

Penguin to sell travel guides at historical monuments

Indian tourist spots will now get quality guides and souvenirs through a Penguin India initiative.

Penguin India, part of one of the world's largest publishing groups, will begin selling picture postcards, trinkets, local tourism maps and souvenirs directly to tourists at monuments and other travel sites in a direct-to-consumer outdoor marketing model.

The new series, published under the Dorling Kindersley Imprint, is known as 'The Monument Series'. It comprises a hamper of six glossy 32-page travel books priced at Rs.200. The books will be unveiled next month.

'We will post our marketing teams outside the 12 historical landmarks that we are covering in our new series to sell them to tourists. The price may sound a bit steep, but then the quality of the books makes up for it,' John Duhigg, managing director of Penguin (Travel), told IANS in the capital.

The publishing house has adopted a direct sale business model because its earlier door-to-door marketing campaigns have been successful. 'We wanted to try out something new this time,' Duhigg said.

Dorling Kindersley has two travel guide series in India - the Rough Guides and now the monument series.

The first six books in the monument series deal with the Qutb Minar, Humayun's Tomb, Red Fort, Taj Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri and Amber Fort.

The second lot to be released next year will deal with Khajuraho, Sanchi, Konark, Ajanta and Ellora, Hampi and Mahabalipuram.

The monument series, Duhigg said, combines culture, heritage, architecture and local ambience through colourful large-format photographs, texts, information listings and maps on glossy pages.

'Most of our travel guides, even those on India, are global and sell abroad. But the monument series has been designed with a view to being sold in India - and appealing to Indian sensibilities,' the managing director of Penguin Travel said.

The series, said Duhigg, will also give Penguin an insight into the Indian market because travel guides traditionally are not part of the Indian traveller's psyche, who rely on offline and digital support to plan trips. 'It will be fun to sell the books directly,' he said.

The growing market for travel books is the trigger behind the new series. 'The market for travel books has been growing phenomenally despite the economic meltdown. Most of the large format travel books on India have been on our Top 10 list,' Duhigg said.

He puts the boom to the double-digit growth in inbound tourism to India. An estimate by the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) said the country clocked nearly five million tourist footfalls last year, making it one of the 'shining stars' of Asia-pacific travel and tourism.

'India is a challenging destination for European and US tourists and a must-do trip. We are fascinated by how much Indians are travelling too, even within the country. Tourists need to have the right kind of information - which is well-edited and experiential in nature. And, moreover, we are constantly under pressure to reach out to new markets,' Duhigg said.

The publishing house also plans to put most of its new content online - to compete with the travel guides on the Internet. 'The Rough Guides have been online for 12 years,' he said.

Penguin is also working on a mega-travel guide-cum-coffee table book - 'The Road Less Travelled', listing offbeat destinations.

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