

Tourism sector poised for high growth: Economic Survey

China, Latin America and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) provide lucrative potential markets for the Indian tourism sector, which is poised for greater growth, said the Economic Survey for 2007-08.

Finance Minister P. Chidambaram tabled the survey Thursday in the Lok Sabha amid din and disruptions from opposition MPs over the plight of the country's farmers.

The survey projected bright prospects for Indian tourism, saying that greater focus needed to be accorded to new emerging markets such as China, Latin America and CIS countries.

The survey lauded the overall development of tourism infrastructure in the country, particularly the government efforts to promote tourism by appropriately positioning India on the global tourism map through the 'Incredible India' campaign.

Over 4.6 million foreign tourists visited India in 2006-07, posting 13 percent growth over the previous year, the survey noted.

It has estimated foreign exchange earnings from tourism during 2006-07 at \$9.7 billion, a growth of 23.5 percent over the previous year.

The Ministry of Tourism has sanctioned 225 projects and utilised Rs.4.6 billion in 2007-08 to upgrade infrastructure at important tourist destinations like Nalanda, Bodh Gaya and Rajgir in Bihar and Varanasi in Uttar Pradesh.

An increasing tourist inflow has resulted in growing demand for hotel accommodation in the country. Against an estimated requirement of 240,000 hotel rooms, the current availability is just 90,000 rooms.

'The (tourism) ministry has taken several initiatives to provide incentives for development of hotels in luxury as well as budget category like recently introduced the 'Incredible India Bed and Breakfast (B and amp;B) scheme,' said a government official, who did not want to be named.

'The B and amp;B scheme intends to provide budget home-stay facilities to tourists and augmenting incomes of urban middle class having surplus housing accommodation.'

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