

What tourism means to me **SHAMIT BAGCHI**

When I think of India as a tourism destination, what immediately conjures up in the mind are glistening snow-capped peaks of the mighty Himalayas, palaces of Jaipur as if an oasis in the deserts of Rajasthan along with its camels, lush green forests in central India and the Western Ghats - a veritable adventure engine. Verdant environs of Kerala; blue lagoons and backwaters, rivers and lakes crisscrossing the heart of the entire country, exquisitely crafted temples of Tamil Nadu, the British monuments in Bengal, the Buddhist monasteries of Leh and Ladakh, Sarnath, the Sanchi Stupa, the national parks of Kaziranga, and a plethora of wildlife, rare bird species, the lions of Gir, the roar of the Bengal tiger, all infuse a heady mix.

But India is much much more, with a confluence of diverse cultures and traditions, races and faiths, arts and handicrafts, it is a fragrant potpourri, a mini world in itself. Those carnivals of Goa or the Rath Yatra of Orissa, the lavish Durga puja's in Bengal, the Kumbh Melas and the paradise-like valleys of Kashmir, and boat races of Kerala; enter the tourist heaven - India.

Like no other country it has all, sandy beaches to picturesque hill retreats of Darjeeling, Dehradun or Ooty and numerous trekking spots. Who does not know of the marble wonder Taj Mahal, or the Hawa Mahal of Pink City, or the magnificent Sun Temple at Konark. Another facet of India are the various pilgrim spots such as Kashi, Mathura, Varanasi, Madurai, Dakshineswar, the dargahs and gurudwaras highlight the spiritual fervour and ancient wisdom. Ah! Blissful land. Legendary figures such as Mahatma Gandhi, Swami Vivekananda, Shri Aurobindo, and other similar personalities and organisations that are a rejuvenating source of great potential, attract millions from within the country and without.

With the booming tourism industry and plenty of hotels, lodges, newer amenities and facilities pouring in, tourists should keep in mind the pristine beauty and try to preserve it by not littering spots with garbage, and of course the authorities also need to protect monuments and introduce cleaner mechanisms of transport.

People of India of tremendous variety blend so well, are a tribute to the nation and this unity in diversity which has become a oft repeated cliché, essentially conveys a message of how a diverse nation like India can prosper with rich vibrant cultures and heritage, endowed with nature's bounty, can move on the path of progress too. People who once come to India cannot be untouched by the aura and charms of this land, and for Indians themselves it is like a treasure trove, a goldmine that has never ending treasures to offer, which cannot be exhausted or explored completely within a lifetime.

So get wanderlust, pack those bags and chug off in that train along the countryside or go on a carefree drive manoeuvring those hairpin bends on roads nestled among hill stations, either alone or with your family and friends; great promises are in store, unravel them !