

G20, Dharamshala Declaration and Northeast: The Trident to Boost Incredible India's Tourism

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There is no doubt that India's Presidency of the G20 is an important opportunity for India to give a strong boost to its tourism sector. This will give a much-needed fillip to the country's hospitality industry and the economy. Showcasing cities which do not get the attention they deserve and a greater focus on the North-Eastern region, by holding meetings there, is a welcome step.

While seeking to benefit from India's G20 Presidency, the Government of India has planned to declare 2023 as '**Visit India Year**' with an eye on attracting more international tourists. This is a laudable step towards tourism in India's G20 Presidency. The Ministry of Tourism (Government of India) will work with other stakeholders – central government, state governments and the private sector – to achieve the objective of drawing more international tourists to India.

It would be pertinent to point out that over 200 events are likely to be held in over 50 Indian cities, before the final summit – the *18th G20 Heads of State and Government Summit* – will be held in Delhi in September 2023 (September 9th and 10th).

While G20-related meetings have so far been held in Udaipur (Rajasthan), Bengaluru (Karnataka) and Kolkata (West Bengal), several meetings will be held under the tourism track in the Rann of Kutch (Gujarat), Siliguri (West Bengal), Srinagar (J&K) and Goa.

During these meetings, the focus will be on giving a boost to green tourism, effective use of technology for the promotion of responsible tourism and training to youth for setting up Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) and start-ups linked to tourism.

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Tier-2 cities and the North-East region

As a result of events being held in different parts of India, not only will the infrastructure of cities be spruced up, but tier-2 and tier-3 cities which often get relegated to the sidelines will get an opportunity to showcase themselves. In recent years, both international and domestic travellers have been showing greater interest in India's tier-2 and tier-3 cities because of better air connectivity, more information via social media on the tourist attractions in many of these cities and the economic potential of tier-2 cities. G20 events will, however, play a crucial role in increasing awareness about many of these cities which have the potential of becoming important tourist destinations.

The G20 tourism track meetings will focus on giving a boost to green tourism, use of technology for the promotion of responsible tourism and training to youth for setting up MSMEs and start-ups linked to tourism.

Significantly, events are being held in each of the North-Eastern States, and several private companies in the hospitality sector have shown interest in investing in the region. In November 2022, the Ministry of Tourism (Government of India) in collaboration with the Government of Mizoram organized an International Tourism Mart in Aizawl (Mizoram) with the objective of showcasing the tourist potential of the North-East both within India and outside. During this event, there was an emphasis on harnessing India's chairmanship of G20 for promoting tourism in India as well as the North-East. A boost to tourism in the North-Eastern region will provide a fillip to the region's economy, by generating jobs in the hospitality sector.

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The 2022 Dharamshala Declaration

In a conference of tourism ministers (from several states and union territories) held in Dharamshala (Himachal Pradesh) in September 2022, it was stated that India planned to position itself as a tourist destination. The tourism ministry also said that necessary steps would be taken in order to give a boost to tourism. They include: “...visa reforms, ease of travel, traveller-friendly immigration facilities at airports and openness to international travel,”

While state governments have been working closely with the central government, another important stakeholder is India's hotel industry. There has been an increase in domestic tourism after two years of COVID-related restrictions. Many have dubbed the sudden increase in travel – international and travel – as 'revenge tourism'.

Showcasing of tier-2 and tier-3 cities which do not get the attention they deserve and a greater focus on the North-Eastern region — by holding meetings there — is a welcome step

During the three-day conference at Dharamshala in September 2022, ambitious goals were set for India's tourism sector. The Dharamshala Declaration stated that by 2030, India would aim for, amongst other things, USD 250 billion contribution of the tourism industry to its GDP, create more jobs in the tourism sector and increase the number of foreign arrivals to 25 million.

G20: An opportunity

The hotel industry views India's Presidency of the G20 as an important opportunity for giving a thrust to the country's tourism industry. While commenting on the importance of this, Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) Secretary General Jaison Chacko said: *“This has come as a golden opportunity for the tourism and hospitality industry. This is the time that the government should go full throttle to promote tourism under the ‘Incredible India’ banner.”*

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There is no doubt that India's Presidency of the G20 is an important opportunity for India to give a strong boost to its tourism sector. This will give a much-needed boost to the country's hospitality industry and the economy. Showcasing of cities which do not get the attention they deserve and a greater focus on the North-Eastern region — by holding meetings there — is a welcome step. There is also scope for young entrepreneurs interested in investing in the hospitality sector to cash in on available opportunities through India's focus on the tourism sector. While seeking to promote tourism and give a boost to India's economy, the emphasis on green tourism and harnessing the digital economy is important. While it is true that a lot of issues need to be addressed before India achieves some ambitious goals it has set for the tourism sector, if all stakeholders work with clear direction and purpose and think out of the box, these goals can be achieved.

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