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Ministry of Tourism
Government of India

SWADESH DARSHAN

Integrated Development of Theme-Based Tourist Circuits

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Scheme Guidelines

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Scheme Guidelines for Integrated Development of Theme-Based Circuits

1. Rationale

India's rich cultural, historical, religious and natural heritage provide a huge potential for development of tourism and job creation. In due recognition of this potential, the Union Govt., in the Budget Speech 2014-15, decided to create tourist circuits around specific themes. There is a great scope and need to develop tourist circuits on specific themes to attract the tourists, both domestic and international, having special interest of visiting such places. This can be achieved only through an integrated approach by providing engaging experiences for distinct categories of tourists i.e. National, Regional, State and International. Various themes which are unique and specific to the area can include religion, culture, heritage, etc. Thus, the theme-based tourist circuits should be developed in a manner that cater to both mass and niche tourism in a holistic manner.

Tourist destinations should be developed with an aim to enhance and harness potential of these circuits and induce requisite private sector investments. Hence, there is an urgent need to develop the requisite infrastructure so that these circuits can provide a rich tourist experience.

2. Vision Statement:

- To position tourism as a major engine of economic growth and job creation;
- To promote India as a global brand to take advantage of the burgeoning global travel trade and the vast untapped potential of India as a destination;
- To develop India into a world-class tourist destination and showcase the full potential of wide range of unique products;
- To provide complete tourism experience by enhancing tourist attractiveness in a sustainable manner by developing world-class infrastructure in varied thematic circuits;
- To develop professionalism and modernism in tourism with focus on in-depth infrastructure development, assuring quality and efficiency while affirming brand and competitiveness;
- To promote national and State resources in mobilization of investment in tourism development to make full use of the national potentials and advantages in terms of available infrastructure, national culture and characteristic strong points of each and every region throughout the country by development of theme-based circuits;
- To develop theme-based circuits like eco-tourism with ecological and cultural conservation;
- To create employment through active involvement of local communities with pro-poor approach in a sustainable and inclusive manner through development of a 'Responsible Tourism' initiative.

3. Mission Statement:

- To develop theme-based tourist circuits on the principles of high tourist value, competitiveness and sustainability in an integrated manner by synergizing efforts to focus on needs and concerns of all stakeholders to enrich tourist experience and enhance employment opportunities.

4. Mission Objectives:

a. Develop circuits having tourist potential in a planned and prioritized manner;
b. Integrated development of infrastructure in the identified theme-based circuits;
c. Promote cultural and heritage value of the country;
d. Provide complete tourism experience with varied thematic circuits;
e. Enhancing the tourist attractiveness in a sustainable manner by developing world-class infrastructure in the circuit destination;
f. Follow community-based development and pro-poor tourism approach;
g. Creating awareness among the local communities about the importance of tourism for them in terms of increase in sources of income, improved living standards and overall development of the area;
h. Promote local arts, culture, handicrafts, cuisine, etc., to generate livelihood in the identified regions;
i. Harness tourism potential for its direct and multiplier effects in employment generation and economic development;
j. Leverage public capital and expertise.

5. Mission Strategy:

a. To identify theme-based circuits that have potential to be showcased as world-class tourism products in consultation with the stakeholders;
b. To ensure that the development of theme-based circuits adhere to the sustainability and carrying capacities of the destinations;
c. To create a framework for classifying infrastructural gaps in the identified circuits that have been major roadblocks in unlocking the potential of these circuits;
d. To plan in an integrated manner the development of these circuits in a specific time-frame ensuring full convergence of State and Central Government schemes as well as private sector investments;
e. To identify and prioritize projects that need to be taken up through dedicated public funding immediately and to leverage to the extent feasible, additional resources from voluntary funding (Corporate Social Responsibility) initiatives of Central Public Sector Undertakings and corporate sector;

f. To promote local arts, culture, handicrafts, cuisine, etc., to generate livelihood in the identified regions;

g. To follow a comprehensive area development approach for ensuring all the facilities required by the tourists in the identified circuits;

h. To centrally coordinate the development process of identified projects.

6. This scheme is proposed to be implemented as a Central Sector scheme during the 12th Five-Year Plan and beyond.

7. General Provisions of Scheme:

7.1 Definitions –

- Tourist Circuit is defined as a route on which at least three major tourist destinations are located such that none of these are in the same town, village or city. At the same time, it would be ensured that they are not separated by a long distance. It should have well-defined entry and exit points. A tourist who enters should get motivated to visit all the places identified in the circuit.

- Theme based Tourist Circuit is defined as a tourist circuit around specific themes, such as religion, culture, ethnicity, niche, etc. A theme-based Tourist Circuit could be confined to a state or could be a regional circuit covering more than a State/Union Territory.

7.2 National Steering Committee (NSC):
To steer the Mission objectives and vision of the scheme, a National Steering Committee will be constituted with the following composition:

1.	Minister in Charge, M/O Tourism	Chairman
2.	Secretary, M/O Tourism	Vice Chairman
3.	Addl. Secretary, M/O Tourism	Member
4.	Financial Advisor, M/O Tourism	Member
5.	Secretary or his representative*, M/O Culture	Member
6.	Director General, ASI	Member
7.	Secretary or his representative*, M/O Urban Development	Member
8.	Secretary or his representative*, M/O Housing and Urban Poverty Alleviation (HUPA)	Member
9.	Secretary or his representative*, M/O Civil Aviation	Member
10.	Secretary or his representative*, M/O Skill Development	Member
11.	Secretary or his representative*, M/O Road Transport & Highway (RT&H)	Member
12.	Secretary or his representative*, M/O Shipping	Member
13.	Secretary or his representative*, M/O Power	Member
14.	Secretary or his representative*, M/O Environment & Forests (MoEF)	Member
15.	Secretary or his representative*, M/O Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation	Member
16.	Secretary or his representative*, M/O Rural Development	Member
17.	Executive Director (Tourism & Catering), M/O Railways	Member
18.	Joint Secretary/Addl. Director General, M/O Tourism	Member Secretary

*not below the rank of Joint Secretary

Other Ministries, if required, may also be represented as invitee members on case-to-case basis.

7.2.1 Key Responsibilities of NSC:

- Enunciate the vision and chalk out the road map for the scheme and provide a platform for exchange of ideas;
- Oversee all operations, steer, review and monitor overall performance of the scheme and provide guidance on specific issues relating to the scheme;
- Recommend mid-course corrections in the implementation tools;
- Periodical oversight and review of proposed/ongoing projects.

7.3 Mission Directorate:

There shall be a Mission Directorate headed by the Member Secretary, NSC, as Nodal Officer. Composition of the Mission Directorate will be as under:

1. Joint Secretary/Addl. Director General (Member Secretary, NSC) — Chairperson
2. Director/Deputy Secretary, Finance/Financial Controller — Member
3. Secretary, Tourism, of the concerned State — Member
4. Representatives of other concerned Ministries — Member
5. Director/Deputy Director General, M/O Tourism — Convener

7.3.1 Key Responsibilities of the Mission Directorate:

- Identification of projects in consultation with the State/UT Governments and other stakeholders;
- Appointment of the Project Management Consultant;
- Outsourcing of independent specialised agencies for appraisal of DPRs, if required;
- Identifying the implementing agencies for implementation of various components of the project;

- Ensuring effective coordination with the State/UT and other stakeholders, implementing Agencies, etc., for effective implementation of the scheme in a time-bound manner;
- Seeking approvals for the identified projects from the Central Sanctioning and Monitoring Committee and reporting the progress of implementation to the said committee at regular intervals;
- Sanction of projects and release of funds to the identified agencies;
- Capacity development of State/UT and other implementing agencies for undertaking various activities relating to identified circuits and destinations therein through setting up of Project Management Units (PMUs), if required.

7.4 Programme Management Consultant (PMC):
The PMC will be a National Level Consultant to be appointed by the Mission Directorate.

7.4.1 Key Responsibilities of the PMC:
- Preparation of Detailed Perspective Plan (DPP) for the identified circuits, identifying the gaps in infrastructural amenities and related skills. The PMC may suggest suitable agencies for addressing the skill gaps. The perspective plan should also include assessment of the funds required, including sources of funds. Business models for investment and operations should be evolved. The thrust of the perspective plan should be on convergence between the different schemes of the Central Ministries, the States/UT Governments and other agencies.
- Identification of projects in the circuits;
- Preparation of Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) — Comprehensive DPRs should be prepared for each circuit after consultations with the respective State Government/UT administration, local bodies, other stakeholders. For the components to be funded by public funding, DPRs should be prepared on the basis of Schedule of Rates prescribed by the Central/State PWD. The DPRs should include inter alia—
  (a) List of individual projects aimed at integrated development of the identified tourist circuit;
  (b) Project Structuring (Capital structuring, implementation framework);
  (c) Components meant for private sector or joint sector investment and possible financial linkages;
  (d) Identification of sources of funds from various Government Schemes/ Private Sector
- Liaison with States/UT/Other stakeholders;
- Submission of periodical progress report to the Mission Directorate for monitoring of the projects;
- Assistance for financial closure of projects for PPP and other projects.

7.5 Central Sanctioning & Monitoring Committee (CSMC):

There will be a Central Sanctioning & Monitoring Committee (CSMC) responsible for sanctioning of the projects submitted by the Mission Directorate and regular monitoring of the progress of implementation. Composition of the CSMC will be as under:

1. Secretary, M/O Tourism — Chairperson
2. Financial Advisor, M/O Tourism — Member
3. Additional Secretary, M/O Tourism — Member.
4. Joint Secretary/ADG, M/O Tourism — Member
   (Member Secretary, NSC)

The Committee may invite representatives of other Ministries, if required.

8. Identification of Thematic Tourist Circuits and Sanction of Projects therein:

8.1 Selection Criteria and Procedure:

- The Tourist Circuits/Destinations would be identified by the M/O Tourism in consultations with the stakeholders and States on the basis of a predominant tourism theme, considering factors such as current tourist traffic, connectivity, potential and significance attached to the sites, holistic tourist experience, etc. The themes shall include religion, culture, heritage, nature, leisure or any other theme.
- Central Sanctioning & Monitoring Committee (CSMC)/Mission Directorate will recommend the list of Thematic Tourist Circuits/Destinations to be taken up for integrated infrastructure development for approval of the Chairman, National Steering Committee.
- Detailed Perspective Plan (DPP) for each tourist circuit, and DPRs for each individual project would be prepared by the PMC giving the details as stipulated in para 7.4.1.
- Appraisal of DPRs will be done by the Mission Directorate or any independent specialised agency outsourced by the Directorate for the purpose.
- Projects recommended by the Mission Directorate after appraisal will be placed before the Central Sanctioning and Monitoring Committee for approval.

8.2 Admissible Project Components under the Scheme:
An illustrative list of components that would be eligible for Central Financial Assistance under the scheme is given below:

8.2.1 Infrastructure Development

- Development/Upgradation of Passenger Terminals (Road, Rail, Water Transport);
- Procurement of equipment for eco-friendly modes of tourist transport;
- Improvement of road connectivity leading to tourist sites/destinations;

- Use of clean energy sources for street lighting;
- Slum upgradation;
- Tourism Information/Interpretation Centres with ATMs/money exchange counters;
- Informatory/Directional signages;
- Wayside amenities with emergency vehicle breakdown, repair and refuel facilities;
- Infrastructure provision for stationing of caravan vehicles;
- Convention centres/golf course/aquamarine parks/amusement parks/theme parks;
- General improvements such as earth filling, landscaping (including trees, shrubs), water fountains, fencing, lighting, pavements/walkways/pathways/driveways, seating facilities/shelters, drinking water points, garbage bins, storm water drainage, treatment facilities for sewerage/effluent;
- External infrastructure such as water supply, sewerage, drainage, electricity and roads.

- Restoration, conservation, illumination of monuments/heritage structures;
- Renewable sources of energy for tourist infrastructure;
- Environmental care and access to clean technology;
- Parking facilities for two-wheelers, cars, buses, caravans;
- Toilet , cloak room facilities and waiting rooms;
- Equipment for tourism activities such as sound & light show, water sports, adventure sports, etc.;
- Construction of craft haats/bazaars/ souvenir shops/cafeteria;
- Construction of open air theatres/amphitheatres;
- Construction of nature trails, watch towers, rain shelters, log huts;
- First Aid Centres (including Indian Medicines System);
- Helipads, heliports, airstrips, ropeways required for tourist in the identified circuits;
- Shoreline development & rejuvenation of natural water bodies such as rivers, lakes, streams, river fronts;
- Improvement in communication through telephone booths, mobile services and internet connectivity;
- Any other activity directly related to tourism and required for development of the identified circuit;

  Consultation with the concerned administrative Ministries, wherever required, will be done on the project components under the scheme.

8.2.2 Capacity Development, Skill Development & Knowledge Management:

- Special courses to address the skill gaps identified by the PMC in the Detailed Perspective Plan (DPP).
- Short duration skill development training programme under 'Hunar se Rozgar Tak (HSRT)' and 'Earn While You Learn' programmes.
- Broadbasing of travel and hospitality education and training and engagement of Vocational Training Providers (VTPs).
- Emphasis on tapping the local potential and expertise in art and crafts.
- Documentation and preservation of the knowledge base in tourism for future use.

8.2.3 Online Presence

GIS based website development and mobile applications, providing:
- Location-based services and location-based contents;
- Booking facilities through e-commerce applications;
- Linkages to applications of existing service providers;
- Support Dash Boards for tourists and operators;
- Decision support reporting for the department.

Project Management System:
- Tracking progress through online UC submission;
- Tracking procurements through e-procurement system;
- Tracking completion of milestones;
- Tracking issue escalations and variations.

Permission Based Knowledge Portal:
- Foster a climate of collaboration among practitioners and academicians;
- Create a back-end digital library for content preservation;
- Push relevant research papers to appropriate institutions for future references;
- Data analysis and reporting.

8.2.4 Up to 10% of the Scheme Allocation to be Earmarked for IEC Component.

8.3 Inadmissible Project Components under the Scheme:

The assistance under this scheme shall not be admissible for the following components:

i. Land acquisition for development;
ii. Resettlement and rehabilitation package, operation, maintenance and management of the assets created;
iii. Improvement/investments in assets/structures owned by private entities.

9. Implementing Agency (IA):
The projects identified under this scheme shall be implemented through the identified agencies.

10. Funding Pattern for the Projects:

- The scheme shall be 100% centrally funded for the project components undertaken for public funding. Efforts will be made to achieve convergence with other schemes of Central and State Governments and also to leverage the voluntary funding available for Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives of Central Public Sector Undertakings and corporate sector. Efforts would be made to introduce suitable Public-Private Partnerships

for improved sustainability of the projects. The Viability Gap Funding (VGF) may be provided under the mission in accordance with the relevant guidelines/instructions of the Govt.

- It is envisaged that the funding of individual project will vary from State-to-State and will be finalised on the basis of DPRs prepared by PMC enabling convergence with other government schemes.
- The State Governments would submit an undertaking with the Government of India indicating their commitment to the scheme by ensuring that the operation and mainte-nance of the identified and developed projects should be the responsibility of the State. A Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) may be created for the purpose wherever feasible. The undertaking would spell out specific milestone to be achieved indicating the works to be undertaken by them in physical and financial terms. State Government contribution towards land, rehabilitation package, O&M should be quantified in the DPR.

11. Disbursal of Funds:

- The funds would be released to the implementing agency. The powers to sanction funds in the scheme shall be strictly in conformity with the GFRs and the directions issued by the M/O Finance from time to time. All the proposals will be routed through IFD of M/O Tourism.
- Funds to the State Govts/UT administration will be released as under:
  1st Instalment—20% of the project cost on approval/sanction of the project.
  2nd Instalment—60% of the project cost after receipt of utilization certificate for the first instalment.
  3rd Instalment—Remaining 20% of the project cost on completion of the work and receipt of utilization certificate.
  For the Himalayan and NE States, different funding pattern and duration of projects may be determined by the Mission Directorate keeping in view the difficulties in these areas.
- The financial assistance sanctioned to the central agencies under this scheme will be released as under:
  1st Instalment—50% of the sanctioned amount on approval/sanction.
  2nd Instalment—30% of the sanctioned amount after utilization of the first instalment.
  3nd Instalment—Remaining 20% of the sanctioned amount after utilization of the first and second instalments.

12. Codal Formalities:

The implementing agency shall follow all codal formalities while awarding contracts for works/material/equipment procurement and ensure complete transparency in its trans-actions. E-tendering/e-procurement will be compulsorily followed for all tenders.

13. Milestones to be Observed by the Implementing Agencies:

- Land to be used for the project must be free from all encroachments;
- Invitation and finalization of all tenders for the projects shall be completed within 3 months from the date of sanction of the projects;

- Work for different phases of the projects shall be completed within the period stipulated in the respective sanction letters.

14. Management of Assets Created:

The tentative operation and maintenance costs of the projects shall be worked out by PMC at the time of preparation of DPR & emphasis shall be given to working out options for sustainable operation and maintenance models through innovative revenue genera-tion options with involvement of private sector/NGOs/Tour Operators in operation and maintenance. This will help to minimize budgetary commitments on the part of the State Government for O&M services. The National Level Consultants shall render transaction advisory services to assist the State Governments in the successful setting up of sustain-able O&M models, if required.

15. Outcome Parameters:

The outcomes of the Integrated Infrastructure Development of Theme-Based Tourist Circuits on a Mission mode shall be measured in terms of—

- Increase in tourist traffic in the identified circuits;
- Employment generation in the identified sectors;
- Enhancement of awareness and development of skills and capacity to augment tourism with value added services;
- Increase in revenue generation;
- Private sector investment in the identified circuits.

The outcome will be regularly evaluated and measured through survey/study by independent agency appointed by the Ministry of Tourism.

Hornbill Festival, Nagaland

Paradise Unexplored: The North-East India Circuit

The North-East (NE) region of the country, popularly known as NE, comprises of eight states: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura and Sikkim. The region shares international boundaries with China, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal and Myanmar.

The NE region, with its magical and stunning natural beauty, challenging rivers and mountains, brightly painted Buddhist monasteries in serene natural environments, exotic flora and fauna, rare orchids, indigenous sports, unique tribal culture, folk dance and music, intricately woven tribal shawls and other handicrafts, offers visitors a rare feast for the eyes and soul. The region offers invaluable resources for the development of eco-tourism, religious tourism and adventure tourism. Each state in the region has its own unique culture and handicrafts. The tourist attractions are scattered all over the entire region and are largely located in remote areas within highly fragile environments.

In order to realise the huge tourism potential of this region, proper amenities and facilities for stay, food, shopping and entertainment, etc., are required to make tourists more comfortable and their visit a memorable one.

The integrated development of a tourist circuit in this region will not only bridge the infrastructural and skill gaps but will also contribute to employment generation and overall socio-economic growth of the region by way of active participation of the local community.

Bodh Gaya, Bihar

The Buddhist Circuit

India is the most important pilgrimage destination for Buddhist tourists. Though Lord Buddha was born in Lumbini (now in Nepal), India is the land where he grew up, attained enlightenment, delivered sermons and attained Mahaparinirvana. Thus, the growth and development of Buddhism took place in India and spread to other parts of the world.

The tourists who visit Buddhist sites also like to see other tourist attractions in India. Development of world-class tourist infrastructure with proper connectivity is therefore important to attract more tourists and to hold them for a longer time. Though a number of projects for development of tourism infrastructure in these areas have been sanctioned, a lot remains to be done to fill up the gaps in infrastructure, connectivity, skill development, training, involvement of local people, etc.

The Ministry of Tourism, in consultation with the concerned State Governments and stakeholders, has identified certain Buddhist Circuits for development as world-class destinations. Various aspects like tourist profile, carrying capacity, seasonality, etc., have been taken into consideration while identifying the Circuits.

7 Places of Buddha's Life

Birthplace of Lord Buddha: Lumbini (Nepal)

1. **Kapilavastu, UP, India**
2. **Bodh Gaya, Bihar, India – Attained enlightenment**
3. **Sarnath, UP, India – Gave his first sermon**
4. **Rajgir, Bihar, India – Gave his sermons**
5. **Sravasti, UP, India**
6. **Vaishali, Bihar, India – Gave his last sermon**
7. **Kushinagar, UP, India – Where Lord Buddha attained Mahaparinirvana**

The Himalayan Circuit

The Indian Himalayan Region occupies the strategic position of the entire northern boundary of the nation. About 73% of the Himalayan mountain range falls in India. Three major rivers of the world — the Indus, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra — originate from the Himalayas.

One of the Natural World Heritage Sites, namely Great Himalayan National Park Conservation Area (GHNPCA), for the protection of monsoon-affected forests and alpine meadows of the Himalayan front ranges, is located in the region. It is a part of the Himalayan biodiversity hotspot and includes twenty-five forest types along with a rich assemblage of fauna species, several of which are threatened. This gives the site outstanding significance for biodiversity conservation.

The Indian Himalayan Region, covering states like Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and the North-East region has innumerable beautiful tourist sites. Some of the sites are very well known for adventure tourism. India promotes its rich natural assets as one of the niche tourism products to overcome the seasonality of Indian tourism.

The Himalayan Circuits aim at development of tourist infrastructure in the major tourist destinations located in the Himalayas across various States. While developing the circuits, due attention will be given towards the infrastructural and skill gaps in the area, carrying capacity of the region and preservation of its eco-system.

Nanda Devi, Uttarakhand

The Coastal Circuit

The development of coastal tourism is one of the niche tourism products promoted by India that helps overcome the seasonality factor of Indian tourism. The Indian coastline (7,517 km approx) is surrounded by the Arabian Sea in the West, Bay of Bengal in the East and the Indian Ocean in the South. India is endowed with a beautiful and vast coastline that includes the coast of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep Islands as well.

India is known for its beautiful sea beaches and as the land of "sun, sea and surf". The long coastline of India is dotted with several world-class sea beaches spread over various states like Gujarat, Maharashtra, Goa, Kerala, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Odisha, West Bengal, etc. The development of coastal tourism will align with the objective of conservation of native natural flora and fauna. The promotion of coastal tourism will also have a focus on creation of employment and overall socio-economic development of the local population.

Coastal tourism is based on a unique resource combination at the border of land and sea environment: sun, water, beaches, outstanding scenic views, rich biological diversity, sea food etc. Based on these resources, various tourism products have been developed in many coastal destinations such as well-maintained beaches, water sports, boat-trips, cruise, bird watching tours, etc.

India has a huge potential of growth of cruise tourism. The development of Coastal Circuits will also result in the development of backwaters, mangrove and cruise tourism and all these will result in increased inflow of both foreign and domestic tourists, thereby contributing to the growth of income and employment in the economy.

Havelock Island, The Andamans

Iskcon Temple, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh

The Krishna Circuit

India is a land of pilgrimages. Practically, all religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Sufism have their major and minor pilgrimage centres in different parts of the country. Tourism is historically associated with religion. Religion and spirituality have always been common motivations for travel, with many major tourist destinations having developed largely as a result of their connections to sacred people, places and events.

The religious tourism products spread all over and in different corners of the country not only enable the tourists to see, feel and experience these holy sites but also enable them to familiarise with the culture in different parts of the country in the process. Tourism, in that sense, is instrumental in promoting national integration.

The development of the Krishna Circuit is basically aimed to develop the places associated with the legends of Lord Krishna in various states. In developing a religious tourism product, it is essential to build in community participation at the given location/destination. Further, it is necessary to understand not only the requirements of the modern pilgrim at religious sites but also how such a visitor interacts and seeks new experiences.

The challenges which need to be addressed include inter alia, lack of infrastructure like budget hotels, roads, last-mile connectivity, sewage, hygiene and cleanliness, solid waste management, touts and lapka culture and developing a code of religious etiquette to be observed by these visitors for a harmonious experience.

The development of the Krishna Circuit will focus on bridging the infrastructural gaps in various places, improvement of connectivity, skill development and training and safety and security of the tourists.

Villagers in Kerala

The Rural Circuit

It is rightly said that India lives in its villages, and to peep into India's heart and soul, one has to experience its villages. Indian villages are imbued with natural beauty, charm and a simple way of life, and offer unique experiences for travellers. Tourism can also act as a powerful tool for revitalising the rural economy. Developing a strong people-public-private partnership within a responsible tourism framework can create a win-win situation for the tourist, entrepreneur and the community and emerge as an alternate engine of growth for rural areas.

The aim for developing the Rural Tourism Circuit is to provide a unique experience to travellers visiting the country and, at the same time, develop the lesser known destinations located in remote areas of the country.

Sunderbans National Park, West Bengal

The Wildlife Circuit

The uniqueness of the Indian subcontinent lies in the diversity it offers in every aspect. India is blessed with the most disparate geography and climate, which provide habitat to a vivid range of flora and fauna. The incredible range of wildlife in India is nature's gift that makes India the ideal location for Wildlife Tourism.

India houses a number of wildlife sanctuaries and national parks that help to preserve wildlife in its natural form.

While uncontrolled tourism can harm these areas, a calibrated and meaningful approach can help in preserving them, with the visitors acting as a check against illegal activities. A proactive, responsible approach providing controlled access to these areas after carefully ascertaining carrying capacity within an eco-friendly framework can augment incomes in the poorest parts of the country and also help the cause of preserving wildlife and plant life.

In developing the Wildlife Circuit, the emphasis is on improving the quality of tourist facilities available at the parks, improving connectivity, skill development of the local population and safety and security of tourists.

Tribes in Nagaland

The Tribal Circuit

From the blissful North East to the splendid Odisha, from the fascinating state of Chhattisgarh to Jharkhand, the tribal population of India has so far managed to preserve their prehistoric rituals, customs and culture even in today's modern world. The population of tribal people in India alone represents about eight per cent of the country's total population. Tribes in India are known for their age-old traditions, culture, festivals, craftsmanship, art, rituals, etc.

Under this circuit, the aim is to develop and promote these tribal areas in a very responsible manner with due focus on cultural sensitivities, carrying capacity and preservation of natural surroundings and local culture.

Lord Rama with Shabri

The Ramayana Circuit

The Ramayana is not just an epic; it is a living, breathing story that finds life in every odd nook and corner of the country. The development of the Ramayana Circuit is aimed at developing and connecting the places associated with Lord Rama across the country, and will bridge infrastructural gaps, improve the tourist facilities, promote cultural and heritage value, develop local art and craft and provide a holistic tourist experience.

The Spiritual Circuit

Spiritual travel originates from the intersection of devotion, lifestyle and travel combined with a sense to achieve the essence of spirituality. Spirituality and the quest for purpose generate a global movement of 300 to 330 million people per annum. India has, since time immemorial, been a destination that has drawn and welcomed seekers from afar in search of enlightenment. Tourism in India has traditionally thrived upon travellers visiting places of spiritual interest. As the birthplace of four great religions - Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, India attracts a significant number of spiritual visitors.

Spirituality is one of the prime attractions for international and domestic tourists visiting different places in India. However, barring a few, almost all spiritual destinations in the country display typical weaknesses, including a lack of standardised targeted infrastructure and policies catering to domestic and international tourists. Upgradation of infrastructure at pilgrim centres to offer a serene and spiritual experience for travellers is critical. Spiritual tourism, combined with wellness and cultural tourism can create a synergy which would be a catalyst for each other's growth in the long term. Since the majority of domestic spiritual travellers are from low income groups, there will be a special focus on the adoption of pro-poor tourism concepts while developing this circuit.

A monk at Bodh Gaya, Bihar

The Desert Circuit

India is a country known for its rich biodiversity. One of the most important physical features of the country are the great deserts. The desert does not only mean sand dunes and exceedingly high temperatures like the Great Indian Thar Desert in Rajasthan, but also the dead land of Kutch and the valley of dry and cold mountains in Ladakh and Himachal Pradesh.

The Desert Circuits will focus on the development of tourist facilities, adventure activities, tribal/local experiences in these challenging areas in a responsible and sustainable manner.

The Thar Desert, Rajasthan

Humayun's Tomb, New Delhi

The Heritage Circuit

Often referred to as a living museum, India is blessed with a rich history, a vibrant heritage and culture. India has an array of 3685 national monuments and ancient sites, including 32 cultural and natural sites inscribed on the World Heritage list of UNESCO. In addition, 46 more such sites are on the tentative list. There are museums which are rich repositories of the country's culture with explicit examples as proof of the development of the country's culture and heritage over a period of time.

Tourism is one of the most effective instruments to give a new lease of life to such priceless heirlooms inherited and celebrated by us. A strong people-public-private partnership to restore and adapt our historical and cultural assets into tourism products would go a long way in preserving not just our built up heritage but also our intangible assets like folk arts, dance forms, theatre, etc. At the same time, creating experiences around our heritage sites and monuments with interpretation facilities, souvenir shops, eateries and other conveniences would not only enhance the overall visitor experience but the revenue earned from such activities would augment resources for the maintenance of these sites and monuments.
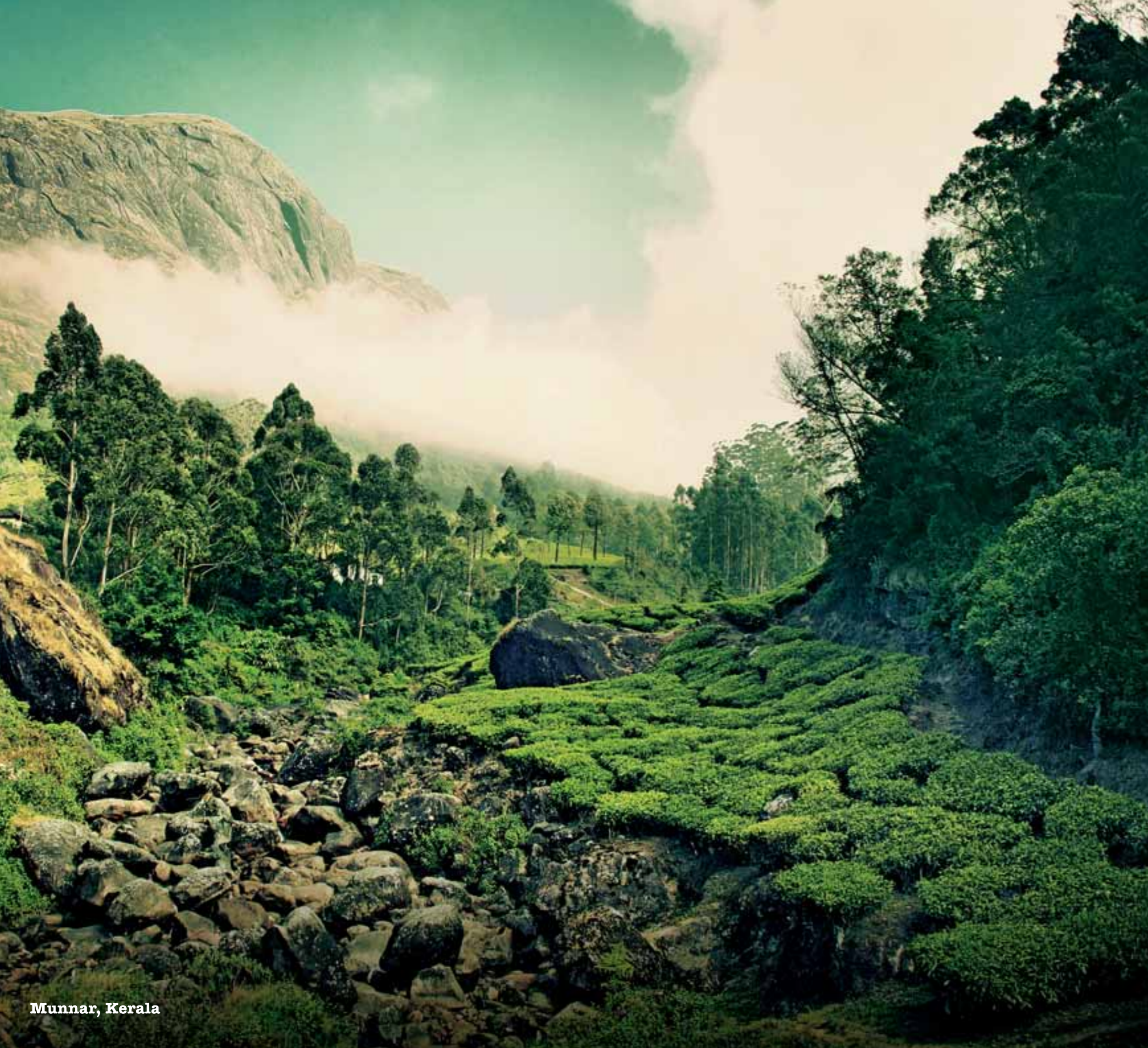
The Eco Circuit

Eco Tourism (also known as ecological tourism) is the responsible travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas that strive to be low impact and often small scale. It aims to educate the traveller, provide funds for ecological conservation, directly benefit the economic development and political empowerment of local communities and foster respect for different cultures and for human rights. Eco Tourism is held as important by those who participate in it so that future generations may experience aspects of the environment relatively untouched by negative human intervention.

Therefore, in addition to evaluating environmental and cultural factors, an integral part of Eco Tourism is the promotion of recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation and the creation of economic opportunities for local communities.

India, due to its geographical diversity, provides ample sites which are suitable for Eco Tourism, spreading across the Himalayas, North Eastern states, Western Ghats, Jharkhand, Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep Islands.

In developing the Eco Tourism Circuit, the goal is to enable people to enjoy and learn about the natural, historical and cultural characteristics of unique environments, while preserving the integrity of those sites and stimulating the economic development opportunities in local communities.

Munnar, Kerala

Ministry of Tourism
Government of India
www.incredibleindia.org or www.tourism.gov.in