

Special Feature – 27th September (World Tourism Day)***World Tourism Day- International Year of Sustainable Tourism 2017*****Chartering roadmap towards sustainable Tourism*****Pandurang Hegde**

The arrival of foreign tourists into the country has increased from 6.8 per cent in 2016 to 16.5 per cent in January 2017. Similarly the domestic tourist arrivals in 2017 increased to the massive 15.5 per cent over 2015. Obviously, these rising tourist arrivals of both domestic and foreign tourist indicate the success of the tourism policies implemented by NDA government since 2014.

The major factor for increase in arrival of foreign tourist is the policy of introduction of online visa facility that has been extended to more than 180 countries. The reforms of extending e-visa facility for medical and business travelers, and increasing the time period of stay from 30 to 60 days has attracted foreign tourists who are keen to visit India.

The launching of e-ticketing of historical monuments like Taj Mahal, introduction of dedicated tourist trains across India and 24x7 tourist help line has had positive impact on the arrivals of tourists from foreign countries.

In the period from 2015 to 2017 the foreign exchange earnings from tourism has shown an increase of 13 per cent from 12000 crores to Rs 13669 crores.

Tourism sector has enormous potential to grow and contribute towards the higher GDP. It provides employment to 39.5 million people working in hospitality industry. Realizing this potential, the Finance Minister Sh. Arun Jaitely in his Budget speech of the year 2017-18, proposed to set-up Five Special Tourism Zone, anchored on SPVs in partnership with the States. The Finance Minister underlined the fact that Tourism is a big employment generator and has a multiplier impact on the economy. The Minister also announced the launching of Incredible India 2.0 campaign across the world during the year.

The Prime Minister has also made earnest attempt to broadcast the diversity of India through social media and showcasing them to the world. He has also spoken about the cultural diversity and spiritual affinity to tap the potential of country's spiritual legacy. The Prime Minister has approved liberalizing of this sector permitting 100 per cent Foreign Direct Investment in hospitality industry to create basic infrastructure across the country.

Travel and tourism is one of the key sectors that receive special support from the Central Government. The government of India launched several schemes to attract tourists. The Swachh Bharat Abhiyan is the fulcrum under which the tourist destinations are kept clean, like renovation of river ghats in pilgrim cities like Varanasi. The slogan of "Swaachh Bharat Swaachh Smarak" given by the Prime Minister indicates the need to keep the heritage sites clean.

Adarsh Smaarak in an innovative scheme launched by Archaeological Survey of India to promote basic tourist facilities in well-known historical sites.

Swadesh Darshan is an important scheme of the Ministry of Tourism. The scheme is based on the vision to develop theme-based tourist circuits on the principles of high tourist value, competitiveness and sustainability by synergizing efforts to focus on needs and concerns of all stakeholders. Under the scheme, 13 thematic circuits have been identified across the country for development.

Under PRASAD Scheme, 25 sites of religious significance have been identified for development in India namely Amravati (Andhra Pradesh), Amritsar (Punjab), Ajmer (Rajasthan), Ayodhya (Uttar Pradesh), Badrinath (Uttarakhand), Dwarka (Gujarat), Deogarh (Jharkhand), Belur (West Bengal), Gaya (Bihar), Guruvayoor (Kerala), Hazratbal (Jammu & Kashmir), Kamakhya (Assam), Kanchipuram (Tamil Nadu), Katra (Jammu & Kashmir), Kedarnath (Uttarakhand), Mathura (Uttar Pradesh), Patna (Bihar), Puri (Odisha), Srisailem (Andhra Pradesh), Somnath (Gujarat), Tirupati (Andhra Pradesh), Trimbakeshwar (Maharashtra), Omkareshwar (Madhya Pradesh), Varanasi (Uttar Pradesh) and Vellankani (Tamil Nadu).

Sustainable Tourism – a tool for Development

Tourism is the third largest export industry in the world, with 1.235 million travelers crossing international borders. The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2017 as the International Year of Sustainable Tourism. It has called for an approach to tourism based on inclusive economic growth, bringing decent jobs to local communities, preservation of environment, addressing climate change and respecting the unique cultural identity of the people.

Thus, tourism development provides unique opportunity to promote better future for people, planet and prosperity. The motto of the 2017 World Tourism Day is the respect nature, culture and respects the host.

The Government is in the process of formulating a new National Tourism Policy (NTP). The salient features of NTP are developing tourism in sustainable and responsible manner, employment generation and community participation.

It aims at promotion of diverse tourism opportunities including showcasing of rich culture and heritage of the country and the niche products as Medical and Wellness tourism. It also emphasizes on skill development and enabling environment for investment in tourism related infrastructure. It also aims at promoting domestic and foreign tourist destinations to experience the diversity of the country.

The Ministry of Tourism has adopted code of conduct for safe tourism, containing safe guidelines for both tourists and local residents that assure basic human rights, freedom from exploitation of women and children.

There are some bottlenecks in implementing the sustainable tourism goals due to the lack of basic infrastructure like roads and providing clean, comfortable accommodation to tourists. In order to address these issues the government is upgrading passenger terminals, improving connectivity to tourist destinations, providing safe drinking water and establishing communication networks in tourist areas to facilitate tourists.

India with her cultural, spiritual and natural richness offers unique experience unparalleled by any other country in the world. Diverse traditions, life styles, colorful fairs and festivals offer a vast variety of choice for the domestic and foreign tourists.

Indian government is not only aware of how to use the tourism sector as a tool to achieve sustainable development goals, but it is committed to bring and share the benefit of travel and tourism equitably with the local communities. The forests, tribal lifestyles, beautiful coastline and beaches, wild life sanctuaries and national parks provides rare opportunity to the visitors, compelling them to revisit the country to experience this diversity.

The Minister of State (IC) for Tourism K. J. Alphons has said “We must spread the word about India’s heritage, philosophy, and it’s incredibly diverse cultures which are worth experiencing.”

The enabling environment being created by the Government of India towards making the country tourist friendly is definitely charting a roadmap towards attaining sustainable tourism, the major goal of International Year of Sustainable Tourism.

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Views expressed in the article are author’s personal.

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