

Karnataka and Wildlife: A unique presentation at WTM 2013

For years, Karnataka's mainstay theme for presentations at leading international trade fairs has been heritage, culture and architecture. The World Travel Market 2013 gave birth to a rather surprising, unexpected theme at the exclusive Karnataka Pavilion –Wildlife, along with nature and adventure. This coincided with the Conde Nast Travellers' October-2013 acclaim of Kabini as India's next big Safari Destination. The acclaim resulted in a lot of specific enquiries on the State's wildlife terrain, the products available and also for Jungle Lodges & Resorts.

Mr. ArvindJadhav, IAS, Additional Chief Secretary-Tourism Govt. of Karnataka led a delegation comprising resorts, hotels and tour operators at the World Travel Market. Some of the leading tour operators from the United Kingdom with whom meetings were fixed beforehand, had come calling on the Karnataka Tourism delegation and discussed opportunities to jointly promote new products and possibilities that attract travellers to Karnataka.

TUI-UK, Black Tomato, Bales Worldwide, Cox & Kings-UK and others from the UK were among the top tour operators that met with the delegation.

Mr. Jadhavremarked, "There is considerable interest in our products and destinations. The emergence of quite a few new resort chains in the State that have taken service and experiential standards to new levels of sophistication has played a vital role. Exposure to destinations like Hampi, Mysore, Pattadakal andKabini have alsoshown results in terms of recognition, recall and association with the State.Tour operators are on the lookout for better options, more variety and great experiences. Keeping these in mind, tour operators, particularly the larger ones have been more than willing to join hands with Karnataka Tourism to promote the destination.Operators like Cox & Kings and Black Tomato have already indicated keen interest to partner with Karnataka in this regard.This is an emerging trend in destination marketing."

"One of our other key focus areas of this year was to push tie ups with some of the leading organisations in world tourism. With the Pacific Asia Travel Association, for example, we are trying to pitch in to host one of the immediate PATA Travel Marts and even offer many of our properties and destinations for smaller meets of the PATA. With the ITB, we are trying to look for training and development that can be imparted to the tourism trade in the State. This is not to say that the trade in our State do not know how to conduct their business, but there are areas where we feel a little bit of exposure to global trends and scenarios will go a long way in shaping the industry," says Mr. Jadhav.

Some of the leading tour operators have implied that wildlife could become the backbone of Karnataka's future and will be an ideal platform to expand its product portfolio,especiallyamongst the foreign travellers.

Mysore and Coorg dominated the delegation:

Resorts like TheSerai, Windflower and Tamara;tour operators like Deccan Dreams, Spice Trip and Blue Yonder; and Mysore-based Sandesh The Prince hotel were part of the delegation along with Jungle Lodges & Resorts and The Golden Chariot. These apart, Skyway International Travel, a Mysore-based

tour operator and Quorum Hotel, a Mysore-based hotel and hospitality group were other participants from Karnataka.

The private sector participants were enthusiastic about the WTM experience this year with some of them clocking up to 26 Tour Operator-meetings. 'It's a very good way to generate international business and all the more advantageous to be part of the State's banner at trade fairs like these,' says Sanjay Sinha of The Serai Resorts.

Sandeep Sinha of The Blue Yonder feels that, "International trade fairs work very well in terms of not just business, but brand visibility, brand establishment and to develop new contacts. Particularly when it comes to niche segments like Responsible Tourism. The theme of wildlife on the Karnataka Pavilion was fresh and resulted in an interesting avatar for the destination," he said.