

TAKE A JOURNEY 1600 YEARS BACK IN TIME ON NEW LUXURY TRAIN

Showcased by the state tourism department, Karnataka's new luxury train, the Golden Chariot, is drawing the attention of overseas visitors. The luxury train promises to give a complete experience of the culture, history and heritage of the state. In a conversation with T3, **Vinay Luthra**, MD, Karnataka State Tourism Development Corporation, talks about recent initiatives to promote this prized product.



What has been the response to the launch of the Golden Chariot from tourists?

Considering it is the first year of operations, the response has been extremely good. We are expecting the momentum to speed up in the next year. Both the international and domestic tourists are happy with the service and facilities on the train. They are also quite taken in by the amazing destinations we have planned in the itinerary.

How many tourists have taken the train so far? Are they mostly foreigners, or do you also get a lot of NRIs, especially from the Gulf?

The average occupancy of the train has been 35 percent and most of them are foreigners. There has also been a good number of NRIs from the UK and USA who have travelled on the train, though nobody yet has arrived from the Gulf.

In this age of mass air travel, do you see travel by luxury trains as a niche segment?

Today's traveller is an evolved traveler who is looking for experiences that are unique and satisfying to him rather than make a statement of been-there-done-that. Luxury has to be experienced and flying to various destinations is more of a convenience factor rather than an experience. Luxury trains are on an increase the world

over and the itineraries that are charted out are unlike the normal tourist itinerary. They showcase exclusive properties and take you through the interiors of various destinations. It caters to a niche segment in the overcrowded travel market.

Do you plan on promoting the Golden Chariot in the Gulf market, where there are no rail lines?

Yes, we do plan to promote 'The Golden Chariot' very intensively in the Gulf market as there being no rail lines is an added advantage for us. What we have to offer is a unique experience of a luxury train travel with an itinerary of beautiful landscapes, culture and world heritage sites in Karnataka. These destinations are very exclusive and different to any other travel experience.

Will you also be targeting Gulf-based Arabs and western expatriates living in that region?

We will be targeting the Gulf based Arabs as well as the western expatriates who are looking out for such unique luxury experiences. The proximity of India makes it more attractive to them.

What have been your recent initiatives to promote this unique product?

Constantly seeking ways to ensure the continued success of the train, KSTDC has been in the forefront to identify channel partners to market the luxury train effectively. It has signed an agreement with The Leela

Group of Hotels to facilitate and market The Golden Chariot in India and abroad. This agreement also provides for co-marketing the train and offering tour packages. The Golden Chariot has not just put Karnataka tourism on the international map, it has become one of the most prestigious products of the country. These marketing initiatives are essential if we wish to make The Golden Chariot one of the most coveted train journeys in the world. We will be marketing it aggressively across the globe through road shows and at trade fairs like ITB - Berlin.

- RAADIA MUKADAM

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For a more detailed itinerary, check out our website: www.goldenchariot.org



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