

Ministry of Tourism to organise conference on Buddhist circuit to promote potential of Buddhist tourism

Under Swadesh Darshan Scheme, Tourism Ministry sanctioned 5 projects of Rs 325.53 crore for Buddhist circuit development in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh

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Key Highlights

- Buddhist Circuit Train FAM Tour and Conference organized by Tourism Ministry scheduled from 04th October - 08th October 2021
- During conference key issues with regard to the development and promotion of tourism in the circuit will be discussed

The Ministry has aggressively started tourism promotion with participation of the industry stakeholders especially after the dramatic improvement of Covid situation in the country and achievement of vaccination targets. Overseas & Domestic tourism both play an important role in the overall growth and development of the tourism sector in India. Buddhist Tourism is one of the prime focused tourism product that India has to offer among its diverse tourism products. Ministry of Tourism undertakes various promotional activities for the promotion of Tourism and these activities are primarily aimed at increasing awareness about tourist destinations, attractions and products.

To tap the potential of the Buddhist tourism, the Ministry of Tourism has organised a Buddhist Circuit Train FAM Tour and Conference scheduled to be held from 04th October - 08th October 2021. The FAM tour will cover the visit of prominent Buddhist sites and conferences at Bodhgaya and Varanasi. The event is likely to be attended by around 125 delegates including tour operators, hoteliers, media and officials of Ministry of Tourism & State Governments. Apart from this, around 100 local tour operators and other stakeholders of tourism & hospitality sector would be attending the event at Bodhgaya and Varanasi to discuss the key issues with regard to the development and promotion of tourism in the circuit.

India is one of world's largest reservoirs of history, culture, philosophy, heritage, and religion and these together list the country amongst the most desired destinations for tourists and pilgrims. India has a rich ancient Buddhist Heritage with several important sites associated with the life of Lord Buddha. Buddhist tourism in India as a tourism product has a tremendous potential. The Indian Buddhist heritage is of great interest to the followers of Buddhism all over the world. It has remained a vital force, an inspiration, and a guide to India's great traditions and customs. Ministry of Tourism has leverage these factors to showcase India as 'The Land of Buddha'.

Buddhism originated in ancient India more than 2500 years ago and spread through much of Asia. With close to 500 million followers, Buddhists represent 7% of the world's total population. The holy sites follow

Buddha's life cycle with the most important ones being Buddha's birthplace Lumbini (Nepal), Bodh Gaya where he attained enlightenment, Sarnath where Buddha gave his first sermon after enlightenment also known as Dharmachakrapravartana, Kushinagar which Buddha chose for his final departure or Mahaparinirvana, Nalanda which was one of the world's first residential universities and an epicentre for learning, Rajgir where Buddha spent several months meditating and preaching at Gridhra Kuta (Hill of the Vultures), Sravasti where he taught many of his Suttas (sermons), and Vaishali where Buddha delivered his last sermon, to name a few. In the State of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, Ministry plans to cover and further develop the following Buddhist sites, namely, Bodh Gaya, Nalanda, Rajgir, Vaishali, Sarnath, Shravasti, Kushinagar, Kaushambi, Sankisa, and Kapilavastu. These sites currently receive approximately 6% of nationwide foreign tourist arrivals with Sarnath and Bodh Gaya leading the pack.

Ministry has taken a four-fold development strategy that focuses on improving the connectivity via air, rail, and roads, enhancing the tourism infrastructure and dependent services, streamlining branding and promotion and showcasing the culture and heritage. Under Swadesh Darshan Scheme, 5 projects worth Rs325.53 crore have been sanctioned for Buddhist circuit development in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh and those sanctioned projects are under different stages of implementation. While works of Rs 44.19 crore on three projects have been sanctioned under PRASHAD Scheme; in Varanasi, two projects including a sound and light show at Dhamek Stupa and a Buddha Theme Park, Sarnath, worth costing Rs 9.5 crores for the development of Buddhist structures have been completed.

In addition to the development of tourism related infrastructure under the various schemes of the Ministry of Tourism, emphasis is also being put on promoting the various Buddhist Sites within India and overseas markets. As part of the above, India Tourism Offices in overseas markets regularly participate in a number of travel and tourism fairs as well as exhibitions wherein India's Buddhist Sites are promoted. Also, Ministry of Tourism organises Buddhist Conclave every alternate year with the objective of promoting India as a Buddhist Destination and major markets around the globe. The upcoming International Buddhist Conclave is scheduled from 17th to 21st November, 2021. Ministry has undertaken multiple projects under branding and promotion that are currently in the pipeline including a live virtual exhibition at national museum, web portal, annual events calendar, social media marketing, campaigns in key source markets like Vietnam, Thailand, Japan, South Korea, Sri Lanka, etc..

Ministry of Tourism has showcased the Buddhist Sites on the Incredible India Website and has also developed a dedicated website www.indiathelandofbuddha.in. This website aims to promote and showcase the rich Buddhist Heritage in India and highlight the major destinations visited by Buddha personally across the country besides showcasing the Buddhist Heritage left behind by his disciples including the modern monasteries. The website has many useful features to make it more interactive and to provide a deeper engagement to the travellers visiting the website. The aim of this website is to showcase and project the Buddhist Heritage in India and boost tourism to the Buddhist sites in the country and cultivate friendly ties with countries and communities interested in Buddhism. The website provides visitors an easier way to learn about Buddhist Heritage and to allow the tourist to browse information based on their own choice. The website is interactive and gives better access to About Buddhism, Footsteps of Buddha, Buddhist Heritage, Monasteries and many more.

The Ministry has also worked on projects for capacity building that include Linguistic Tourist Facilitator training in Thai, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Chinese languages. 525 people have been trained in these languages between 2018 to 2020, and 600 more will be trained between 2020 and 2023. This is especially important as Buddhism, has branched out to a large part of Asia, and 97% of the world's Buddhists are concentrated in East and Southeast Asia alone. Hence it is important to develop a linguistic connect with the tourists.

It further aims to utilise tourism to showcase both the ancient roots of the region and to capture the spirit of a New India driven by cutting edge digital technologies and a strong focus on infrastructural growth.

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