

Adventure eco-resort amid tea garden in Sikkim

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(From left) Rahul Banerjee, Mrinalini Srivastava and Arijit Dutta release the Temi resort logo in Kolkata

April 21 (TravelAndy): The government of Sikkim, a 7,096sqkm state nestled in the Himalayas in northeastern India, is developing backpacker-friendly homestays around an upcoming adventure eco-resort in the midst of the Temi tea garden.

In what is being touted as then first public-private partnership with a non-Sikkimese partner in this sector, West Bengal-based Priya Entertainments has signed an agreement with the Sikkim government, which owns the Temi tea estate, for the resort project.

The King of Sikkim had established the Temi Tea Estate over 376 hectares with elevation between 4,800 and 6,400 feet to provide employment to Tibetan refugees. Among India's smallest states, the land-locked Sikkim has Tibet in its north and east, Bhutan in its east, Nepal in its west and the Indian state of West Bengal in its south.

The focus of the luxury eco project will be a building called Burra Bungalow, which was damaged in the 2011 earthquake. It's renovation has begun and it will be furnished with heritage fittings. The promoters are looking to open it around mid-2019.

With unhindered views of the majestic Mt Kanchenjunga, the world's third-highest peak at 8,586 metres, Priya intends to market the resort as an exclusive getaway for luxury tourists. "Definitely not more than 24 people at a time," said Priya Entertainments MD Arijit Dutta.

The resort would initially begin with tea tourism. Dutta says they would give guests the opportunity to pluck two the leaves and a bud themselves, which can be packed and branded as 'Temi Tea plucked by me' to take home as gifts. The promoters also plan to start a cherry blossom festival from this November, when the area is awash with pink hues of the flowers.

Dutta said he also plans to have a casino at the facility with gaming being legal in Sikkim.

"Paragliding facilities are already available in the area. Ziplines will be in place by June. We'll also have mountain biking. We're looking at the safety aspects of quad bikes," said said Mrinalini Srivastava, the MD of Temi Tea, talking about the adventure aspect of the resort. Srivastava, an Indian Police Service officer, was in Kolkata on Friday to make the announcement about the resort.

Responding to a question from TravelAndy, Srivastava said even though the resort would be a luxury getaway, budget tourists would also be able to experience the place with the government developing homestays around the resort. "There is huge demand. We only have around 25 homestays in the area and the government intends to develop 50 more," said Rahul Banerjee, consultant and advisor to the project. "The area has a demand of around 68,000 beds."