

## **Maharashtra government to appoint ambassador for women tourism plan 'Aai'**

The state tourism department will appoint a brand ambassador for its soon-to-be-out 'women tourism' policy to promote safe tourism for women travellers. Called the 'Aai' tourism policy, the initiative will likely include discounted tours conducted by the Maharashtra Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC), and tie-ups with hotels and resorts across the state that will offer women friendly stays.

State tourism minister Mr. Mangal Prabhat Lodha said tourism department was in touch with top women entrepreneurs from the tourism sector and would soon roll out a detailed policy after consultation with stakeholders. Mr. Lodha said the government was also planning to give rebates or subsidies to women tourists.

Mr. Lodha said as part of the Aai initiative, dedicated women-only tours will be offered along the MTDC's various tourism circuits, including special Mumbai Darshan tours which showcase the city's key tourism hotspots. "We are in talks and will soon also appoint a brand ambassador for the women tourism policy. There will be a dedicated website for women tourists, and buses for them on the tourist circuits. The buses will have GPS tracking keeping women's safety in mind. Women tourists will be given priority for this. This will be for the women, by the women tourism policy. We will select the tourist spots keeping in mind preferences and interests of women too," Mr. Lodha said.

Mr. Lodha said the tourism department is looking to create one lakh employment opportunities through new tourism initiatives.

In the women tourism circuits, preference will be given to women for jobs also. We will organise an Aai tourism festival once a year. Women from various walks of life, including celebrities and entrepreneurs, will be invited for this festival. The entire Aai tourism initiative is an effort to create a women-friendly tourism atmosphere. We want to increase the presence of women and participation in all tourism-related businesses, like hotels, resorts, marketing,

transport and travel, and tourist guides. We are planning to give them special training for this. We are also planning to set up a tourism unit within the tourist department," Mr. Lodha said.

Officials said special women tourism circuits like Mumbai circuit, spiritual circuit for pilgrim centres like Ashtavinayak darshan and a heritage circuit that will cover historic forts like Sinhagadh, Shivneri, Kasba Ganpati and other spots will be chalked out soon.