Prime Minister Narendra Modi during G20 Tourism Minister’s Meet



Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Excellencies, Ladies and gentlemen, Namaskar!

I welcome you all to Incredible India! As tourism ministers, handling a sector worth over two trillion dollars globally, it is rare that you get a chance to be a tourist yourself. But, you are in Goa – a major tourist attraction in India. So, I urge you to take out some time from your serious discussions to explore the natural beauty and the spiritual side of Goa!

Our ancient scriptures have a saying. Atithi Devo Bhavah. Meaning, “guest is god’’. And, that is our approach to tourism. Our tourism is not just about sight-seeing. It is an immersive experience. Whether it is Music or Food, Arts or Culture, the diversity of India is truly majestic. From the High Himalayas, to Dense Forests, From the Dry Deserts, to Beautiful Beaches, From Adventure Sports, to Meditation Re-treats, India has something for everyone. During our G-20 Presidency, we are organizing nearly 200 meetings in 100 different locations all over India. If you ask your friends who have already visited India for these meetings, I am sure that no two experiences will be alike.

In India, our efforts in this sector are centred on preserving our rich heritage, and at the same time, creating world class infrastructure for tourism. One of our focus areas is on developing Spiritual Tourism. After all, India attracts pilgrims of every major religion of the world. After the infrastructure upgrade, the eternal city of Varanasi, just one of the major spiritual centres, now attracts 70 million pilgrims – a ten-fold increase from earlier. We are also creating new tourist attractions, such as the Statue of Unity. As the tallest statue in the world, it attracted about two point seven million people within a year after it was built. In the last nine years, we have placed special emphasis on developing the entire eco-system of tourism in the country. From transport infrastructure, to the hospitality sector, to skill development, and even in our visa systems, we have kept the tourism sector as a focal point of our reforms. The Hospitality sector has great potential for employment generation, social inclusion, and economic progress. It employs more women and youth compared to many other sectors. I am glad we are also recognising the relevance of tourism sector for speedy achievement of Sustainable Development Goals.

> **“Collaboration among governments, entrepreneurs, investors and academia can accelerate technological implemention in the tourism sector.”**

You are working on five inter-connected priority areas of: Green Tourism, Digitalization, Skill Development, Tourism MSMEs, and Destination Management. These priorities reflect Indian as well as the Global South’s priorities. We should make greater use of emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and augmented reality to drive innovation. For example, in India, we are working on using artificial intelligence to enable real-time translation of the wide range of

languages spoken in India. I believe that collaboration among governments, entrepreneurs, investors, and academia can accelerate such technology implementation in tourism. We should also work together to help our Tourism companies increase their access to finance, ease business regulations, and invest in skill development.

It is said that Terrorism divides, but Tourism unites. Indeed, Tourism has the potential to unite people from all walks of life, creating a harmonious society. I am happy to note that a G20 Tourism dashboard is being developed in partnership with UNWTO. It will bring together best practices, case studies and inspiring stories. It will be a first-of-its-kind platform and will be your enduring legacy. I hope that your deliberations and the “Goa Roadmap’’ would multiply our collective efforts to realize tourism’s transformative power. The motto of India’s G20 Presidency, “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’’- “One Earth, One Family, One Future’’ can itself be a motto for global tourism.

India is a land of festivals. We have festivals around the year, all over the country. In Goa, the Sao Joao Festival is coming up soon. But, there is another festival that you must visit. The festival of democracy in the mother of democracy. Next year, India will hold its next General Election. For over a month, nearly a billion voters will be celebrating this festival, re-affirming their abiding faith in democratic values. With more than a million voting booths, there will be no shortage of places for you to witness this festival, in all its diversity. I invite you all to visit India for this most important of global festivals. And with that invitation, I wish you all success in your deliberations.

Thank you!

