Remarks by Dr. Adarsh Swaika, Ambassador of India during 'Exploring Incredible India' – Networking Event on Tourism on India

[11 October 2023, 1630-1830 hrs.]

Distinguished speakers & panelists, Delegates from the hospitality and travel industry in India, Representatives of travel industry in Kuwait, friends from media, ladies and gentlemen,

I welcome all of you to today's special event wherein we have tried to bring together a cross section of stakeholders in travel and tourism sector from India and Kuwait with the objective of knowing India specifically from the tourism perspective.

I will not get into the specifics of tourist opportunities and related infrastructure for tourism to India as we have experts from India, both DMCs (as we call in tourism jargon) and renowned hoteliers, who are going to speak about different facets of 'Incredible India'.

I just want to put before you 5 thoughts as to 'Why India when it comes to tourism'.

(i). Firstly, India offers a 'complete tourism experience'. By complete tourism experience, I mean whether you are searching for scenic landscapes, historical sites and monuments, wildlife parks and bird sanctuaries, adventure sports including mountain trekking, skiing, water-rafting etc, hill stations in summers, spiritual place, beaches, back-waters, river-fronts, tea and coffee-estates, shopping, food and so on, India is "THE COUNTRY'. India is home to as many as 42 UNESCO World Heritage Sites and many more are yet to be included.

(ii) Secondly, Improvements made in the last decade or so in tourism Infrastructure – Today, India can boast of world-class tourism infrastructure whether it is the luxury hotels, luxury trains, luxury cruise, air connectivity or road transport. The latest sector to join in this category is rail transport. And the statistics itself speak for it – around 200 5 star hotels, 150 airports and 8500 railway stations. Raod connectivity with 6 lane-highways practically cover the length and bredth of the country. The introduction of modern high-speed Vande Bharat trains has opened up travel by rail as an attractive option.

(iii) Thirdly, Apart from destination choice and world-class infrastructure, the soft dose of Indian cultural ethos and seeing unity in diversity. I can even dare to challenge whether any country in the world could offer such a varied experience in terms of all this encompasses Indian culture – festivals, traditions, language, food, shopping etc.

(iv) My 4th point, the sheer ease of travel with the digital transformation that has taken place in India. Pay for almost everything from ticket bookings to hotel to shopping to entry tickets through mobile apps. And no need to carry currency notes or credit cards,

(v) My 5th and last point that today most travelers care about most, the economic part of your tourism plan. It will be mostly far more economical if you compare the same facilities with other tourist destinations in the world. But yes, compare apple to apples and not apple for oranges.

Friends,

All these factors have made India an important and growing tourist destination in the ‘Map of World Tourism’. The International

Tourist arrivals in India during 2018 and 2018 were around 18 mln. I am taking these figures as Covid have had an impact in subsequent years. The International tourist arrivals are picking up momentum since last year. Augmenting tourism infrastructure, easing of visa regime, assurance of quality standards in services of tourism service providers, projection of the country as a 365 days' tourist destination, promotion of sustainable tourism etc. has been a strong focus of Government of India encompassing a whole of Government approach with Indian states as an essential partner. Some of the initiatives taken by Ministry of Tourism of India for facilitating tourism to India include:

(i) 24x7 Toll Free Multi-Lingual Tourist Info-Helpline in 10 International languages, including Arabic.

(ii) 24/7 Live Chat Service interface on the incredible India website to assist with planning and quick query resolutions.

(iii) Tourist Facilitation and Information Counter at 9 International airports in India catering to non-English speaking tourists where the tourists can speak directly with the foreign language agents and get guidance, including in Arabic

I now know for sure *(and have seen during this summer when it was so difficult to find many of our Kuwaiti friends and interlocutors)* that Kuwaitis are one of the most widely traveled people anywhere. They travel, they take their time, are keen observers of local cultures and traditions, connoisseurs of arts and crafts and most importantly, they are discerning travellers with a keen eye for the best experiences in terms of luxury and hospitality.

Many of you present here, represent the vibrant travel and tourism industry in Kuwait and are a critical link for providing options

to Kuwaiti travelers. I am sure you have heard about India and some of you have taken your clients to India and some plan to. But this is a fact today that not many Kuwaiti travellers are presented with attractive packages and options for travel to India as is the case for some of the Western destinations. This is where your role becomes so important to provide them with the tourism opportunities that India has to offer and help them in making an informed choice. Our endeavour through this event, and through future activities and social media, is to systematically work towards encouraging awareness about India's tourism opportunities to our Kuwaiti friends and foster connections between all stakeholders. I am sure today's discussions will help us all to move towards this direction.

We have structured today's event in a manner that we not only get a glimpse of India but also understand the gaps and the typical requirements of a Kuwaiti traveler to better position India as a 'Tourist Destination in the Kuwaiti Travel Map'. Our friends from India are here, they would definitely like to bring to you what India has to offer. Our Kuwaiti blogger friends will tell us about their experiences in India. We also have planned some exciting prizes with the support of our friends in hospitality and aviation sectors, at the end.

We have also put together an informative e-booklet on India tourism which I am pleased to unveil now.

With this, let me welcome you all once again and thank all of you for being a part of this event, particularly the presenters, moderator and panelists, some of whom have flown in from India only for this event. That shows the importance we attach to the tourism potential from Kuwait.

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