

The road from Goa

The G20 Tourism Ministers' meeting in Goa in June 2023 was a landmark event for several reasons. It underscored Prime Minister Modi's commitment to positioning tourism as a key pillar of development and received strong endorsement from the global community. The UNWTO views this as a roadmap for making tourism a central element of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The G20, representing around 85% of global GDP, over 75% of global trade, and about two-thirds of the world population, is a forum capable of driving change. In 2022, the G20 countries welcomed 74% of international tourists and accounted for 73% of tourism exports worldwide. Notably, 60% of foreign tourist arrivals to India come from G20 countries.

The Goa roadmap coincided with significant positive developments for tourism both in India and globally. The Indian budget of 2023 charted a clear direction for the future, emphasizing professional development of the sector in Mission Mode, involving convergence of all stakeholders and strong public-private partnerships. Around the same time, the UN hosted several conferences on the importance of tourism, such as the event on “Economic, Social, and Environmental Sustainability of Tourism,” which advocated a comprehensive approach to sustainability in tourism. The Goa Roadmap, built upon five priority areas, underscores tourism's contribution to achieving the 17 SDGs. These five priority areas are green tourism and climate action, digitalization, skill development, support for tourism MSMEs (which account for 80% of all tourism businesses worldwide), and a holistic approach to destination management.

Now, the task is to channel the enthusiasm generated by India's G20 presidency into implementing the action plan and fulfilling promises. The strategy should encompass three fundamental steps: a ‘total tourism’ approach to implementation involving collaboration among twenty ministries as identified in the Draft Tourism Policy, proactive participation from states to ensure harmony in tourism policies, practices, and procedures, and sustainability as the guiding principle for this journey, as emphasized by the UNWTO Secretary-General.

To transform tourism into a key pillar of development, as Prime Minister Modi envisions, structural and organizational reforms in tourism management are necessary. The 2023 budget indicated the government's direction towards Mission mode implementation, stakeholder convergence, and robust public-private partnerships. The draft Tourism Policy 2021 outlined a reconstruction of the organization, recommending the formation of National and State Tourism Boards, a recommendation initially made by the National Tourism Committee in 1988, which remains relevant today.

To recall a famous quote from Alice in Wonderland, “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?” to which the Cat responds, “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.”