

# Tourism Minister bats for Incredible India at PATA 2011

**Kamal Gill**

The three-day annual travel-trade event, PATA Travel Mart 2011, was recently held in New Delhi. Hosted by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, the event extensively showcased Incredible India. The mart was attended by 279 buyers from 50 source markets and 288 sellers from 30 destinations.

The travel mart was inaugurated by Subodh Kant Sahai, Minister for Tourism, Government of India, and Sheila Dikshit, Chief Minister of Delhi. Also, present at the inauguration were Hiran Cooray, Chairman, PATA International, Bill Calderwood, CEO, PATA International, R.H. Khwaja, Secretary Tourism, representatives of the media and various PATA delegates.

Sahai addressed the august gathering in his inaugural speech by reminding everybody that India is emerging as one of the major economies of the world with a growth rate of over 8 per cent per annum. "The tourism industry is growing even at a higher pace. In fact, foreign tourist arrivals to India have recorded a growth of over 10 per cent during the first eight months of the year," he stated with pride.

"When the whole world was facing slowdown and the tourism industry was showing signs of recession, it was India, among the very few, which led the tourism industry's remarkable recovery. India's strong domestic tourism and aggressive marketing was responsible for it," the Minister said.

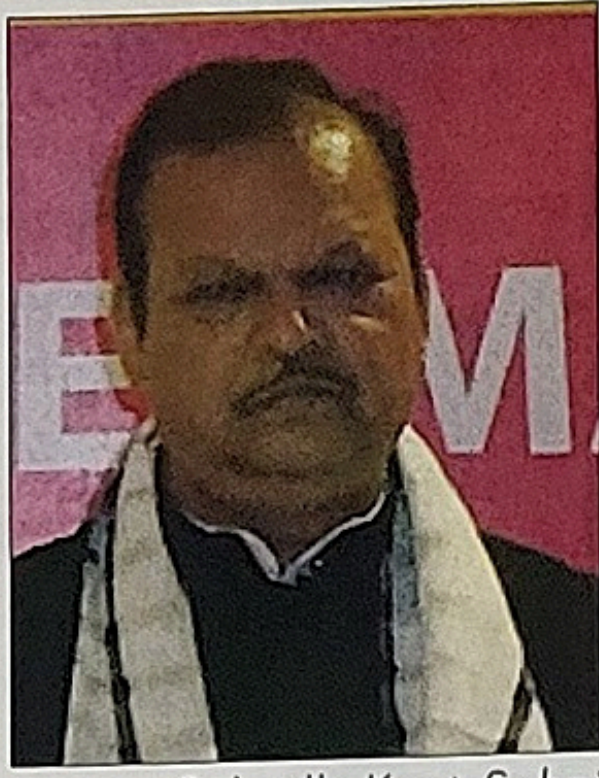
"Today, India is recognised as a year-round

destination offering a variety of tourism products—from the magnificent Himalayas in the north to the beautiful and serene backwaters of Kerala in the south; from the legendary forts of Rajasthan in the west to the world-class heritage sites like Hampi in Karnataka in the south; from the sprawling beaches of the west coast to the calm lakes of the east coast; from the exotic one-horned Rhinos of Kaziranga to the majestic elephant herds of Bandipur, and from the majestic lions of Gir to the Royal Bengal Tigers of the Sunderbans," he reeled out.

While referring to Northeast India, Sahai pointed out that the region is practically unexplored. He urged the delegates to promote this beautiful region of India, which has all possible tourism products.

Sahai emphasised that besides offering unique and diverse cultural and heritage tourism products, India also showcases a range of new products in adventure and sports tourism, both soft and hard. Citing examples, he mentioned, "One can go for mountaineering in the Himalayas or do white water river rafting in the Ganges, or discover the Valley of Flowers at one's own leisurely pace."

While alluding to eco tourism, the Minister for Tourism said that India's rich natural heritage, with an unparalleled variety of flora and fauna, offers some of the exclusive eco-



Subodh Kant Sahai

tourism products.

Golf is another niche tourism product from India, and Sahai exuded optimism that India has some of the finest golf courses and polo clubs in the world. He particularly drew attention to the fact that India will hold its first F1 race at the Buddh International Circuit in Greater Noida in October 2011.

The Minister informed the PATA gathering that India has been concentrating on the promotion of rural tourism to expose the visitors to the new ways of life, culture, cuisine and traditions. "Rural tourism in India has been gaining momentum and Hodka Rural Tourism Project in India got a PATA Gold award for excellence," he said.

While highlighting another prime area of tourism where India has made a mark, Sahai informed, "With a variety of destinations and products, India, today, occupies a unique place for film shootings. India has invited film producers from all over the world to showcase its magnificent and breathtaking locales."

Wellness and medical tourism are other areas where India excels and Sahai reminded the PATA gathering that India has established itself as world-class wellness and medical destination by offering quality services at a

very competitive rate. "This sector has been growing at the rate of over 20 per cent per annum," he confirmed.

Dwelling at length on MICE offerings from India, Sahai stated that India, over the years, has become an excellent MICE tourism destination, with MICE facilities in Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Mumbai and Delhi.

Elaborating on the visa facilities offered by India, Sahai said, "India started Tourist Visa on Arrival Scheme with effect from January 1, 2010, and, today, it offers Tourist Visa on Arrival to nationals of 11 countries."

Stating that spirituality in India draws many and the country is the cradle of many religions, Sahai stated, "India gets a sizeable number of tourists for religious and spiritual purposes. The Ministry is promoting Buddhist Tourism in a big way and a Buddhist Conclave will be organised next year in India."

While assuring everyone that sustainable tourism is at the core of all tourism initiatives, Sahai said, "India is very sensitive and committed towards the promotion of sustainable, safe and honourable tourism and is concerned utmost about safety and security of tourists in the country." "In India, a tourist is equivalent to God, *Athithi Devo Bhavah*," he said while referring to the ethos of Indian culture.

While concluding his speech, Sahai said the Ministry of Tourism will host its own National Travel Mart in 2012/2013 to promote B2B interaction.

## Philippines prepares for PATA Travel Mart 2012

Three days of successful business meetings at PATA Travel Mart closed in New Delhi on September 9 with the Philippines gearing up to host the Mart in Manila in September 2012.

PATA Chairman Hiran Cooray said, "After a very productive week in Delhi, PATA is delighted to take the PATA Travel Mart back to Manila where it was launched as the first regional travel trade event for Asia Pacific back in 1978."

Daniel Corpuz, Under Secretary of the Philippine Department of Tourism, addressing PTM 2011 delegates in New Delhi at the 'Welcome to the Philippines' dinner said that PATA holding the Mart in Manila in 2012 was a 'strong indication of the region's business confidence in the Philippines'.

He added, "PATA Travel Mart 2012 will allow the Philippines to demonstrate, not just our capacity, but our expertise in hosting major international events. With the current growing

private sector investment in tourism facilities development throughout the Philippines, there is no better time to see the new products, convention facilities and other tourism infrastructure in place since the last time we hosted a big PATA event."

The Philippines has hosted several PATA events: the 29 PATA Annual Conference and Workshop in 1980, the PATA Annual Board of Directors Meeting in 1989, the 47th PATA Annual Conference in 1998, and the Chapter World Congress and PATA Board of Directors Meeting in 2002. When Manila hosted the first PATA

Travel Mart in 1978, just over 300 delegates attended. After more than three decades, PATA Travel Mart remains at the forefront of Asia Pacific's much expanded travel event calendar, attracting over 1,000 delegates while still maintaining an exclusive B2B professional trade-only format.

Chairman Cooray said, "We thank the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India for hosting a very productive Mart this year. In New Delhi, we have seen excellent cooperation between the tourism industry's public and

private sector in hosting the Mart. We can now all look forward to Manila next year when we expect the Mart to be another significant milestone as we build the business for PATA members."

The 2012 Mart is scheduled to take place on 25 – 28 September at the SMX Convention Center, the largest private venue in the Philippines and one of the flagship establishments of the country's MICE industry. It is conveniently located close to prestigious hotels and key public transportation systems.

