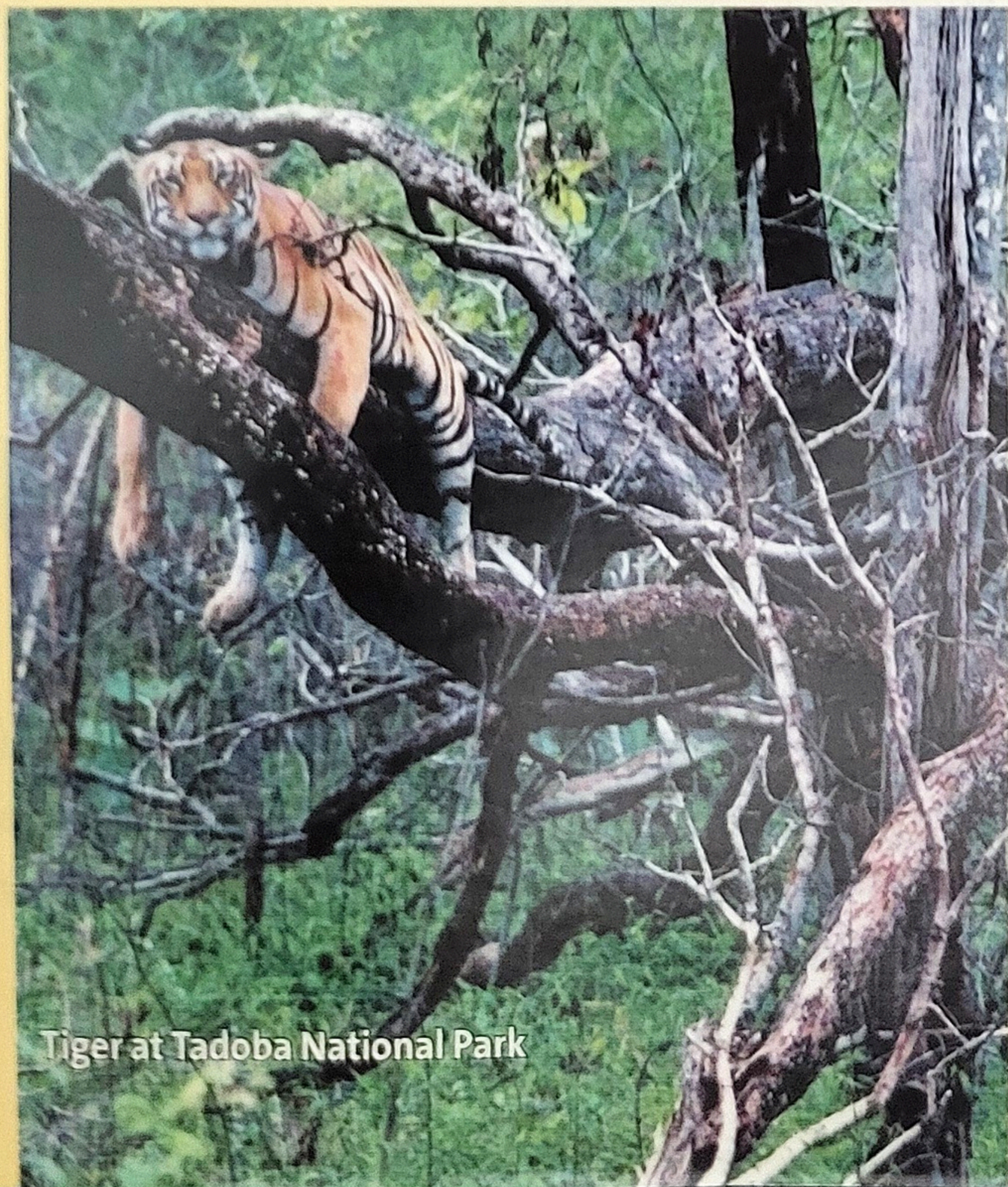


Maharashtra focusing on Adventure & Coastal Tourism

TRADITIONALLY a pilgrimage and heritage destination, Maharashtra has largely been ignored for its other, rather varied attractions. World-famous heritage sites such as the Ajanta and Ellora caves near Aurangabad, Sinhgarh Fort, Elephanta Caves, Bibi ka Maqbara, and the like have been the only tourist-magnets aside from pilgrimage destinations such as Shirdi, Nashik, Pandharpur, the Sidhivinayak Temple, etc. But this is changing now. The Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC) and private entrepreneurs have realised the tourism potential of the state regarding other segments and as a



Tiger at Tadoba National Park

result, have implemented projects and initiatives to develop and promote segments that were otherwise ignored. The state, with its 35 districts has diverse product offerings unlimited in their potential and waiting to be tapped. Tourism opportunities can be explored with the 720-kilometre coastline to develop Beach Tourism, the 350 forts and caves for Heritage Tourism, agricultural farms allowing Agri Tourism, temples for Pilgrim, lush forests and natural parks for Wildlife and Eco Tourism, and the list can go on to Adventure, Bollywood, Medical, Wine, Luxury Tourism and much more.

Speaking about the tourism potential in the state, Arjun Sharma, MD, Le Passage to India, said, "There is a lot the state can offer in terms of MICE, Adventure, Wellness, Pilgrimage, Medical, Luxury and Heritage Tourism.



ARJUN SHARMA
MD, Le Passage to India

Maharashtra boasts of 720 kms long coastline of virgin beaches, several unexplored hill stations, wildlife sanctuaries and national parks. There is a need to focus on and develop them as tourist spots. The potential of Bollywood and festival based tourism is so far untouched and could replicate a Hollywood model. The tourist is

arriving but not staying and therefore ways need to be devised for the tourist to spend more time in the state."

The MTDC, on its part, has initiatives and plans to achieve this potential. Dr Avinash Dhakne, MD, MTDC, informed that the corporation is currently reviewing some project ideas and will start implementation of the same at the earliest. "There are a lot of ideas that we want to bring about and the process for the same has already begun. MTDC is currently reviewing a lot of project ideas and will start the implementation at the earliest."

Initiatives:

Initiatives by the government are the need of the hour to tap the potential of the state as a destination with varied offerings for a tourist, be it MICE, adventure, beaches, medical, or simply a holiday. MTDC is looking at developing products and promoting them through travel agents both in India and international countries. It is also considering the possibility of Backwater Tourism in coastal areas. To start with, the corporation plans to develop one coastal destination and see the results of the same to take it forward at other backwater regions in the state. However, the limitations seen for developing Backwater Tourism are security and

support services like hotels and jetties, which are a major concern. Local co-operation will be a key to develop backwater tourism. While the circuit plans are still in the conceptual stage, the corporation is working towards introducing five circuits this year.

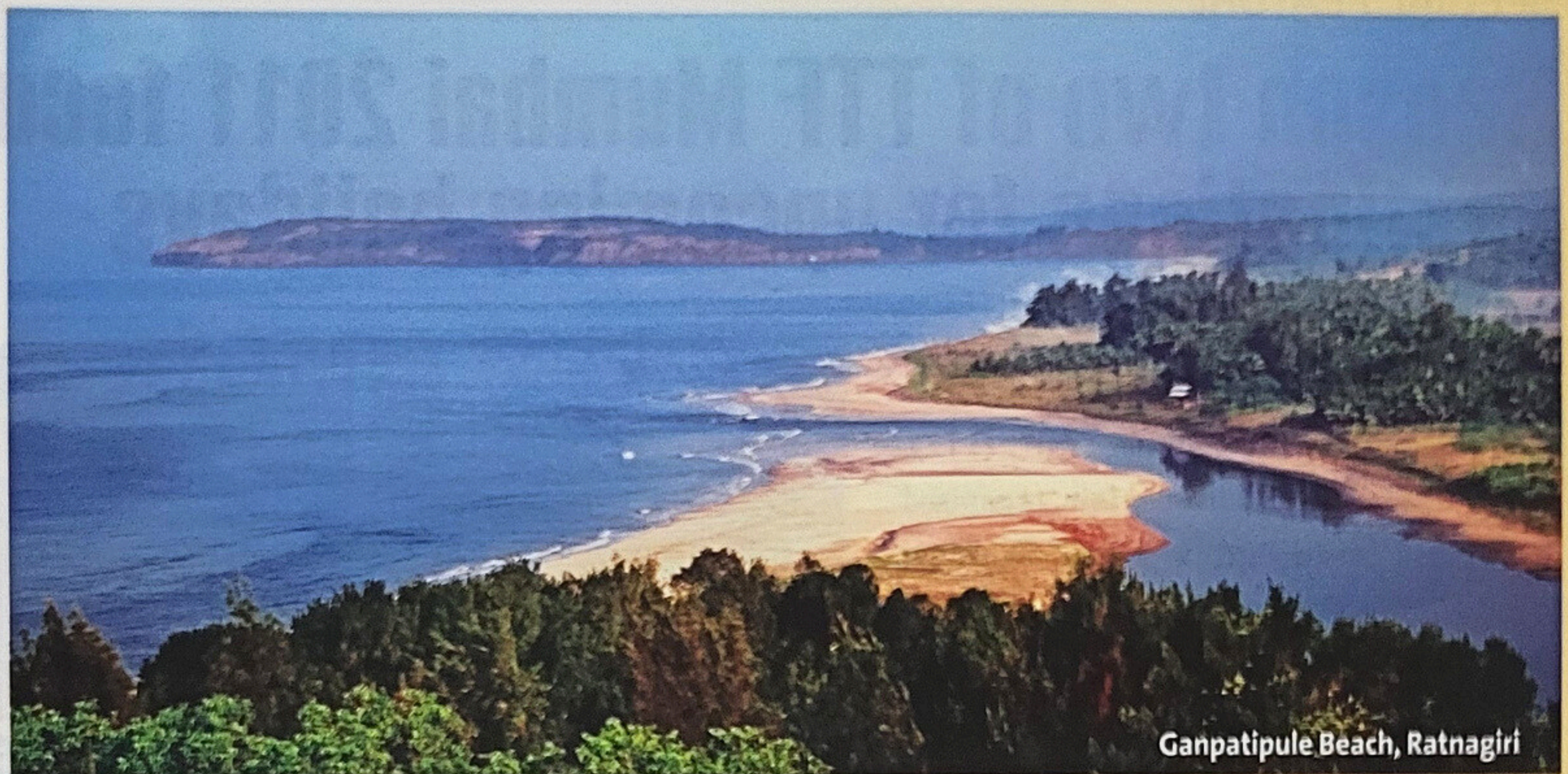
Circuit development requires a lot of effort in terms of arranging transport, developing activities for tourists and hotel accommodation for travellers.

Speaking on these segments being focused on by the state, Dhakne said, "Some of the major focuses for MTDC this year in terms



DR AVINASH DHAKNE
MD, MTDC

of promoting the destination will be Coastal, Forts and Agricultural Tourism. We also want to promote the festivals of Maharashtra like Ganesh Chaturti, Govinda (Janmashtami) which are celebrated both in cities as well as tribal areas, wildlife in Tadoba National Park and Pench, etc. Segments like Wildlife, Backwater Tourism, development of circuits will also be conceptualised in the coming months," he added.



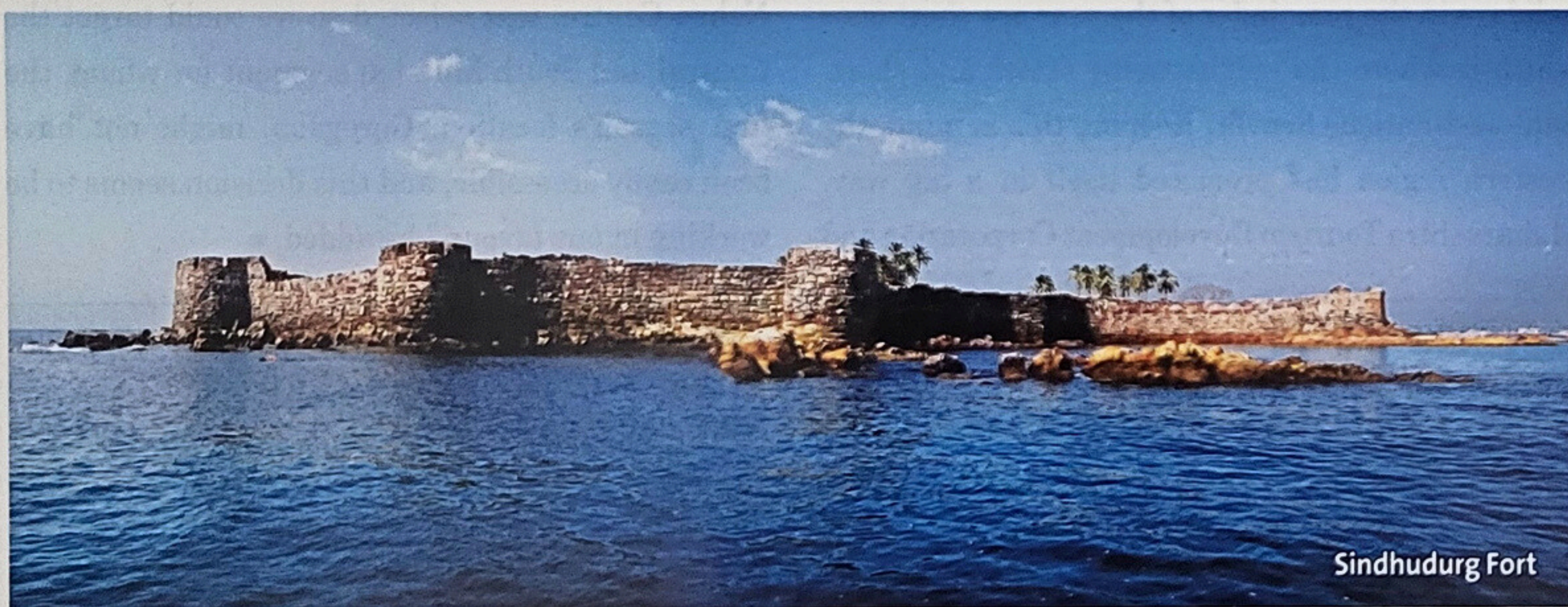
Ganpatipule Beach, Ratnagiri

along the route for longer time," avered Shubhada Joshi, Director, Girikand Travels Pvt. Ltd.

Undiscovered Locations

The unnoticed Vidarbha has been recognised as a potential tourist destination with its three tiger reserves and 13 National parks. The state is investing a significant amount for the development and promotion of Vidarbha region of Maharashtra

recently directed its urban planning authorities to restore the 20 odd tourist spots in Mumbai and its suburbs, and provide tourist-friendly facilities. If the plan comes through, Gilbert Hill, the heritage site at Andheri, will get a rope-way, and the Juhu and Versova beaches may see adventure activities like para-sailing. Chhagan Bhujbal, Minister for Tourism, Government of Maharashtra, in a review of the spots in the city, directed the appointment of a consulting agency to chalk out a development plan for comprehensive development of tourism spots in the city. A co-ordination committee also has been set up under the chairmanship of the Municipal Commissioner, for the implementation of the development plan.



Sindhudurg Fort

COASTAL TOURISM

The MTDC has started promoting Coastal Tourism to tap the state's vast coastline. It will create the necessary infrastructure and then promote the beach destinations among international and domestic tourists. Basic facilities like washrooms, showers, roads, cleanliness of beaches, development of water sports, etc. will be undertaken. Development of water sports will be undertaken through PPP mode as it is the best feasible business model. MTDC will also promote the Bed and Breakfast scheme. It has initiated the same in the Konkan region and will replicate it across the state.

"Coastal or Beach Tourism in Maharashtra has immense potential. This coastal route in Maharashtra can compete with any other route in any part of the world as far as scenic beauty, beaches, mountain ranges and forts, and opportunity to interact with the cultural base of Maharashtra goes. But we need to do a lot of work on infrastructure like good resorts, sports activities, even cruises etc i.e., facilities that would attract tourists and make them want to stay

with a special grant of Rs 50 crore. The fund has been allocated to MTDC and the Forest Department for the development of infrastructure facilities at prominent tourism destinations in the region. Jagmohan Sethi, Chairman - Tourism Committee, Vidarbha Economic Development Council (VED) said that the grant will be used for developing facilities like internal roads and interpretation centres for training tourist guides. The facilities will be developed at four national parks in Vidarbha--Pench, Melghat, Tadoba and Navegaon--besides some other destinations like Chikhaldara.

Apart from this, MoT has also sanctioned projects worth Rs 82.67 crore to Maharashtra during the Tenth Five Year Plan for the development of Vijaydurg, Sindhudurg, Sinhadag, Sewri Fort, Ghodbunder Fort, Worli Fort, Bandra Fort, Sevadi Fort and Panhala Fort.

HERITAGE

Keeping the state's heritage sites in view, MTDC has come up with plans to conserve and further promote heritage destinations in the state. The corporation

MICE

Maharashtra has everything that a MICE operator could need to sell it as a MICE destination. An industrial state, the state has attracted a substantial chunk of FDI in its major cities, along with beaches, heritage sites, wildlife, and adventure activities, making it an ideal destination for MICE. Maharashtra needs to convert this opportunity by having a ready base of corporates waiting to be tapped as done by the Pharmaceutical sector for the MICE segment.

Mumbai, the financial capital of the country is one of the biggest gateway cities of the country for business and leisure travellers. Home to the only major airport in Maharashtra, Mumbai is an ideal MICE destination with tourism infrastructure in place such as major convention and exhibition centres, hotels, an international airport, ports, and a widely connected train network. Speaking about the city's MICE potential, Tarun Malhotra, Director, Inorbit Tours, explained, "Maharashtra hosts the economic capital of the



TARUN MALHOTRA
Director, Inorbit Tours

country - Mumbai, which also happens to be one of most important gateway cities of India. Business traffic is booming in Mumbai and this can definitely be converted into a MICE or leisure destination." ■