

# Buddhist circuit in focus, UP looks to strengthen tourism & investment ties with Japan

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THE UTTAR Pradesh government is exploring to strengthen business ties with Japan as the state Tourism Department is making extensive plans to start tourism exchange and showcase investment opportunities with the East Asian country during Japan Tourism Expo in September with a focus on the Buddhist Circuit.

A delegation led by state Finance Minister Suresh Khanna is meeting investors in Japan.

Tourism Department officials said besides the Buddhist Circuit, the state is preparing an elaborate plan to showcase investment opportunities in meditation centers, hotels, cultural infrastructure under public private partnership (PPP) mode.

The foundation of the ties was laid last year during the visit of Yamanashi prefecture Governor Kotaro Nagasaki, who was accompanied by leading Japanese business delegates. They not only signed MOUs for industrial co-operation but also discussed opportunities in tourism exchange with a joint promotion of Mount Fuji and hot springs in Japan, and Buddhist and cultural destinations such as Sarnath, Shravasti and Kushinagar in Uttar Pradesh.



A delegation led by minister Suresh Khanna is in Japan

"Familiarisation trips from Japan are being regularly organised by the state Tourism Department to showcase the Buddhist Circuit in Uttar Pradesh, which is deeply intertwined with the life of the Buddha. The idea is to showcase the significant role of UP in the global Buddhist pilgrimage trail and encourage tourism exchange with Japan," said a senior government official.

Tourism and Culture Minister Jaiveer Singh said, "The state has seen a three-fold rise in tourist footfall the last eight years, and this reflects our focused strategy and global engagement. Our vision is to transform the Buddhist Circuit into a world-class spiritual and cultural gateway by integrating infrastructure, international connectivity and community involvement. We are welcoming countries like Japan to partner with us in building Buddhist temples, meditation centres, wellness retreats, and hospitality projects under PPP mode."

With Kushinagar getting much attention in the past, the

focus now is on developing infrastructure and cultural centres in Kaushambi and Farrukhabad districts where the government will invest on meditation centers or developing Buddhist tourist sites.

"In 2016, nearly 28 lakh tourists visited the Buddhist sites in UP. The number nearly tripled by 2024. Kaushambi witnessed a massive jump from just over 2 lakh tourists to more than 24 lakh visitors. Kushinagar witnessed a jump to 22 lakh from 9 lakh, while Sarnath remained a leading destination with 11.8 lakh visitors in the past year," said Mukesh Kumar Meshram, Principal Secretary, Tourism and Culture.

The delegation led by Finance Minister Suresh Khanna is camping in Japan for the last three days, to participate in the World Expo in Osaka and hold B2B meetings with potential investors. On Thursday, the delegation, also comprising Principal Secretary, Infrastructure and Industries, Alok Kumar, explored tie-ups in the semiconductor sector and academics.

Officials said the delegation explored semiconductor collaboration with Tokyo Electron Limited (TEL) in a meeting with company's Executive Vice President (Global Sales Division and India Business) Takeshi Okubo.

