

# IATO Speaks

A tourism industry communication by Indian Association of Tour Operators

**New e-visa regime  
for peak &  
lean season**

**Suggestions on  
boosting  
foreign trade through tourism**



Cover depicts Durga Puja

## 35<sup>th</sup> IATO Annual Convention

from September 12-15, 2019, Kolkata





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festival of lights!

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Ayodhya  
26 October, 2019

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## PM's blessings



Narendra Modi  
Prime Minister of India

During India's 73rd Independence Day celebration, Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged people to travel to at least 15 tourist destinations within India by 2022. He said that there is a huge scope to improve India's tourism sector in his address to the nation from the Red Fort.

He added that India has so much to offer and that if domestic tourism increases it will, by default, attract international tourists.

"I know people travel abroad for holidays, but can we think of visiting at least 15 tourist destinations across India before 2022, when we mark 75 years of freedom," the PM said.

PM Modi also said that Indians should visit local destinations even if there are no hotels or infrastructure there. He said that their visits would boost tourism and will help to create better facilities.

"There is a huge scope to improve our tourism sector," he said.

He also said the world is eager to explore trade with India and the government was working to keep prices under check and increase development.

Cover Picture Courtesy: Incredible India Archives

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## President's Message



**Pronab Sarkar**

Dear Friends,

**T**he season for tourism is around the corner and I am confident that with your astute business sense, you will be successful in all your endeavours.

I would like to inform you that we had a productive meeting with Hon'ble Tourism Minister Prahlad Singh Patel on June 17, in his office. The Association members impressed on the Hon'ble Minister the significance of IATO and its role in the industry. The Minister requested IATO to make a presentation on safety of women, for both international and domestic audiences. We have already initiated the task of making these two key presentations, which will subsequently be excellent marketing tools for our members.

You will be happy to note that with regard to our website, the IATO server is totally independent and shall augment the brand value of IATO as a reliable partner in India and abroad. IATO is also working on tie-ups with international outbound associations, and appointment of a PR agency is expected soon.

I am pleased to state that our committees have crafted themselves effectively and the impact is visible. The Hotel Committee had a fruitful meeting with the Taj Group and Oberoi Hotels in June and July, respectively. Key issues related to credit facility, OTAs, cancellation policy, rates, better engagement, demand for advance, reservation system, loyalty points for IATO members, and joint action by hotel chains and IATO were discussed.

The Outbound Committee also set sail with an interaction with Dubai Tourism, TCEB and Thai Airways. Our digital marketing workshop in Guwahati, in association with TOAA, was a huge draw. This will not only help us enhance our membership in the Northeast, but also be the first step towards

showcasing IATO as a national body that supports regional associations and their members. Also, guide rates have seen a nominal increase and all members can quote the same to their foreign agent partners.

You will be pleased to know that on our request, IndiGo has introduced daily non-stop flights between Delhi-Jodhpur and Ahmedabad-Jodhpur from September 5. IATO had requested Air India, IndiGo and SpiceJet to consider introducing flights on the Mumbai-Aurangabad-Udaipur sector as well, with the tourism industry of Aurangabad facing a lot of problems post closure of Jet Airways. In this regard, Rajiv Mehra, VP, IATO, met Ashwani Lohani, CMD, Air India and Meenakshi Malik, Executive Director (Commercial), Air India, on June 12. You will be pleased to know that Air India has proposed to start operating flights on the above-mentioned sector from September 27.

The Incredible India roadshows in USA and Canada were successful, with 20 IATO members participating. The upcoming roadshows will be held in Vietnam, Philippines and Indonesia from August 26-30; Spain and Portugal from October 14-17; and in Europe, South America, Central America and South Korea in September. Our members have been informed and we wish to capitalise on these opportunities. IATO has also contributed to the selection of buyers for India Tourism Mart (ITM) to be held from September 23-25.

The Association's recommendations for boosting foreign trade through tourism and issues faced by tour operators with the Railways have been submitted to the concerned decision makers, with follow-ups being done to ensure implementation.

The 35th Annual Convention in Kolkata, from September 12-15, will be a landmark event. 'Is Tourism Thriving? – Challenges and Opportunities' as the theme, coupled with well-appointed sessions, India travel fair, networking lunches and dinners, and eagerly-awaited Fam trips post the convention, are all poised to make a mark. Please consider this as my personal invitation to you, to be a part of our annual convention.

I also request you to kindly provide us your feedback and suggestions, for us to be able to maximise the reach and impact of our newsletter, enriched with information that our distinguished members keenly look forward to.

Wishing you the very best in all your endeavours!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pronab Sarkar', written over a horizontal line.

Pronab Sarkar  
President

# City of Joy all set to host 35<sup>th</sup> Convention

Ahead of the 35th convention scheduled in Kolkata from September 12-15, Pronab Sarkar, President, IATO and Convention Chairman said the mega event will help promote the city as a destination for MICE tourism.



**P**reparations are on full swing for IATO's next convention in Kolkata and the Executive Committee is delighted to announce that **Pronab Sarkar**, President, IATO, will chair the convention, while **Rajnish Kaistha**, Hony. Joint Secretary, IATO, and **Debjit Dutta**, Chairman, West Bengal Chapter, IATO, will be co-chairmen.

Sharing details on the plan of action, Sarkar informed that several interesting events are lined up this time. "As Chairman, my first endeavour would be to ensure proactive participation of our members.

A grand opening ceremony to the event will help showcase Kolkata as a sought-after city for MICE tourism

and put West Bengal on the road to augmentation of tourism in the state. There will be business sessions as well as networking luncheons and dinners providing an optimal mix of business, knowledge, and entertainment," he said.

The theme of the convention is – "Is Tourism Thriving? – Challenges & Opportunities". Dutta insisted that Durga Puja is the thematic emblem of the convention this year in full consultation with West Bengal Tourism and the state government. He added, "We have made numerous plans to promote new and niche tourism products not just in the city but in the state and across eastern India as well. We are working to get the best out of this convention to boost tourism in the region."

**The inaugural function will be held at the Biswa Bangla Convention Centre in the evening on September 12, and all business sessions and other functions will be held at ITC Royal Bengal Kolkata**

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Contd. on page 6 ►





## Convention Ready



**Pronab Sarkar**  
Convention Chairman



**Debjit Dutta**  
Convention Co-Chairman



**Rajnish Kaistha**  
Convention Co-Chairman

The last session of the convention will be held on September 14, followed by the closing dinner. For tour operators and travel agents, there will be an exclusive half-day session on September 12 in the forenoon. Post-convention tours will begin from September 15.

Sharing his views, Kaistha said that the interactive and knowledgeable

sessions during the convention shall share innovative and experiential travel ideas with present and future problems and solutions for the industry. "The idea is to let people know that there is more to West Bengal than just Kolkata and Darjeeling. The showcasing of other lesser known but high tourism values areas shall be good home taking knowledge," he said.

To facilitate this, Sarkar added, the focus will be on digital marketing, improved connectivity, creating synergy among eastern states for tourism promotion and marketing, charting out unexplored destinations, listening to the new generation of tourism professionals, addressing the issues of taxation, and promoting cruise tourism in the state. "Presentations by state governments and ideas of the Ministry of Tourism will form the core aspects," he shared.

Sarkar claims that his expectations from the convention are realistic and shall fructify in witnessing a surge in tourism in diverse segments in the state of West Bengal and the eastern region.

"The facets of the upcoming convention differentiate it from other landmark IATO conventions. We welcome one and all to this historic platform to savour the essence of an all-abiding growth of tourism," he concluded.

# Interaction with MOT

The Executive Committee had a productive meeting with the Hon'ble Tourism Minister, Prahlad Singh Patel in his office in Delhi. The committee members informed the minister about the significance of IATO and its role in the industry.







# Meet, greet and interact

Delebrating over various issues in the assoication, IATO Members gathered in Delhi over monthly interactive luncheon meetings at The Oberoi and The Park, New Delhi to meet, greet and interact.

**JULY 2019**



**AUGUST 2019**





## No-crime zone around 500 m of tourist sites

**Prahlad Singh Patel**, Minister of State (IC), Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, said that they will work towards ensuring that there is a no-crime zone around 500 m–1 km radius area of major tourist attractions by tightening security arrangements. They will also work towards training drivers, guides and tour operators, affiliated with MOT, on dealing with foreign tourists, especially women. He said, “The personnel that interact with the tourists at every touch-point need

to be sensitised on how to deal with them, and make sure that they do not carry any negative perception about the country.

Even in case of any problem, the tourist shall be able to seek help from his phone, no matter where he/she is. Even in case they enter one state from another, we are trying to work on the technology that the helpline numbers in their phones change automatically, depending on their location.”

## Monuments to have information boards in foreign languages

**Prahlad Singh Patel**, Minister of State (IC), Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, has announced that they will soon install information boards at major monuments

across the country. These would have information in three foreign languages, the choice of languages would be determined based on the countries from where that particular



monument gets the maximum number of tourists. This might also be followed by a digital code on the board, where tourists can point their phones and get information of the monument in detail.

## New e-Visa regime for peak & lean season

Fulfilling the long-standing demand of the association and the industry, the Ministry of Tourism, GOI has announced the reduction of visa fee from USD 25 to USD 10 during the lean season (April-June) to boost the inbound tourism in the country. A short duration of e-Visa for tourists with one-month validity and visa fee of USD 25 has also been introduced for peak season (July-March). This is a steep drop from the current e-Visa fee of about US\$ 80 to US\$ 100.

The Ministry has proposed a 5-year e-Tourist Visa with USD 80 fee, besides the existing one-year e-Tourist visa with a fee of USD 40.

For Japan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, lean period visa fees is US\$ 10 and for e-Visa of 30 days, 1 year and 5 years, the fee is US\$ 25. For rest of the countries, where e-Visa facility is available, lean period visa fee is US\$ 10 and peak season visa for 30 days is US\$ 25. For e-Visa for 1 year and 5 years, the fee is US\$ 40 and US\$ 80 respectively.

There will be no visa fee for tourists from 14 Pacific Island nations belonging to Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) and Myanmar, Argentina, Indonesia, Jamaica, Mauritius, Seychelles, South Africa and Uruguay.

## Paryatan Parv from Oct 2-13

The third edition of Paryatan Parv will be celebrated on the 150<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi and will be held from Oct 2-13 across the country. The dates for the nationwide activities under Paryatan Parv by the states will take place from October 2-13, 2019, while the activities under Government of India will be held from October 2-6 at Rajpath in New Delhi.

**MOT issues guidelines calling entries for National Tourism Awards 2017-18**







# The forgotten saga

## ভুলে যাওয়া কাহিনী

A tribute to the people of West Bengal



Few centuries ago, circa 1617-1624, when an entourage of curiosity footed seafarers anchored their ship at the shores of Bengal province; little did they realise, that they were stepping into a land of no return. Such was the charisma of its people, and the assurance of its wealth, that this voyage turned into an enterprise of survey for trade opportunities. Decades later in 1698, the 'British East India Company' bought three villages from a local landlord. These villages were called Sutanuti, Gobindapur and Kolkata, thus began the glory of Kolkata and the new-age saga of Bengal (a word acquired from the ancient kingdom of Banga, pronounced 'Bongo'). By 1772, Kolkata became capital of the Colonial Indian Empire. With their takeover of Bengal, many literary practices of this distinguished land, began to find new urban patronage and social bearings. Constant exposure to western people, their lifestyles, etiquette and finer education, began to affect social changes.

Gradually over many decades (period known as Bengal renaissance, circa 1775-1833 through 1861-1941), the region came to be known for its artistic pursuits, knowledge and learning, and its capital Kolkata, became the centre of elite intellectual fraternity, literary wealth, writing and poetry, social and religious reforms, music, science, film making and ultimate cultural high. This was a period of metamorphosis directed by blossoming of influences and marked the impressive transition from medieval to the modern nineteenth century Bengal. It continued to conserve its versatile persona, appeal and scholarly aura thereafter, as years, seasons and governments went by.

**West Bengal, is the only state in our 'Incredible India' which is endowed with every conceivable leisure product within its singular geography, such is the abundance of its tourism wealth**

Sipping a cup of hot masala chai (tea), 64 years old Deboshish Ghosh fondly recalls: *"Although the core character of Kolkata remained largely unchanged, however the nostalgia of those days still elates my spirits. We lived on the Ganesh Chandra Avenue and often walked across to Chowringhee, I was then a young boy, tana-rickshaws (hand-pulled rickshaws) with wooden wheels rolled on city streets, sometimes they used to run alongside the chubby looking yellow ambassador taxis. These tana-rickshaws used to carry around all types of people, from white-collared office babus to pot-bellied lalas and their bulky spouses, my mother used to go to new market area in one of them. I can still, in my mind, almost hear that hollowish ting-tt-ting jingling sounds of their ghungroo shaped finger-bells. These rickshaws were introduced by British in 1890s, it began as a ride only of the affluent people, eventually it became popular with middle class too. I also remember my father used to get his shoes custom made from one Mr. Lee on Park street. In those days twin-engined Dakota aeroplanes used to fly to Dumdum aerodrome. We visited lebutala during Durga puja*

*festival. Roland Joffé had tried to capture a dramatic story with the life of a tana-rickshaw puller, through his film. And also, by the way, Satyajit Ray, who brought world recognition to Indian cinema, was the first Indian to receive an honorary Oscar."* Putting down his blue porcelain tea cup, Mr Ghosh concludes: *"Anyways, Kolkata is a cosmopolitan city with very rich history, but all the rest of West Bengal has many greatly rewarding experiences to offer. Yes, sure; Kolkata city is one of them, but this is only one very small part".*

Born on 26 January 1950, the state of West Bengal, is the only state in our 'Incredible India' which is endowed with every conceivable leisure product within its singular geography, such is the abundance of its tourism wealth. It sweeps across 88750+ sq kms of charming landscapes, touching the enchanting mountains and valleys, in the shadows of the Himalayas up in the North, and tropical shorelines of swaying palm trees and soothing waters of Bay of Bengal, down in the South. And a lot, lot more, in between.

West Bengal is also the passage way of the river Ganga which flows through this land on its journey to the infinity of the Oceans, carrying in its holy waters, the prayerful hopes of nirvana for countless hindu souls.

The appeal of its beauty and experiences remain unending! Nobody can ever fully comprehend the delightful merits, inherent to this versatile topographical and cultural wonderland called West Bengal. (Pascima Banga. পশ্চিম বঙ্গ).

*The author, Neelam Thakur (Neel) has been a devoted tourism professional for more than three decades  
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# Making members tech-ready

The Skill Development Committee of IATO has organised numerous workshops/training programmes periodically to upgrade and enhance the skills and knowledge of members and their staff.

**W**ith a series of training programmes organised in the past six months, the Skill Development Committee is buoyant on keeping the IATO members abreast of the latest IT tools and digital marketing technology to increase their competitiveness and subsequently their business and to cope with the new technology and marketing techniques, which is need of the hour. According to **Kuku Kumar**, Convener, Skill Development Committee, IATO and Proprietor, Travelmate India, the focus has been on improving the skill set of mid-level employees with the intent of evolving them into decision-making managers.

"The training has been inclusive at all levels of the company. The best example of which was the training for office attendants to improve their communication skills, customer handling, personal grooming and effective office handling skills. This was very well received and appreciated," she says.

Since April 2019, the committee has organised seven different training programmes including sessions on opportunities for GenX, office attendants and digital marketing workshops across the country on demand by the various IATO Chapters.



**Kuku Kumar**  
Convener, Skill Development Committee - IATO  
and Proprietor, Travelmate India

Sharing details, Kumar informs, "Kerala, Kolkata, Guwahati are some locations where the digital marketing training has already taken place and we intend to conduct training at several other locations. There are some other chapters who have shown interest and we intend to hold this programme next in Bhubaneswar. The other programme which was highly appreciated was 'Tourism Opportunities for GenX'. The intent is to target staff of small and medium tour operators and their team members, enabling them to face upcoming changes and competition in the market and to create a win-win situation for the organisation they are associated

with. Their foundation must be strong, so that they would be able to strengthen the organisation as well as create a professional working atmosphere."

Kumar believes that these training programmes will help members and their staff stay aware of how to overcome constant challenges being faced in the tourism industry. "Most of trainings have been undertaken voluntarily by the IATO members, who are keen to share their first-hand experience gained by them over a period, which is highly appreciated. The tourism in-



**Since April 2019, the committee has organised seven different training programmes across the country on demand by the various IATO Chapters**



dustry, although very progressive, is facing constant challenges and we and our staff must be fully aware of how to overcome them," she says.

The skill development committee is constantly in touch with the members to know their pulse regarding the specific areas where the staff needs to be honed up and based on that, these trainings are designed accordingly. Over booking of seats in each programme is indicative of the popularity of these training programmes, many of which had to be repeated on demand.

In future, Kumar aims to train the staff in India and internationally, who are selling India. She is passionate to make them India destination experts. This can be achieved by conducting online programmes and through webinars, according to her.







# Experience festival of lights in Ayodhya

Welcome to Ayodhya, the birthplace of Ram and *Deepotsav*, one of the most popular festivals in India. Ayodhya is situated on the bank of river, Saryu in district Faizabad of Uttar Pradesh.

**A**yodhya in Sanskrit means 'where there is no war'. Awadh is a synonym for Ayodhya in the local dialect. Ram, in Sanskrit means sun, light, radiance within me, the soul or self. Ram is also an ancient mantra used for meditation or Dhyana yoga and devotion or Bhakti yoga.

*Deepotsav* is a celebration in gratitude for the Divine in one's life and the guiding light within each person.

This festival of light is celebrated on the night of *Kartik Amavasya*, when King Ram, son of King Dashratha and Queen Kaushalya returned from a 14-year exile. He was accompanied by his wife, Sita, brother Laxman and new friends from Lanka and Kishkindha. The whole city was beautifully lit up to welcome them.

Airborne on *Pushpak Vimaan*, Lord Ram showed a bird's eye view of Ayodhya to his friends and said,  
जन्मभूमि मम पुरी सुहावनी। उत्तरदिशि बहसरजूपावनि॥

He felt privileged to be born in this naturally scenic and sacred place which has pure vibrations.

Today, Ayodhya is a place of pilgrimage for lovers of culture and history. Many royals, saints, monks and common people have kept the temple town on the banks of pristine river, Saryu as a tribute for every seeker. You will find the spirit in its people, food, music, literature, buildings, spaces. *Deepotsav* in Ayodhya was revived in



2017 in all its glory by the Honorable Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Sri Yogi Adityanath.

*Deepotsav* in 2018 was celebrated with much fanfare. The whole cityscape was a silhouette of lights. 3.15 million traditional earthen lamps (*diyas*) were glowing at the glorious '*Ram ki Pairi*' steps.

Colorful tableaux, folk music, a water show, plays on the life of Ram from Indonesia, Cambodia, Laos and Russia were performed. A sense of awe, beauty and inner awakening marked *Deepotsav* 2018!

Be with us for *Deepotsav* 2019 at Ayodhya, India.

## Things to do

- ❖ **Shobha Yatra:** Participate in the parade of tableaux and live performances with folk music and scenes from the world's oldest epic play, Ramayana.
- ❖ Listen to the ancient mantras and chants at the evening Saryu *aarti* at the riverfront.
- ❖ See the story of Ram in a laser light show, son et lumière.
- ❖ See the Ramayana plays from India and around the world.
- ❖ Take a boat ride to see local life.





## Swiss ambassador participates in special heritage walk in Bhubaneswar

Swiss Ambassador to India, Dr Andreas Baum participated in a special heritage walk at Old Town in Bhubaneswar. The envoy included Swiss politician Niklaus Samuel Gugger and his son, in a walk which



began from the beautiful precincts of Mukteswar and Siddheswar temple, where he was overwhelmed by the sheer artistry on display on the walls of the temples. The ambassador praised the art and craftsmanship of Odisha. Throughout the walk, he took many pictures and appreciated the beauty of the temples.

## Indigo launches daily non-stop flight to Jodhpur from Delhi, Ahmedabad

Budget carrier, Indigo has announced the commencement of daily non-stop flights between Delhi – Jodhpur – Delhi and Ahmedabad – Jodhpur – Ahmedabad from September 5, 2019. Flight 6E 423 will fly from Delhi to Jodhpur at 12:55 hours and arrive at 14:00 hours. While, 6E 197 will return from Jodhpur at 17:25 hours and land in Delhi at 18:45 hours. The flight to Jodhpur from Ahmedabad, 6E 781 will depart from Sardar Vallabh Bhai Patel airport at 16:00 hours and arrive at its destination at 16:55 hours. The flight 6E 778 will fly from Jodhpur at 14:30 hours and land in Ahmedabad at 15:30 hours. The airline will use Airbus A320 for all these new flights.

## IATO seeks flights between Mumbai, Aurangabad & Udaipur

IATO had requested Air India, IndiGo and Spice Jet to consider introducing flights on sector Mumbai – Aurangabad – Udaipur – Aurangabad – Mumbai as the tourism industry is facing lot of problems after closure of Jet Airways operations in Aurangabad. In this regards, Rajeew Mehra, VP, IATO also held a meeting with Ashwani Lohani, CMD, Air India and Meenakshi Malik, Executive Director (Commercial) Air India after which Air India has proposed to start operation of its flight on the above sector from September 27, 2019. The national carrier proposes to operate Airbus A320 on this route thrice a week on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The flight will take



(On the right) Ashwani Lohani, CMD, Air India

off from Mumbai at 12:30 pm and will arrive at Aurangabad at 1:40 pm. It will fly for Udaipur at 2:10 pm. On the return route, the flight will arrive from Udaipur at Aurangabad at 4 pm and proceed towards Mumbai at 5:40 pm.

## IATO writes to Nitin Gadkari to improve roads to Ajanta Caves

The association has written a letter to Nitin Gadkari, Union Minister of Road Transport & Highways, urging him to revive the pending work of highway Aurangabad-Sillod-Ajanta-Jalgaon on top priority.

The apex body of tour operators has also sought immediate action to reduce inconvenience to tourists visiting the world heritage site, Ajanta Caves.

The Tourism Promoters' Guild (TPG) has also submitted a memorandum to the Union Minister, drawing his attention to the traffic density on the highway to Ajanta Caves, which is very high as he urged



the need of repair works of roads on priority basis.

As many as 9,000 vehicles (of different types) use the route daily. The memorandum explains the worse condition of the roads and how tourists and other motorists are facing hardships since the contractor left the road work incomplete.



## Direct flight to Khajuraho starting October 27

Addressing the need and demand of the travel fraternity in Khajuraho, Air India has announced a daily direct flight to the UNESCO World Heritage site from New Delhi, starting October 27. At present, the airline operates services to the temple town in Madhya Pradesh via Varanasi and Agra three times a week. The flight will be rescheduled to Khajuraho and then to Varanasi. Agra will be excluded from the route. The city has been facing dearth of international tourists amid poor air connectivity after the grounding of Jet airways.



New Delhi and then to Varanasi. The return flight will arrive at Khajuraho from Varanasi from where it will depart for New Delhi.

Confirming the same, Dhananjay Kumar, Spokesperson, Air India said, "We will be rescheduling the existing Khajuraho flight from October 27 (the beginning of the airlines' winter schedule) by operating it directly from

To address the issue, IATO had requested Air India to operate a daily flight on the sector looking at the popularity among foreign tourists at the destination.



## Work together for new markets

In a series of meeting with the Taj Group and the Oberoi Group, the Hotel Committee is hopeful that IATO and the hotels can work together to promote new markets so that new flight routes and new destinations can open up. Hony. Secretary, **Rajesh Mudgill** said that the IATO members will get an opportunity to experience Taj and Oberoi properties. The Taj and Oberoi team suggested that IATO members can experience their properties. IATO has requested Taj to give them a date with regards to the above, while Oberoi hotels has offered special industry rates for IATO members for their personal travel which are with immediate effect and valid till 30<sup>th</sup> September 2019.

This measure will improve connect between hotels and IATO. Other key points discussed were loyalty points to



tour operators, reservation system and special rates for domestic operators.

The meeting with the Taj Group was also fruitful. Credit policy, cancellation parameters, rates, timely remittance of commission to IATO members were discussed.

## IATO at Uttar Pradesh Travel Mart 2019



During the recently concluded Uttar Pradesh Travel Mart 2019, President Pronab Sarkar represented IATO while sharing the stage with Chief Minister of the state, Yogi Adityanath. He also addressed the gathering during the session.



## Daily non-stop flight to Aurangabad from October 8

Catering to IATO's demand to improve connectivity to Aurangabad, Spicejet has launched a daily non-stop flight starting from October 8 to the heritage city, best known for its medieval monuments like Ajanta & Ellora caves and Bibi Ka Maqbara. The airline has also announced 11 other new domestic flights effective from the first week of October 2019. SG 8901 will depart from Delhi at 6.00 am and reach Aurangabad at 7.50 am. SG 8902 will depart from Aurangabad at 8.20 am and reach Delhi at 10.20 am. Spicejet has launched an introductory all-inclusive promotional fare from ₹ 4,099 onwards.

**IATO donates  
₹ 2.5 lakh for Odisha  
Cyclone relief fund**





# Revision of guide fee from October 1

IATO and the Tourist Guides' Federation of India (TGFI) have signed an agreement to hike fee for guides by almost 10 per cent, effective from October 2019, for a period of two years (i.e. till September 2021)

**R**ajeev Mehra, President, IATO has revealed that IATO and Tourist Guides' Federation of India (TGFI) have signed an agreement with regard to hike fee for guides. "After deliberations between TGFI and IATO EC/Guide Committee, we reached to a conclusion for a reasonable hike and an agreement was signed between **Pronab Sarkar**, President, IATO, and **Dr Ajay Singh**, President, TGFI. Effective from October 2019, for a period of two years (i.e. till September 2021), the agreement suggests an approximately 10 per cent increase on the present rates," he said.



Rajiv Mehra, Vice President, IATO

Commenting on the reforms for tax relief in the industry, he said, "IATO was called for a meeting with officials of MOT, which was attended by our President and me. We gave them several suggestions, mostly related to GST, and the ministry has sent the same to the GST Council to be looked into favourably. We also requested MOT to grant an 'exports' status to the tourism sector."

The association has also been requesting for rationalisation of GST on tourism and hospitality, exemption of GST on foreign exchange earnings by tour operators and reduction in tourist visa fee, but all this remains pending.



The IATO team works very closely with the Ministry of Tourism (MOT), and recently met Prahlad Singh Patel, Tourism Minister (I/C), Government of India, to discuss a strategy that would help boost inbound tourism to India. Mehra informed that the association met the new minister in

his office and discussed a number of things. "He has especially emphasised on the training of drivers for the safety of women and other passengers. He also sought suggestions from IATO, which we are working on, and would be giving details on shortly," he said.

Mehra also shared that MOT had organised roadshows in USA and Canada, where 19 Association members, led by IATO president, Pronab Sarkar, had participated. "From MOT, Meenakshi Sharma, Director General, Tourism, led the delegation," he concluded.



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the present rates**



# Promoting outbound tourism to foster bilateral ties

The association is terming it as a step to drive cross-border tourism and improve bilateral tourism ties with different countries with outbound tourism.

**T**he Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) will now start promoting outbound tourism to neighbouring countries in a bid to help its members expand their horizon of business as well as improving bilateral ties with the countries to get more tourists to India and simultaneously send tourists from India to such destinations. The association invited Dubai Tourism, TCEB and Thai Airways to discuss their plans to work together. The association is also working to promote outbound operations for its members with an intent to develop a model of cross-border tourism.

In a first such interactive meeting organised for IATO members who do outbound or want to do outbound, IATO introduced its members with the idea and intent to promote outbound tourism as well. Around 80 members attended the meeting.

Sharing more details, **Rajiv Mehra**, VP, IATO & EC Liaison, Outbound Tourism Promotion Committee said that they are first looking to target the neighbouring countries like Thailand, Dubai, Vietnam and can further move on to other countries. "Let us learn things and promote India for inbound

tourism to our neighbouring destinations and also for outbound tourism so that more Indian tourists travel abroad. Whatever less business is coming to India, let us get it filled up with such initiatives," he said.

Working tirelessly towards enhancing the reach of outbound tourism within IATO and motivating members towards expanding their horizon, **Vishal Yadav**, Convener-Outbound Sub Committee, IATO, stated that the association had to change with time.

"IATO has been the apex body for inbound tourism in the country but with changing times, we have realised that there is a lot of scope in the outbound market as well for our members. A lot of problems and issues are happening in inbound and we need to evolve with time to survive. This initiative will give an extra avenue of growth to our members," he said.

IATO is making a roadmap on how it can help its members to share more support and knowledge about promoting outbound tourism and Yadav said that the association intends to organise an Outbound Knowledge Forum on a bi-monthly basis.

"Going forward, we would invite more NTOs to become part of the forum. We are already working with Dubai Tourism, TCEB and Thai Airways and talks are going on with couple of other NTOs to become part of the next event", he shared.



**IATO is making a roadmap on how it can help its members to share more support and knowledge about promoting outbound tourism**

Talking about the need of stepping into outbound tourism, Yadav said that it becomes a moral responsibility of IATO take new initiatives, being the government recognised, apex body of tourism.

"We do not have an association recognised by the Government of India, Department of Tourism (DOT) for outbound tourism. It becomes our responsibility to create a team of travel agents with is DOT approved," he said.

He further said that there is a lot of scope for enhancing bilateral ties with countries from where India receives tourists and promoting outbound tourism there.

**Vishal Yadav**  
Convener  
Outbound Sub Committee, IATO



# IATO takes up issues faced by tour operators with Railways



The association wrote to **Piyush Goyal**, Minister for Railways, taking note of various issues faced by tour operators.

In the letter addressed to the minister, President **Pronab Sarkar** first congratulated him on assuming charge in the new government and apprised him about details of the association. He informed Goyal that the members are facing certain issues and the association have been writing to the Railways, but the problems have remained unsolved.

Among the number of issues, the IATO President informed that IATO members are facing issues regarding group ticket booking facility with IRCTC, where online booking is allowed only for maximum six passengers in one booking, whereas the average size of a foreign tourist group is of 30-40 persons.

He said that IATO has already made recommendations to IRCTC, but the demand has not been heard yet. In a set of suggestions, Sarkar said that IATO members should be allowed to book rail tickets for their foreign groups in the similar way as they do for domestic air booking. He also mentioned a facility of 360 days advance booking for foreign clients for IATO members, who are recognised by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. One of the other suggestions is to make booking pattern for IATO members, terms and conditions, advance booking period at par with the pattern followed for international booking centres abroad.

In another concern, Sarkar made the minister aware of the grievance concerning booking of luxury trains billing with IRCTC. The members of the Association are currently facing issues with IRCTC in respect of their invoicing of booking of Tour Package for Maharajas' Express Luxury Train for the current season 2018-19.

In the letter, the association said that from the current season 2018-19, IRCTC has abruptly changed its invoicing pattern and has started

treating the tour operator / sales affiliate as 'pure agent' of the end customer / tourist by referring to GST provisions. Their reference to GST provisions is erroneous. IRCTC did not take concurrence from tour operators / sales affiliates before changing the billing process.

IATO has suggested that IRCTC should raise Tax Invoice in INR with 5 per cent GST to the tour operator / sales affiliate and then the tour operator should raise Tax Invoice to the foreign tourist / client, said IATO.

The association also called for restoring the old invoicing system of IRCTC to the sales affiliate and then from sales affiliate to the foreign national.

IATO also raised issues regarding Railway Platform entry pass for tour operators. "In order to service the foreign groups and individuals our IATO members buy platform tickets whose sale is suspended during/ around special occasions like 15<sup>th</sup> August, 2<sup>nd</sup> October, 26<sup>th</sup> January and during Puja holidays etc., due to which our representatives going to assist the foreign tourists are not able to assist them.

Many a times foreign tourist groups are scattered, or many tourists who do not know English language face lot of problems," said the letter to the minister. In its suggestion, the association asked for issuance of special pass to serve foreign clients for arrival and departure at the platforms for the Railway Station in all metro cities and tourist places.

The association has also demanded for a 2-minute halt of Vande Bharat Express at Tundla Junction for facilitating foreign/domestic tourists for pilgrimage tourism to Prayagraj and Varanasi. The apex inbound tourism body also requested the minister to introduce Vande Bharat Express on other important tourists' sectors.

# EVENTS CALENDAR

## Upcoming Incredible India Roadshows

VENUE DATE

### AUGUST 2019

#### ★ Roadshow No. 1 : Vietnam, Philippines, Indonesia

Hanoi	26 (Mon)
Manila	27 (Tue)
Jakarta	29 (Thu)
Public Event in Jakarta with Embassy of India, Jakarta	30 (Fri)

### SEPTEMBER 2019

#### ★ Roadshow No. 2: South Korea

Seoul (South Korea)	03 (Tue)
Busan (South Korea)	04 (Wed)

#### ★ Roadshow No. 4 : UK & Ireland

Manchester	17 (Tue)
Glasgow	18 (Wed)
Dublin	19 (Thu)

#### ★ Roadshow No. 5 : The Netherlands & Belgium

Amsterdam	24 (Tue)
Brussels	25 (Wed)
Antwerp	26 (Thu)

### OCTOBER 2019

#### ★ Roadshow No. 7 : South & Central America

Barcelona	14 (Mon)
Madrid	15 (Tue)
Seville	16 (Wed)
Lisbon	18 (Fri)

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## New Membership

*approved with effect from 17<sup>th</sup> July, 2019*

### ACTIVE

#### Sacred Dot Tours LLP

101, First Floor, DT Mega Mall, DLF Phase-1  
Gurgaon-122002  
Tel: 0124-4101122

### ACTIVE (CHANGE OF STATUS)

#### Geanis Holidays Pvt. Ltd.

61/1 Ashok Nagar (Opp. Tilak Nagar  
Metro Station Gate No.3)  
New Delhi- 110018  
Tel: 011-41094211

### ALLIED

#### Asian Exclusive Travel Pvt. Ltd.

101, Allied House  
1, Local Shopping Centre, Madangir  
New Delhi-110062  
Tel: 011-26053747

#### Columbia Tour And Travels

Ikhrajpora, Jawahir Nagar,  
Sgr. Near S.B.I. ATM.  
Srinagar-190008  
Tel: 0194-2312039

#### Enduring Journeys Pvt. Ltd.

Building No.16, First Floor,  
Sultanpur Mehrauli Gurgaon Road  
New Delhi-110030

#### Experience India Tours & Travels Pvt. Ltd.

Shop No.16, 2nd Floor,  
Shri Ram Mandir Complex, H-Block  
Palam Vihar, Gurgaon-122017  
Tel: 0124-2365409

#### Grand Royal Tours Pvt. Ltd.

220, First Floor, Thammanan Road,  
Near Four Roads, Arisi Palayam  
Salem-636009  
Tel: 0427-4042503

#### Hindustan Tour & Travels

7, Laxminaryan Bari Road,  
In front of Ujjayanta Palace, Main Gate  
Agartala-799001  
Tel: 0381-2322020-5373

#### Hospitality & Marketing Services

2/2, Ashoka Road, Shipra Suncity  
Ghaziabad-201014  
Tel: 011-43570369

#### MCI Gets India Pvt. Ltd.

2nd & 3rd Floor,  
366, Mansarovar Building,  
Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road, Sultanpur  
New Delhi-110030  
Tel: 011-46611500

#### Pema Wellness Resort At Baypark

D. No 5-72/1, Healing Hills, Beach Road  
Visakhapatnam-530045  
Tel: 0891-2825555

#### Rajasthan Holidays

20 Tirupati Vihar,  
Dhaibai Ji Ki Bari Pula  
Udaipur-313001  
Tel: 0294-2410722

#### Swastik India Journeys

Villa No. 14, Pebbles Bay,  
Sirsi, Bindaya Road, Bindauka  
Jaipur-302012  
Tel: 0141-2357450

#### Titly Travels

40/6 Church Road, Jagpura, Bhogal  
New Delhi- 110014  
Tel: 011-41517435

#### Trekmunk Pvt. Ltd.

7/6338 Street No.1,  
Block-7, Dev Nagar, Karol Bagh  
New Delhi-110005  
Tel: 011-40454194

#### Turtle Trails India Travels

2/31, Ground Floor, Vijay Nagar  
Double Storey, Delhi-110009  
Tel: 011-26270452  
Mob: 9999845726

#### Veda Voyages

Shop No.14, Devdarshan Apts.  
Behind Johnson N Johnson,  
Moghul Lane Mahim (W)  
Mumbai-400016  
Mob: 9820101734, 7777088359, 9973167140

#### Varanasi Journeys Pvt. Ltd.

B1/12 Mint House Colony,  
Nadesar  
Varanasi-221002  
Tel: 0542-2500344









# Promoting innovative travel ideas



**DEBJIT DUTTA**  
Founder & CEO  
Impression Tourism  
Services (India)

**D**ebjit Dutta is a leading tour operator, travel supplier and DMC promot-

ing innovative travel ideas across East and Northeast India along with sub-Himalayan Eastern neighbours of Bhutan and Bangladesh.

Dutta is also associated with Vivada Hospitality Services (India) for their community tourism initiative in Sundarbans under the banner of TORA Eco Resort and Life Experience Centre. Having spent his entire childhood in the foothills of Eastern Himalayas and having travelled across the region, he developed a passion for travel

which inspired him to take up tourism as his lifestyle and in 1997 he started his journey in the travel industry after completing his PG in Tourism from NBU. Today, Dutta is well recognised in the tourism industry for his vision and innovation in tourism and effort on positioning of Eastern South Asian Tourism Circuit in the national and global market with highest level of service standards across the region.

A well-known industry activist and orator, Dutta is

associated both with IATO and ADTOI as State Chapter Chairman along with some other prominent trade bodies such as CII in the state of Bengal. Dutta believes that skilled human resources is one of the most important factors for the development of tourism to ensure the delivery of products and services at the ground level. As a part of his sustainable tourism practice he is associated with skill development initiatives to empower the host community to achieve sustainable future through tourism.

## South India specialist 'delivering happiness'



**SEJOE JOSE**  
Managing Director  
Marvel Tours

**S**ejo Jose started his career in travel trade in 1999 with proprietary firm called Marvel Taxi. The main objective of the firm was ground handling business for both domestic and international guests for its partners from Delhi and Mumbai. On August 16, 2002, Marvel Tours became a private limited company with the head office at Kochi. The vision of the company was to ensure uncompromised quality in

service for every client. The company focused on quality and ensured every guest goes back with great memories of South India. It is now considered as a South India specialist with offices in Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Marvel Tours has earned a reputation of the being the only South India based company to help our partners from Delhi, Mumbai and other parts of India to do both Leisure Tours and MiCE events in South India.

Marvel Tours has now expanded again into houseboats. Its sister concern, Marvel Cruise has eight house boats built in traditional style. Perfect Hands Solutions is another sister concern, which represents over 150 hotels in Kerala and helps its partners to get the most competitive price for their guests.

## Taking cruise tourism to a next level



**SUSHILA RAMAMOORTHY**  
Executive Director  
Vivada Corporation

**B**eing at the forefront of cruise business and river cruises in the Eastern part of the country, Sushila Ramamoorthy is happy to be associated with IATO as the cruise partner for the 35th IATO Convention in Kolkata. Her company, Vivada Cruises invested in river cruising in 1999, with commencement of day cruises from Kolkata to nearby areas like Belur Math, Kumartuli,

Botanical Gardens etc. In 2006, it introduced overnight cruises to Sundarbans and heritage trails on the river Ganges, both for the domestic market and overseas.

Reiterating the fact that river cruising is a popular tourism product of West Bengal for the inbound market, she hopes that the delegates coming for the IATO convention will enjoy an evening onboard its cruise M.V. Auspicious.

Ramamoorthy joined Vivada in 1987 and having worked on various projects including Barge building and Cruise designing, she has experience of putting up various needs of the inland water industry to the ministry, both at the central and state government level. She is presently representing the trade in the Board of Directors of West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation.



# Boosting foreign trade through tourism

The association has submitted its inputs to the Minister of Commerce & Industry, Government of India and Director General Foreign Trade for boosting trade through tourism.

In its letter, IATO has requested that following recommendations may be considered for the tourism industry to enable growth in business and in turn increase foreign trade and foreign exchange earnings.

## GST Issue

The association has asked for exemption of GST on foreign exchange billing by tour operators for inbound tours. It said that the place of supply for certain service shall be the location where services are actually rendered. Applying the above criteria, the place of supply (POS) of services of an Indian tour operator giving services to foreign tourist in India happens to be in India where the tourist is physically present or comes in contact with the Indian tour operator for the purpose of availing services. Since

**Tour operators under the foreign trade policy are eligible for SEIS benefits which is presently 7 per cent on their foreign exchange earnings**

the services are actually performed in India, POS takes place in India which means that all the criteria of 'export of services' are not fully met. However, the fact is that the payment for the services rendered to the foreign tourist / foreign agency are realised by the tour operator in convertible foreign exchange. Invoice is raised to the For-

ign Tour Operator/person located abroad and recipient of services is the foreign national / client of the Foreign Tour Operator (FTO).

## IATO's recommendation

The parameters/ definition of "export of services" may be relaxed in the case of tour operators and the services of tour operators earning foreign exchange for the country may be accorded with the status of 'export of services' paving the way for non-payment of IGST on billing to the foreign tourists / FTO.

The criteria of place of supply based on performance of services as laid down in section 13(3)(b) of IGST Act may also be excepted / made inapplicable for tour operators operating in the country. Tourism industry should be given the status of deemed export services.

## Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEEs) from Tourism in India

Year	FEE in ₹ terms		FEE in US\$ terms	
	₹Crore	% Change over previous year	US \$ Million	% Change over previous year
2008	51294	15.6	11832	10.3
2009	53754	4.8	11136	-5.9
2010	66172	23.1	14490	30.1
2011	83036	25.5	17707	22.2
2012	95607	15.1	17971	1.5
2013	107563	12.5	18397	2.4
2014	120367	11.9	19700	7.1
2015	134844	12.0	21013	6.7
2016#2	154146	14.3	22923	9.1
2017#2	177874	15.4	27310	19.1
2018#1 (Jan-Nov)	175423	10.7@	25838	6.4@

#1 Provisional estimated, @growth rate over Jan-Nov of previous year

#2 Provisionally Revised estimated (based on final FTA received from BOI).

The month-wise FEEs from tourism and corresponding percentage change over previous years during 2016-2018 in ₹ terms and US\$ terms.

Source: Market Research & Statistics, Ministry of Tourism



## Removal of cascading effect of GST on tourism industry

Under the GST regime, tour operator services are taxed under 5 per cent tax slab with denial of Input Tax Credit (ITC). 5 per cent tax on entire package value results in taxing all the input service procurements made by the tour operator once again. This has resulted in cascading of taxes in the entire supply chain. This defeats the very purpose of GST, which aims to kill cascading of taxes.

### Recommendations

The gross value may be taxed 18 per cent GST and Input Tax Credit on various input services may be allowed on actual basis notwithstanding the technicalities of POS rules.

## To increase SEIS benefits to tour operators

Tour operators under the foreign trade policy are eligible for SEIS benefits which is presently 7% on their foreign exchange earnings.

### Recommendations

This may be increased to 12% to encourage the tourism industry.

## Reduction in e-tourist visa fees

E-Visa fee was increased in June 2018 from US\$ 50 to US\$ 80 and US\$ 80 to US\$ 100. The main reason of our request for reducing the Visa Fee is that our neighbouring countries charge very low Visa Fee compared to India.

### Recommendations

To reduce the tourist e-Visa Fee and charge at flat rate of \$25 or 30 per person for all nationals for e-Visa or roll-back the increase and charge the visa fee which was being charged before June 2018. To consider free of charge e-Visa (Zero Visa Fee) for tourists during the off season i.e. from April to September every year as other than the hotels in hill areas occupancy in hotels in rest of India is less than 50%.

## Other required initiatives

### Reduction of taxes on air turbine fuel and airport handling fee

To reduce airfares for airlines operating in India, Air Turbine Fuel (ATF)

and airport handling fees should be reduced. Airlines be given incentives both – international and domestic, by reducing tax on Air Turbine Fuel to promote non-metro international airports like Aurangabad, Bhubaneswar, Visakhapatnam, Guwahati etc. Further, domestic sectors like Aurangabad be connected with Buddhist sectors and other sectors like Agra Khajuraho, Varanasi be connected with more flights enabling more airline to operate.

### Air Charter Policy

We need to ease our Guidelines for Air Charter Policy for operations of Charter Flights to make it more user friendly to attract bulk tourists from abroad.

### Increase in allocation of funds for Ministry of Tourism

Allocation of funds for the Ministry of Tourism in the Union Budget should be increased so that our Ministry can utilise these funds for overseas marketing and promotions, tourism events, road shows, advertisements, Fam Tours for overseas tour operators, Marketing Development Assistance to tour operators for the stakeholders participation in international Exhibitions & Roadshows etc. Ministry of Tourism and Ministry of Commerce must work together and spend funds on promotion of tourism. It will multiply efforts and give better results. The purpose of both ministries are same, to increase inbound tourism traffic to India.

### Tax benefits for investments in tourism and hospitality sector

Introduction of tax benefits for investments in Tourism Sector, especially for Hotels, Resorts, Luxury Transport and Adventure Tourism equipment. To introduce new business friendly Government policies. Government and private sector investments be encouraged in New Tourism Circuits like Buddhist Circuit, Ramayana Circuit, Adventure Tourism, New Destinations, Beach Tourism, Amusement Parks, Cultural Hubs for tourist entertainment etc.

### Training and skill development

Allotment of funds for skill development and training programme for tourism and hospitality sector to generate trained manpower matching the industry needs and increased tourist arrivals. For training tourist facilitators in different languages, more institutes be included with more languages and should cover as many states as possible.

### Marketing proposal

Special Incentives be given to Foreign Tour Operators who are sending more than 250 foreign tourists and above from abroad in a financial year. Marketing should be done thematically like for China, Japan and South East Asian countries, Buddhist tourism be focussed. Similarly, wellness tourism can be promoted all over the globe. Marketing be done in local languages abroad and also given thrust for representative offices like other countries have marketing office run by local people in respective language to promote Incredible India.

Incentivise private sector i.e. tour operators to host Fam Tours like being done by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. All Fam Tours including entry fee for the monuments to be re-imbursed to the tour operators by the Ministry of Tourism. Incentivise US \$ 50 per person per group, minimum 25 pax in a group. More incentives for MiCE operators be given to attract more foreign MiCE tourism activities in India. Group of 100 and above foreign tourists should get GST reimbursement and also first Gala Dinner should be hosted by the Ministry.







# West Bengal to aggressively promote heritage tourism

**Atri Bhattacharya**, Principal Secretary – Tourism, Government of West Bengal, informed that Durga Puja is the biggest tourism property of the state.

**E**choing his views on aggressively promoting heritage tourism in the state, Bhattacharya said that Kolkata continues to be the major tourist hub in West Bengal and Durga Puja is the biggest tourism property of the state. “We have a number of tourism circuits. We are now aggressively going to promote heritage tourism in the state. There is a very good circuit in the south-western part of West Bengal, adventure tourism with the presence of rivers, mountains and forests. We also have a heritage circuit in Murshidabad and Malda. We have a lovely tourism circuit in Dooars, on the foothills of the Himalayas with tea gardens, forests and a soothing ambience. We also have opportunities for business and recreational trips in the entire stretch from Kolkata to Durgapur and Asansol, which are our major business centres. So, all in all, our new theme and logo, ‘Ocean to the sky’ is something that the tourists need to explore. We want to promote the diversity of Bengal because it is the natural advantage we have, which very few parts of the world have,” he said.

He also talked about promoting home stays in the state and supporting transport operators in the state. Tourism presently contributes close to 12 per cent of the state’s GDP. The government plans to raise that to 20 per cent by 2025.

On West Bengal’s focus to highlight the wide variety of festivals it comprises, starting from Durga Puja, Bhattacharya said that it is not something that West Bengal tourism has come out with, it is something that Chief Minister of West Bengal, **Mamata Banerjee**, has aggressively promoted because the cultural identity of the state not only needs to be preserved but also needs to be evolved. He explains, “It will be four

years that we will have a parade of the pujos, all the idols of the pujo committee after the Durga Puja. It’s something very innovative and a stunning visual to experience and also something which has not happened before. In the series



**Our new theme and logo, ‘Ocean to the sky’ is something that the tourists need to explore. We want to promote the diversity of Bengal because it is the natural advantage we have, which very few parts of the world have**



of festivals according to the state, we have Durga Puja in October, after which we have Kali Puja, then we have the Kolkata International Film Festival in November, which is growing in scale every year. In December, we have a Christmas Carnival in Kolkata, which is a unique kind of an event, not happening anywhere in the country.

For one week, the central part of Kolkata, including Park Street is lit up and it’s a celebration. In January, we have the ‘Bangla Sangeet Mela’, a series of festivals and what we are trying to do this year is that we have signed an MoU with the British Council and the British Government to promote river festival in the state. They already had ‘Totally Thames festival’, where they had celebrated and promoted Durga Puja in London. We are

trying to put forward the first-ever Kolkata River Festival in January 2020. We are also planning to do the same in two other venues as well. Let’s see how that goes.”

The department is also upgrading its 42 properties across the state, out of which 10 have been leased out. The department is in the process of upgrading the first 25 of them to reach 3-star standards before Durga Puja. By end of this season, Bhattacharya expects to upgrade all 42 properties.

Also, on the cards is an app for crowd-sourced rating of every tourism facility in the state — hotels, homestays, restaurants, tour operators. The most highly rated among them would, in turn, be recommended to tourists by the government. Bhattacharya also brought forward the issue of having more guides and promoting elephant safaris in the state.



**Atri Bhattacharya**  
Principal Secretary - Tourism  
Government of West Bengal

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# Incredible India

**IATO's widespread presence  
across the country with its state chapters**

