

India has not exploited its tourism potential fully

It is well known that the Indian tourism industry has enormous potential. It is equally well known that it has nowhere near realised this. But the sector seems to be on the right track: A 2018 economic impact report by the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) has said the nation is expected to establish itself as the third largest travel and tourism economy by 2028 in terms of direct and total GDP and that the total number of jobs dependent directly or indirectly on the travel and tourism industry will increase from 42.9 million in 2018 to 52.3 million in 2028. Calling India the seventh largest travel and tourism economy in the world, Gloria Guevara, president and chief executive of WTTC, said India should be working on improving its tourist infrastructure.

Ms Guevara has told us something we already know. India's tourism infrastructure — connectivity, hospitality, accessibility and security — has to improve substantially. Take for example, Aurangabad in Maharashtra, a city that has so much for tourists (a huge number of Asians visit the city known for its Buddhist archeological treasures), but such poor flight connectivity. The same holds true for Mysore, the former seat of Wodeyar royalty, that has no commercial airport. When it comes to the hospitality sector, even though the situation has improved in the last few years, it needs to do much better, especially in the second-tier cities. To do so, the sector must not just invest in brick-and-mortar infrastructure, but also in human resources. In the last few years, India has seen several attacks on tourists, especially women. This situation must be addressed not just because of the revenue but also because it tarnishes India's image. There is another area in which India needs to dramatically improve to increase revenue generation: merchandising. On this, India must learn from the West. It is nearly impossible for anyone to leave a tourist site in Europe and America without buying a souvenir. And in India, even getting a nice replica of the Taj Mahal is an arduous task.

Unlike many other tourism behemoths, India has so much diversity in the form of heritage sites and natural beauty. Yet we have not been able to exploit it. We really need to up our game to ensure better revenue for business and the State and employment generation opportunities.

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