

ROADSHOW
Madhya Pradesh Tourism

Stockholm
13 March 2024

REMARKS
Ambassador Tanmaya Lal

Principal Secretary, Tourism, Govt. of Madhya Pradesh Mr. Sheo Shekhar Shukla,

Friends,

I would like to complement Mr. Shukla for his wonderful overview of attractions offered by Madhya Pradesh and the focus on sustainability and inclusiveness in the initiatives to promote tourism.

It is great to **join colleagues** from the Indian State of Madhya Pradesh here in Stockholm.

Good to see **such initiatives** by authorities from different Indian states to invite Swedish tourists.

I arrived in Stockholm during **pandemic**.

Travel and tourism were among the worst affected sectors.

It is good to see that tourism continues to strongly rebound since then and the pre-pandemic levels are being crossed.

The visit of MP Tourism to Sweden is, therefore, **timely**.

While most people abroad are familiar with tourist attractions of places like Rajasthan or Goa or Kerala or the Taj Mahal, **India has much much more to offer**.

It is **unlike most other popular tourist destinations**.

India is often called a **subcontinent**. Its size is similar to that of the **European Union**.

India's **geographical diversity and civilisational heritage** combine to offer a **unique** and an **incredible** choice of destinations for tourists.

There is something for all interests.

From **natural beauty to wildlife & adventure; history, cultural heritage to spiritual & pilgrimage sites**.

The **diversity of landscapes** is **bewildering**.

From **ski slopes** on **snow-capped** Himalaya, the world's highest mountain ranges to **moonscapes** of Ladakh to **sand dunes**-studded **desert** landscapes in Rajasthan; from **pristine beaches** along a 7,500 km long coastline to **backwaters** in Kerala to **mountain lakes**; to **tropical jungles; to islands**.

India is also **one of world's 12 Mega Diverse countries** in terms of flora and fauna. There are more than **100 well preserved national parks** with great **wildlife** including **Tiger** reserves, **Rhinos, Lions** and **Elephants** and **Bird** sanctuaries.

Many of world's faiths originated in India.

There are magnificent **ancient temples to wonderful monument architecture** ranging from **stepwells** to **forts and palaces**.

Then there are amazing **festivals** and cultural experiences including a mega diverse **cuisine** and of course **shopping!**

In fact, since there is **so much to see and do and experience** in India that it is often **not easy to choose one tourist itinerary**.

I can also talk about **any number of unique travel experiences**.

From **House Boats** on Dal Lake in Srinagar in Kashmir to those in Kerala backwaters.

India's first **Dark Sky reserve** has been developed in Hanle in Ladakh in Himalaya.

Living Roots Bridges made of tree roots are a remarkable attraction in the state of Meghalaya. An example of **traditional** and **sustainable engineering skills**.

The world's first international Residential **university** dating back 1,500 years was in Nalanda. It flourished for 800 years. It is now being revived.

42 sites in India have received UNESCO's **World Heritage status**.

15 Cultural practices in India have received status as world's **Intangible Heritage**.

Each region or state in India has its unique charm and attractions.

Madhya Pradesh or MP is a **state known for so many different aspects for tourism** - from **ancient cultural heritage to spectacular landscapes of mighty rivers and waterfalls to marble canyons** to amazing **wildlife**.

MP is **one of the two largest Indian states**, each with around 10% of India's landmass.

Madhya Pradesh is located in the **heart of India** and is blessed with **natural beauty and civilisational heritage**. There is something for all interests.

Three sites in Madhya Pradesh are now included on **UNESCO's World Heritage List**. The sites tell a **long history**. range from prehistoric times going back around 30,000 years to more than 2,000 years and then around 1,000 years ago.

The World Heritage site of **Bhimbetka** caves is where rock art dating back to 30,000 years ago have been preserved.

The site of **Sanchi** houses Buddhist Stupa, one of the oldest surviving World Heritage monuments in India where intricate carvings depict not only stories from Buddhist times but also of animals and birds found in Central Asia !

The third Heritage site is **Khajuraho**, the Hindu and Jain temples dating back to around 1,000 years ago.

The beautiful site of **Pachmarhi hills** is listed as a UNESCO **Biosphere reserve**.

Madhya Pradesh has several **Tiger reserves**.

The state also offers range of **adventure sports** opportunities.

In addition to all these, Madhya Pradesh is **one of few places in the world** where you can still see rocks that tell stories going back billions of years. And of dinosaurs and human origins.

Somewhat lesser known but absolutely unique attractions of Madhya Pradesh relate to its remarkable **geo-heritage**.

This region is home to some of the **world's oldest rock formations**, some dating back to more than 2.5 billion years ago.

Fossils of some of earliest life forms called **Stromatolites** that date back more than 1 billion years have been found in Madhya Pradesh.

Some of you may have heard the name of **Gondwana land** which was a super continent around 250 million years ago. The name 'Gondwana' was given by Austrian scientist Edward Suess based on the tribal community of **Gond** who live in today's Madhya Pradesh.

The iconic river **Narmada** dates back to the times of Gondwana land. Much before India broke away from Gondwanaland and moved north to join Asian plate.

Dinosaur fossils, especially fossils of dinosaurs' eggs have been found on Narmada Riverbanks.

Asia's largest **meteorite** impact dating back around 2 billion years lies in the heart of Madhya Pradesh.

There are many other such examples. For comparison, **Himalaya** is only around 50 million years old.

Madhya Pradesh is also known for its beautiful **handicraft and tribal heritage**.

The cities of **Indore** and **Bhopal** in Madhya Pradesh consistently rank among the top cleanest cities in India.

The extensive **steps** being taken by the Tourism authorities in Madhya Pradesh led by Mr. Shukla to improve and **enrich travel and tourism experiences** through various **museums, national parks with excellent resorts** and making them **easily accessible with air connectivity** are indeed impressive.

In the past, **connectivity and infrastructure** constraints had presented **challenges** for tourism in India. This is changing very fast.

India is undergoing a **transformation**. There is a massive push for infrastructure development and connectivity.

The pace of change is remarkable.

Every year more than 10,000 km of **roads and highways** are being added. Every year more than 6,000 route km of **railways** are being added. Railway **stations** are being renovated and upgraded. New faster Made in India **trains** are being introduced.

In the last 7-8 years, the number of active **airports** has doubled from 75 to 150. More world class airports are being built.

Last year, Air India and Indigo Airlines have placed orders for 1,000 new **aircraft**.

Connectivity within India is being transformed.

Facilities at tourist destinations are being upgraded.

There are around 375 Five Star **Hotels** with a capacity of 65,000 rooms in India and another 350 Four Star Hotels with 20,000 rooms.

Tour operators and other services are becoming much more professional.

After the disruption caused by Covid19 pandemic, annual foreign tourist arrivals are almost back to the earlier levels of around **11 million** and growing fast.

Domestic tourism is also booming. Including in Kashmir.

Covid19 disrupted the **direct air connectivity** between India and Sweden. Air India has resumed operations to Copenhagen and we hope for an early restoration of the Stockholm sector also.

There are meanwhile good connections via Helsinki, Dubai, Doha and Copenhagen.

Sweden, which is largest in terms of economy and population in this region, accounts for the largest number of tourists from among the Nordic Baltic countries. Within Sweden, **Stockholm** accounts for the largest number of outbound tourists.

I understand that the number of **Swedish tourists** visiting India annually was around 50,000 before Covid19 disruption. There is a huge potential to attract tourists from Sweden and Nordic region to India.

We hope that today's interaction will help generate and revive interest in the wonderful range of tourist attractions on offer in Madhya Pradesh and other parts of India.

I look forward to the presentations and discussions.

Thank you.