



# Hospitality & Tourism

## Branding Strategies for India

### Executive Summary

Tourism, long seen as a panacea for economic development, and for spurring the growth of related infrastructure in India, came in for its share of accolades and criticism at a session where the Minister of State for Tourism and Culture, Mr Vinod Khanna, delivered the keynote address.

The stagnancy in the tourism sector is only too well known. So, panellists and speakers made only a passing reference to the ills. In the short question-answer sessions, though the problems faced by members of the audience only brought home the point that results, not mere reasoned thought, are the only way of banishing the problems investors as well as tourists face.

The Minister brought some cheer with his statement that a Tourism Policy is now in place, and that a five-fold increase in the tourism budget in the Tenth Five Year Plan has been provided for (taking it up to a sizeable Rs.2,900 crore). He also laid the mandate for the role of the private sector in developing tourism within a legitimate framework to be provided by the Government. Hoping to position tourism as the main engine for economic growth, he identified six tourism circuits that are to be developed, mapping all of India, and made a presentation of the Incredible India brand that will be used to market the country internationally.

To this, the Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism, Mr Rati Vinay Jha, added her submission to NRI investors: VIN, or Visit India, Invest in India, Network in India.

Of the overseas speakers, almost every one made a plea to promote tourism within the PIO community, pointing out that India could be a popular choice for rediscovering their roots, a shared culture, and the abundance of monuments and natural attractions in the country. "If you improve the infrastructure, there is a huge potential within the NRI/PIO community, and you could have very large numbers in a very short time," said Kanti Lal Tappoo, Executive Chairman of the Tappoo Group, Fiji.

Mr Harold Ramdhani, President, Ram's Holding, Surinam, suggested that Indian tourism officials should bring home unique instances to attract the Indian population to their homeland. And Mr Sundru Pillay, CEO, Metro Travel, South Africa, recommended that some Government of India tourist offices overseas should be shut to make way for marketing efforts involving PIOs liaising with Indian consulates. He also pointed out that on an average, a visitor to India spends US\$250 on taxes alone, requiring considerable review of the tax infrastructure.

Other hospitality experts from abroad included Mr Dinubhai Patel, Regional Director and Executive Board Member of the Asian American Hotel Owners' Association, USA, and Mr Shankar Kumar Bose, GM, Bahwan Travels, Sultanate of Oman.

For their part, Indian speakers pointed to their efforts to develop more tourism for India. Mr K Roy Paul, Secretary, Civil Aviation, Government of India and Chairman of Air India, assured the audience that efforts were being made to increase the bilateral flying rights between countries, and pointed out the need to develop smaller airports at tourist destinations away from major metros, where private investment was being encouraged. He also pointed out that the charter policy has been considerably liberalized.

Mr Arvind Singh Mewar and Mr Gaj Singh, former maharajas from Udaipur and Jodhpur, respectively, and promoters of tourism, particularly heritage tourism, pointed to the need for developing an ecologically conscious, heritage tourism brand for India, after having proved its success in their home state of Rajasthan. Maharana Arvind Singh, CMD, Historic Resort Hotels, suggested that any effort, if it is to be turned into an investment opportunity, needs to be translated for the lowest common denominator in the chain of development, if a larger tourism plan is to succeed. Maharaja Gaj Singh, Chairman, Murudhar Hotels, pointed to the success of a programme that he has spearheaded: RICH, or Rural India Culture and Heritage, which has worked extremely well in Rajasthan.

Mr Pradip Madhavji, Chairman of Thomas Cook, was concerned about the effect of terrorism on tourism, and asked NRIs and PIOs to act as goodwill ambassadors against travel Advisories that target India. And hotel major Mr Lalit Suri of Bharat Hotels, who is President of the Hotels' Association, of India, pointing to the role of the 50-million strong Chinese diaspora, said the 20-million strong community of overseas Indians had a very important role to play in developing Indian tourism. He also suggested that visa rules should be relaxed for visitors from the seven countries where Indian residents have been offered dual citizenship.

For his part, Co-Chair host Mike Patel of USA's Diplomat Hotel promised to provide the Indian Government with a White Paper, on his return to America.

A slight promise that India could considerably enhance its measly share of 0.38 per cent of total tourist arrivals worldwide?