

Incredible, thy name is India

Dear Friends,

Two hundred and forty thousand. That is the number of hotel rooms required in India according to one estimate. Against this, the current availability is only a paltry ninety thousand rooms. This in a nutshell is the crux of the tourism story in India.

With the gradual phasing out of the global gloom, it goes without saying that more and more tourists – both from within the country and from foreign shores - will come to India to savour a way of life that is truly incredible, truly Indian. But where will they put up? Where is the infrastructure to lure in the big spenders? Are we in a position to offer even the most basic of amenities? From the mighty Himalayas to the oceans through rolling plains and scorching deserts – the country is blessed with a cornucopia of wonders. Add to it a civilization that is age old as time and a cultural diversity that embraces all the hues of the rainbow and the tantalizing experience that beckons is enough to attract tourists by the hoards. Yet, the sad part is that this unique product is neither packaged well, nor is there any concerted effort to put it on the shelves to grab the eyeballs.

The long list of negatives notwithstanding, the arrival of foreign tourists have been registering a steady growth rate since 2002 and in 2008 it stood at 5.37 million. The fact that these 5.37 million people spent a whopping Rs. 50,730 crores gives an indication of the kind of potential that the segment has. Add to this the domestic tourists at almost hundred times more the number of foreigners, which alone is more than the total population of many a decent sized country. The contribution of tourism to the country's GDP and total jobs was 5.92% and 9.24% during 2007-08. Total number of tourism jobs in the country that year was a fantastic 49.8 million.

I can go on ranting out the figures. However, to cut a long story short it will suffice to say that we must accord the highest priority to this sector and a long drawn out plan for creating quality infrastructure is a must. The segment is not only capable of attracting the moolah, but also create a plethora of jobs . Jobs around the country, across the various economic strata. The key will be to look at tourism in a new light – as a facilitator of economic development. To look at tourists, not merely as travelers, but as the harbingers of prosperity.

Happy Reading,
Suvobrata Ganguly