



ENVIS CENTRE ON ECO - TOURISM

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Arijit Dutta - MD, Priya Entertainments, has ventured into the eco-tourism sector in recent times.



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SUBJECT : IBNS catch up with him to discuss about his upcoming ventures.

I have been very fond of nature: Arijit Dutta

Arijit Dutta - MD, Priya Entertainments, has ventured into the eco-tourism sector in recent times. IBNS catch up with him to discuss about his upcoming ventures.

May 2, 2018: Mr Dutta, why did you venture into eco-tourism? What prompted you to venture into the eco-tourism sphere?

That has been my interest because I have always been very fond of nature. In the younger days, being in St. Paul's, Darjeeling, we used to do a lot of trekking, camping, pioneer camps, Duke of Edinburgh Scheme. So that interest was always there. My eco-tourism is at a different level. I don't like the idea of a hotel. Mine is more on the form of tents. Luxury tents, but stay with nature, far away from human habitation, so that it gives you the feel that you are close to nature, and when you are in the tents, somehow you sleep differently. Khairabera Eco Adventure Resorts in Purulia is a super hit among tourists over the past 1 ½ years. Facilities as riding, trekking, fishing, animal watching put together of International standards at quite moderate pricing is attracting tourists in droves from not only Bengal but Bihar, Jharkhand and other places of India. This is one of its kind facility in the country and the only in the East which is actually bringing the patrons closest to nature.

My latest project Eco Adventure Resorts at Burra Bungalow, Temi Tea Gardens, South Sikkim is again another extension of my love for nature.

The business of eco adventure tourism has a great demand supply imbalance and PEPL shall play an important role in the next few years of bridging the gap.

Your love for the jungle is well documented. Do you think that made it easier for you to set foot into the eco-adventure tourism?

Of course my natural affinity for the jungle and adventure has given me an impetus to set my foot in eco adventure tourism. Since I have been in the jungles, safaris on numerous occasions and as I have grown in the hills it is but natural that will understand the business of eco adventure tourism better than a just an investor / entrepreneur would. The pros and cons of the eco adventure tourism business is much better understood and practically applicable ideas and vision is a natural fall out of years and hours spent in such environs, which I have done.

Though PEPL is a household name in the Bengali entertainment industry, it's fairly new in the tourism front (correct me if I'm wrong). How has been the experience thus far?

Yes relatively new in the hospitality and tourism sector. The goodwill that the house of PRIYA has enjoyed and the iconic status it has in the entertainment industry surely is a legacy which we will carry forward to our new areas of business and so far we have enjoyed a fabulous support in our tourism sector. Our Eco Adventure Resorts at Khairabera, Purulia has completely changed the dynamics of tourism landscape of the area. Very few tourists actually knew about the rugged terrain yet scenic beauty of that area before we had launched the KHAIRABERA ECO ADVENTURE RESORTS. But the most modern facilities that we are providing at KEARS with the state of the art facilities twined with the naturally beautiful surroundings is an eclectic mix of nature and modern facilities and KEARS project is a winner all the way and is perhaps the landmark tourism initiative of Eastern India and again PEPL is pioneering the same.

Similarly PRYA VILLA though on a smaller scale is providing an upmarket solution to visitors with a demand for high quality facilities in Shantiniketan. Over the years Shantiniketan has become a popular destination after Darjeeling in Bengal and PEPL's project is aimed at tapping the market.

As an avid traveller, what do you make of the tourism infrastructure in India?

Despite the recent growth of the tourism sector in the country, India's share in international tourist arrivals is a meagre 0.50%, while the share in the global international tourism receipts is around 1.30% only. Tourism not only creates jobs in the tertiary sector, it also encourages growth in the primary and secondary sectors of industry. Hence, it is high time, the government should encourage the participation of the private sector in a big way for the all round development of the tourism sector that has the potential to act as the key driver of inclusive growth. **Lack of Infrastructure:** It is a major challenge for the Indian tourism sector. Tourism-associated economic and social infrastructure – hotels, connectivity, human resources, hygiene, health facilities, etc are largely under developed in India. The poor quality of infrastructure is reflected in India's 112nd rank in the ICT readiness component and 104th rank in the health and hygiene components of the WEF's Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index 2017. The prime reason for this apathy is the poor allocation of financial resources. It should be noted that in the Budget 2017-18, the government has allocated only Rs 1840 crore for a promising sector like tourism.

Safety and security: Safety and security of tourists, especially of the foreign tourists, is a major roadblock to the tourism development. Attacks on foreign nationals, especially on women, raise questions about India's ability to welcome tourists from far away countries. Among the 130 countries surveyed, India was placed at the 114th position in terms of safety and security aspect in the WEF Index 2017.

Accessibility: Majority of the tourist spots in the country are not accessible to poor, women and elderly. This is because of high costs of travelling, poor connectivity and a series of permissions required for various reasons.

India's tourism sector witnessed a growth of 4.5 per cent in terms of foreign tourist arrivals (FTAs) with 8.2 million arrivals in 2015, and a growth of 4.1 per cent in foreign exchange earnings (FEEs) of USD 21.1 billion. While in 2016, FTAs

were 8.9 million with growth of 10.7 per cent and FEE (USD terms) were at US\$ 23.1 billion with a growth of 9.8 per cent. In 2015, the domestic tourist visits to States/UTs was pegged at 143 crores in 2015.

What's next in store for PEPL after the Khairabera Eco-adventure resort and Priya Villa?

Eco Adventure Resorts at Burra Bungalow, Temi Tea Gardens, South Sikkim is our next project. The TEMI story dates back to the late 1960's when the King of Sikkim gave refuge to displaced neighbor's along the Silk Route and helped them set up a tea estate over a vast expanse of 376 hectares of land along elevations of 1400 to 2000 meters or 4800 to 6400 ft making some of the finest flavours of brew. The Temi Tea Garden lies between Damthang and Temi Bazaar towards Singtam, it spreads over an area of 376 hectares.

The Burra Bungalow is the epicentre of attraction of the TEMI Tourism Project. This historic project initiated by Priya Entertainments Pvt Ltd and supported by the Sikkim State Government shall be the first ever PPP initiative in Sikkim with a non Sikkimese partner in this sector . As per the Agreement PEPL becomes the exclusive Tea Tourism player in Sikkim. Temi Tea Estate sprawls over 200 hectare where 176 hectare is under cultivation.

The bungalow shall continue to be called as The Burra Bunglow (Temi) and shall be furnished with erstwhile era's heritage fittings to serve 4-5 rooms and additional cottages for accomodation. While at Temi not only would you get an opportunity to relax and unwind in the timeless bungalow and its surroundings but also soak in the beauty of the garden and enjoy plucking the Tea leaf and make your own tea. Some of the major attractions are Paragliding facilities which is already operational, Namchi just 20 Km away is a major destination for tourists, the hot water Thermal Springs and the Cherry trees which blossoms in November has galvanized TEMI authorities to organize Cherry Blossom festival or Autumn festival from this year. Driving in when these trees are in bloom is like moving through a pink mist beyond which one can glimpse the gleaming snows of

Khangchendzonga. The drive upto Temi takes you through mountain sides lush with forests.

TEMI shall open a complete new vista for hill and tea tourism and hopefully set trends and change the dynamics of the Tourism Industry of the East and North East India.

Let's talk about movies. A popular Bengali actor (Saswata Chatterjee told IBNS) has alleged that certain movies are not allowed to run in the theatres. As the owner of one of the most prestigious theatres in Kolkata, what's your take on the issue?

I can share my personal experience and I as an Independent Hall owner I have never been dictated and neither do I take in any diktats whoever the person/group may be and I am known, respected in the industry for my independent and forthright views.

In a previous interview with IBNS, you had said that Jharkhand and Odisha are probable venues for Bioscope, your own multiplex chain. How is that coming up?

As of now the focus is on the expansion of the hospitality segment and surely we shall make moves in the Jharkhand and Odisha states as and when the opportunity arises in expansion of the Bioscope brand.

What is the most important thing required to be a successful businessman?

Leadership Skills-To be successful in business, you need outstanding leadership skills. You should be able to command a room and inspire a team of associates to perform at their best.

Bold to Take Risks- A great business leader has an entrepreneurial spirit and is not afraid to take risks to advance the business and improve revenues.

Competitive Spirit- A sense of competition helps to propel the best business men and women to the forefront of the industry. The desire to do better than similar organizations can prove vital to your success.

Good Intellect-Thorough knowledge of the business world, as well as of technology, economics, politics, history, and other matters, is important for business leaders. Intellect helps to cultivate a global perspective and sparks creativity.

Ability to Take the Initiative-Initiative is important in business as it continually pushes people to work harder, learn more, and perform better.

Solid Communication Skills-Great communication skills are essential, as no business transaction is a solitary endeavor. Business leaders must be able to communicate effectively in writing and orally to ensure the highest levels of efficiency.

Ambition-The most successful business leaders have unrelenting ambition. They have lofty goals and do whatever it takes (within legal limits, naturally) to achieve those goals.

A Reliable Nature-Great business men and women are unfailingly reliable. They can be counted on to get the job done and always make a positive contribution.

Personal and Professional Integrity-A keen sense of integrity is important to ensure that business transactions are conducted with ethics in mind. A successful business person conducts him or herself in a respectable manner and always acts fairly and responsibly.

Likeability-Great business leaders have great personalities. Their colleagues, superiors, and subordinates respect them and enjoy working with, or for, them. They are able to make networking contacts and use them to help fuel the business along.

What's keeping you occupied these days?

Presently the hospitality expansion at Temi, Sikkim is foremost in my priority list apart from looking into KEARS, Purulia and Priya Villa, Shnatiniketan. Ofcourse amidst all this PRIYA Cinema and Bioscope too needs attention and my acting stints in films being currently shot at Bangladesh and Kolkata takes up a lot of my time.