realize the country's full tourism potential and take lot of more innovative initiatives to make India a global tourism hub.

The concerted and innovative initiatives will certainly give further impetus to both domestic

and foreign tourism to realize India's full potential for positive results to emerge as a major player in the world tourism industry.

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*\*Author is Jammu-based free-lance journalist.*

*Views expressed in the article are author's personal.*

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