

Five million foreign tourists visited India in 2007

The number of foreign tourist arrivals in India in 2007 totalled five million, an increase of 12.4 percent from the previous year.

'We received five million foreign tourists in 2007 which indicates a 12.4 percent increase over 2006 and earned \$11.62 billion from tourism,' Minister of State for Tourism and Culture Kanti Singh said at a press conference in the course of the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2008 here Wednesday.

'The growth trend continues in 2008,' she said, adding that in 2004-05, tourism contributed 6.11 percent to India's gross domestic product (GDP) and provided jobs amounting to 8.78 percent of the total employment generated in the country.

According to the minister, India has a healthy growth of inbound as well as outbound travel.

'In 2006, 8.34 million Indian tourists travelled to overseas destinations. It indicates excellent business opportunities for both inbound and outbound tour operators as well as tour operators in the receiving countries,' Singh said.

The government was laying major thrust on infrastructure development of international standards around identified mega projects, she said.

'Overseas investors are allowed to invest up to 100 percent equity on repatriation basis in hotel and tourism-related projects. We are aiming to have world-class airports infrastructure to cater to 10 million international and 60 million domestic tourists by 2010.'

Even as efforts were being made to have the 'visa on arrival' facility at Indian ports, she said the facility of multiple-entry tourist visa of five-year duration had been introduced for the nationals of 18 countries, which allows them to stay for 90 days in the country.

Pointing out that around a number of foreign visitors apart from 10,000 sportsmen and women are expected during the Commonwealth Games in [New Delhi](#) in 2010, she said hotel accommodation was being augmented through income tax holidays to two-, three- and four-star holidays.

'India has a large variety of tourist attractions. We are trying to develop new tourism products such as adventure tourism, medical tourism, rural tourism, cruise tourism, conference and convention, wedding and honeymoon, monsoon, agriculture, spas, golf, eco-tourism, luxury trains, shopping and fairs and festivals,' the minister said.

Giving a presentation, E.K. Bharat Bhushan, joint secretary in the tourism ministry, said the government was trying to project India as 'a 365-day tourism destination'.

Citing World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) projections covering 174 countries, he said: 'In the next decade, India will be the fastest growing tourism destination with an annual growth rate of 88 percent.'

He added that the target was to reach a figure of 10 million foreign tourist arrivals by 2010.

According to Bhushan, foreign tourist arrivals from the Middle East registered an impressive growth of 16 percent in 2007.

'A total of 172,389 foreign tourists visited India from the Middle East in 2007,' he said.

Apart from medical tourism, the tourism ministry is also promoting rural tourism in a major way.

'In our rural tourism initiative, 125 rural sites have been identified to showcase rural life, art, culture and heritage, nature and landscape in and around the villages,' the joint secretary said.

As for outbound tourism, he said the sector was growing at an annual rate of around 25 percent with the country's growing middle class spending more and more on foreign travel.

'Outbound tourism from India is increasing steadily with 8.34 million Indian tourists travelling overseas in the year 2007. The figure is likely to reach 50 million by 2020,' he said.

A total of 31 participants from India, including the state tourism boards of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Jammu and Kashmir and Kerala, are participating at the three-day ATM 2008, the Middle East's premier travel and tourism event, which got under way Tuesday.

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