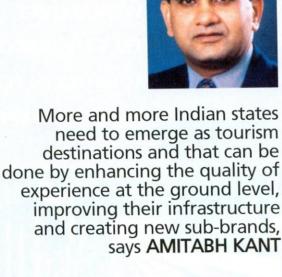
ring flowers and

idea pool



A brand is

what a brand does t was an unbelievably complex and intricate exercise. To bring a country as large as India with 28 states, nine union territories, 18 official languages and 1.12 billion people spread over 3.29 million sq km of breathtaking geography and history — together under the

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campaign that helped India metamorphose into one

of the top destinations of the world, a fact that

was acknowledged even by Conde Nast Traveller Readers' Award that ranked the country as the

world's most preferred holiday destination in 2007.

Kant, courtesy his experience as a joint secretary

And to thin men get away with chocolates to Incredible India has now penned the fascinating success story in his book, Branding India: An Incredible Story. In fact, he realm of tourism by a simple branding exercise was feels the book is more relevant today as the Indian a challenging task," says Amitabh Kant, one of the main architects of the Incredible India campaign. A tourism industry faces a slowdown again due to the

in the Ministry of Tourism between 2001 and 2007, bution and poverty alleviation. In fact, one of the

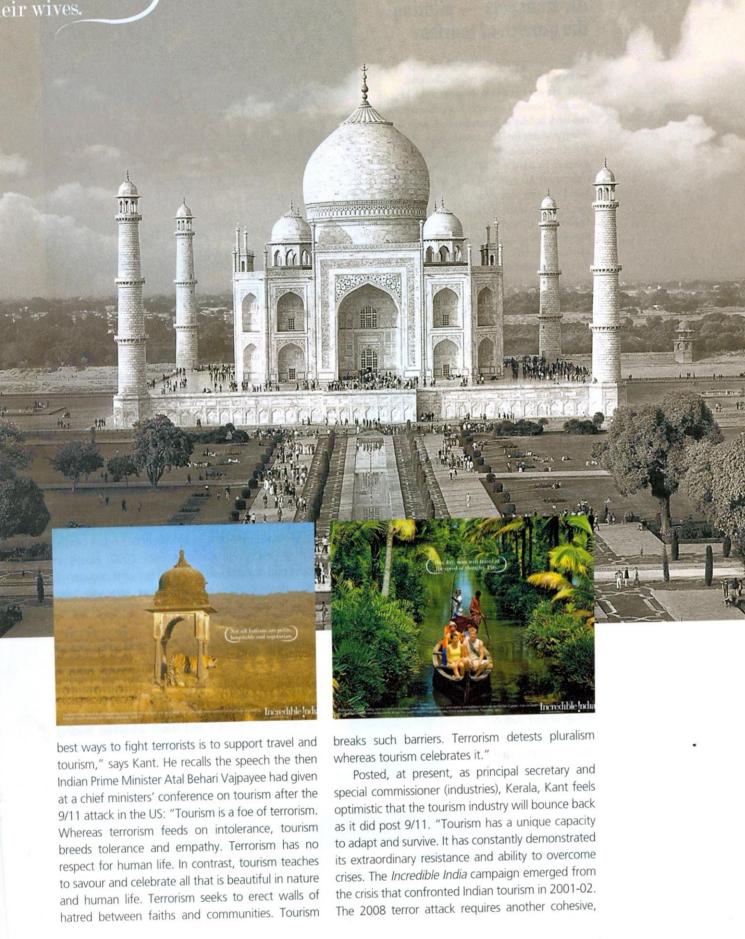
economic meltdown and the 26/11 Mumbai terror

attacks. "The tourist inflow during the first three

months of 2009 has seen a decline of around 18 per

cent as compared to the same period last year. But I feel tourism is an antidote to terrorism; it is a

catalyst for employment creation, income redistri-



idea pool Air transport — piloting the growth of tourism Clark, a leading travel writer, woke me up frantically at 1 am a week before Christmas in 2001. He was just a week away from checking into the Coconut Lagoon in Kumarakom for a two-week holiday in Kerala but there were no tickets available for India from London. All flights were choc-a-bloc. Sounding a bit sheepish, he asked if I could talk to the

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39.0

per cent in foreign exchange earnings in US \$ terms

as compared to 2001, which itself had witnessed

a fall of 4.2 per cent in arrivals and 7.6 per cent in

foreign exchange earnings over 2000. Hotels in

India had gone down by 25-30 per cent occupancy,

international tour operators had removed India from their sales brochures and inbound Indian

tour operators had, on account of lack of business, switched to outbound operations. This was a

consequence of several disastrous events, one

after another — the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York, the war in Afghanistan,

the Parliament attack in Delhi, the troop mobilisation at the Indian border and travel advisories leading

to withdrawal of schedules by airlines from

was a moment for action. The need of the hour

was a strong national policy for tourism. The need

was to acknowledge tourism's potential for revenue and employment generation. The Incredible

India campaign was launched at the peak of this

crisis to bring back consumer demand, generate momentum and enhance growth in the tourism

For India, this was a time for reflection. It

9.4%

13.3 14.0 chairman of Air India and swing two tickets for him. I was now wide awake. Though a few

Source: Centre for Asia Pacific Aviation (CAPA); Airports Authority of indic

India.

19.5

2005

health, culture, railways, shipping, rural development, environment and forests, civil aviation, roads and highways, home affairs — as it did during the Incredible India campaign. "To achieve a synergy, however minimal, among these departments and move ahead without making too many compromises was a huge task. That it was accomplished was, of course, thanks to colleagues in the government and the private sector, who battled all odds for the cause of Indian tourism," he says. Now over to him: Crisis as a catalyst: The making of a brand called Incredible India A crisis of massive magnitude had gripped Indian tourism in 2001-02. The year 2002 had seen a decline of six per cent in tourist arrivals and three

tour operators at the World Travel Market in London had cribbed to me about insufficient

flights just about a month ago, I had no idea that it was so difficult to get seats to India from the UK. I assured him that I would try my level best — and I did — but Clark ended up travelling five days after his scheduled departure

Just eight years down the line, things have changed dramatically, with even private Indian carriers flying into Heathrow. For years, India's growth in the tourism sector was severely retarded by the civil aviation sector. India is a long-haul destination for most of the key and

emerging source markets and almost 97.2 per

concerted response," he says, adding the need of

the hour is for more and more states to emerge as

tourism destinations by enhancing the quality of

experience at the ground level, by improving their

it requires intervention from every possible government sphere — infrastructure, urban development,

As tourism is a multi-sectoral activity, says Kant,

infrastructure and creating new sub-brands.

two decades to economic growth. They will evolve into transform its air transport industry containing hotels, conference centres, duty into one of the largest in the world. entertainment facilities. In a sense, they India is likely to achieve the same transport network that will serve as host to result in less than myriad economic activities. The southern states of India have rapidly moved forward a decade almost 480 aircraft till 2012 against an existing fleet size of 310 operating in June 2007. During the last two years alone, standard airports. These will, in the coming years, be the impetus for both trade and traffic to south India. The almost 150 aircraft have been added for the scheduled government is actively promoting the development of services services with another 50 private aircraft in the general at regional airports to reduce the concentration of traffic at the primary gateways. The major beneficiaries will be the What does the future scenario look like? It took China southern states, which will emerge as the regional hubs. almost two decades to transform its air transport industry There are several challenges as India's aviation industry moves into the 21st century. The issue of human resources is into one of the largest in the world. India is likely to achieve the same result in less than a decade. This would, however, of critical concern. CAPA has estimated that an additional require coordinated action to ensure adequate infrastructure, 2,000 pilots will be required by 2010 but this necessity competitive cost structure, rational taxes and growing and cannot be met by locally trained resources. expanding commercial and tourism opportunities. As CAPA Almost 600 foreign pilots are flying in India mostly as states, "The growth of the Indian aviation sector has the commanders whose availability has been limited because of potential to absorb up to US \$120 million in investment by induction of new aircraft in the skies. A long-term solution

industries.'

It took China almost

The enormous potential for growth can be assessed from the fact that India's annual domestic passenger traffic is only one-fifth of that of China and less than four per cent of that of the US. India's large population base, its growing and vibrant economy and the inability of the inadequate rail and road infrastructure to meet the growing demand are likely to catalyse further growth. This realisation has led to Indian carriers placing orders for delivery of

Incredible ndia

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additional funds sanctioned to mend these roads and bring them up to international standards. The roads have since been done up, the integrated

2020 and create 2-3 million jobs, which would be further

supplemented by an indirect growth in the tourist-related

on the other hand, inspired world-class resorts that

are traditional in flavour but modern in amenities. In

fact, this conscious shift in focus, which enhanced

unit value, has been the foundation of brand Kerala.

Today, the state is one of the most expensive desti-

Soon after joining the Ministry of Tourism in 2001,

my first official visit was to the Buddhist Circuit

of Bodhgaya, Rajgir and Nalanda in Bihar. We took

the Rajdhani express from Delhi to Gaya and drove

down from there. The national highway stretch

was probably the worst in the world — the entire

distance of 96 km was full of large potholes. It

was a bone-rattling nightmare — a journey that

should have taken an-hour-and-a-half took us

almost five hours. No wonder the Japanese and

the Southeast Asian tourists, who should have

flocked to visit the Mecca of Buddhism, had been

driven away. It took all our persuasive skills to get

nations in India between September and March.

Infrastructure: Propping up the

fundamentals

But it was not easy to pull it off. The opposition was stiff and there was a lot of criticism. But thankfully, the officials stuck to the positioning that in reality was a brilliant signboard to showcase the myriad facets of the state's most powerful tourism product, nature. To begin with, it was decided that the whole

down to the common man.

Kerala, where it all began

requires substantial investments for training academics in

various regions of India and it may be worthwhile for state

God's Own Country shows the way:

"God's Own Country" is perhaps the most power-

ful positioning statement for an Indian destination.

concept of mass tourism would be done away with.

In terms of overall marketing and promotion, the

focus was shifted to the affluent, sensitive traveller,

to whom Kerala was pitched as an upmarket desti-

nation. This was done with the specific intention of

ensuring that the benefits of tourism percolated

budget travellers pay for the entire holiday in the

country of origin — they tend to spend less money

once they are there, quite unlike affluent travellers.

Studies had clearly shown that backpackers and

governments to take the initiative in this field.

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cent of its inbound traffic arrives by air.

multi-faceted commercial operations

free shops, shopping malls and

will be the hubs of a multi-model

to create and develop international

Airports will be the key drivers of

Backpackers also triggered a particular kind of development with a hundred-rupee-a-night rooms mushrooming all over Kovalam. Affluent travellers, idea pool

development of Bodhgaya, Rajgir and Nalanda has

been completed and better conservation, preser-

marketing of India without a simultaneous focus on

infrastructure improvement would be a disaster. For essentially, a brand is what a brand does. In the long

run, a branding campaign which does not match

with the actual experience does damage to the

destination management. Therefore, it holds the key

What have been the major constraints in the crea-

tion of adequate hotel accommodation capacity?

First and foremost, there has been an inadequate provision of land for hotels in the land-use plans in

to India's sustained growth in the tourism sector.

Hotels: Creating room for growth

The experience confirmed the belief that any

vation and lighting undertaken.

The meru danda, or the spine. Ancient wisdom compares it with a shining golden mountain called Meru, the axis of the universe. The danda-asana straightens and strengthens the spine, the axis of our mind, body and soul. Indeed, like Yoga and Ayurveda, India offers many stopovers for the traveller on a journey of self-discovery It's an experience that's truly incredible.

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ment return required from the project.

low. This has resulted in high tariffs.

able for construction of hotel properties has been

fairly low, not taking into consideration the invest-

Income Tax Act. Thus, there is a lack of adequate

fiscal incentives for entrepreneurs to invest in a capi-

tal intensive industry like hotels. In most cities across

the world, hotels are situated in the central business

districts so that travel over long distances can be avoi-

ded. Good scientific urban planning ensures that hotels enable the destination to compete globally. In

contrast, in India, hotel sites are far-flung and FSIs are

absence of budget category (two to four-star) hotels

in metro cities of India, leading to India's inability to

More significantly, it has led to an almost total

Most states across the country have not accorded hotel infrastructure status under the provisions of the

FRP power saving fans designed by IIT **₹ 5500 Clients Worldwide** 

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Two

**National** Awards

**BRANCHES: ALL OVER INDIA** 

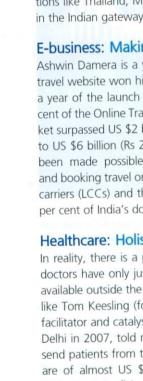
quently, Miliband took a guided tour of the milk collection and chilling centre and the women's self-help group training centre. For Miliband, this was a glimpse of India quite unlike what he would have An NRI friend of mine, Mohit, a Wall Street

Sustainability:

Sustainable tourism development aims at a balance between environmental, economic and sociocultural aspects. For tourism development to be sustainable, there must be optimal use of environmental resources and the sector must help conserve natural heritage and biodiversity, respect the sociocultural authenticity of host communities and provide socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders. Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience for them, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable practices

found in cities like Delhi, Mumbai and Bangalore. whiz kid, and his charming wife, Neerja, came to Kerala for a holiday in 2007. On my recommendation, they ended up staying two nights in the unique heritage village of Aranmula, centred around the legendary Parthasarathy temple. The village is famous for its Aranmula Vallomkali, the fabulous boat race held on the river Pamba. It is also





Incredible India

I GREY

Shortcut to India New airline routes are opening up some of the country's most intriguing Getting to smaller cities in India used to be a nightmare, literally. Travellers would have to stop in New Delhi or Mumbai, where overseas flights often arrive and depart in the middle of the night. But during the past three years, several foreign airlines have launched non-stop flights from Bangkok, Singapore, Dubai The itinerary for the future and other cities to more than a dozen second-tier destinations in India. This means a tourist or business traveller in Asia can

come to wash away their sins or take a flight to Kochi, the gateway to lavish resorts with traditional ayurvedic massage and treatments. Source: Wall Street Journal Incredible ndia

now take a long weekend or

easy side trip, bypassing

India's modernised cities

and going straight to parts

of the country that haven't

yet been as transformed by

Travellers can spend a

the booming economy.

long weekend visiting

Varanasi, where Hindus

idea pool

South Asia:

among them. Sustainability and eco-tourism are complementary to each other because the basic components of eco-tourism demand the implementation of sustainability principles. The concept of eco-tourism basically comprises four fundamental components. Travel has to be restricted to relatively undisturbed or protected natural areas; it has to be nature-based; it has to be conservation-led; and it must have an educative role — which implies that eco-tourists must have a desire to learn about nature on their trips. Eco-tourism is, therefore, a logical component of sustainable development, requiring a multi-

disciplinary approach, careful planning (both physical and managerial) and strict guidelines and regulations which will guarantee sustainable operations. Poverty alleviation: Tourism as key catalyst

food with their hands in true village style. Subse-

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renowned for the Aranmula Kannadi (mirrors), which are made using white lead and copper and have immense clarity. A French artist, Louba Schild, runs a folk art school in a 100-year-old heritage building. The Vijnana Kala Vedic cultural centre teaches the nuances of Kathakali, Mohiniyattam and Bharatanatyam as well as percussion and Kalaripayattu. The Vaasthu Vidya Gurukalam teaches Vaasthu Vidya, the ancient Indian science of architecture. There is also an art gallery, where you can learn the age-old techniques used to create murals on the walls of the temples.

Through the looking glass: Future of tourism In the context of India, the vast potential of tourism as an employment creator and wealth distributor still remains untapped. The size of the tourism industry worldwide is US \$ 4.6 trillion whereas the software industry globally is US \$ 500 billion. The tourism

Branding India: An Incredible Story

In an attempt to discover India, the British foreign industry globally generates 20 million jobs. As India secretary, David Miliband, accompanied by Rahul grows and expands its base in travel and tourism, it Gandhi, spent a night at Shivkumari Kori's house at will generate many more jobs and the sector will Simara Village in Amethi district of Uttar Pradesh. become a major catalyst for India's growth. The two men slept on charpoys and ate vegetarian Amitabh Kant is the author of