

## '14 more rural tourism sites to be ready'

Over a dozen rural tourism sites are going to be added to the 'Incredible India' campaign to woo travellers seeking a slice of the real India.

While 36 rural tourism sites have been earmarked to come up in the country, of which 15 have already come up, another 14 will start functioning from this October, Tourism Secretary S. Banerjee said.

He said rural tourism is being given the ministry's highest priority, as it is an innovative tourism product and also benefits the community. He was speaking at a rural tourism workshop here Wednesday.

Rural tourism products all over the country have now received a fresh, wider projection with 14 more rural sites getting ready, after the first 15 of the ministry's 36 UNDP-partnered rural sites became ready last year, he said.

'The employment potential of tourism has been widely accepted. It not only has socio-economic benefits for rural communities, it also gives support to languishing arts and crafts while showcasing the rich culture and diverse cuisine of the sites,' he added.

The focus is on promoting tourism that is sustainable, in harmony with the surroundings and promotes art, craft and culture, he said.

He advised the stakeholders to find effective marketing arrangements, including tie-up with the travel trade at the regional, national and international levels.

At the workshop, principal stakeholders of village tourism Committees of the rural tourism sites were also present.

'The target is not just foreign tourists but the domestic segment which now has a trend shift, searching for one's roots, especially among youth,' he added.

He said the sites that are almost complete are Hodka (Kachchh district in Gujarat), Kumbalangi (Ernakulam district in Kerala), Naggar (Kullu district in Himachal Pradesh) and Ballavpur Danga (Birbhum district in West Bengal).

In the next stage, the sites that would be complete by October 1 are Kazhugumalai (Thoothukudi district in Tamil Nadu), Jageshwar (Almora district in Uttarakhand), Nagarnar (Bastar district in Chhattisgarh), Raghurajpur (Puri district in Orissa), Anegondi (Koppal district in Karnataka) and Mukutmonipur (Bankura district in West Bengal)

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