

Astro- Tourism

February 9, 2021

In news: Recently, the Ministry of Tourism organised a webinar titled “Astro-Tourism: The Next Frontier of Nature-based Tourism” under Dekho Apna Desh campaign

Key updates on the webinar

- It focuses on promoting nature-based tourism which is emerging strongly in a post – COVID world, the major thrust of the webinar was sustainable and responsible travel
- The webinar focused on exploring the evolution of Astro-tourism as one of the most authentic and environment-friendly ways of travelling along with its immense potential to bring positive social, economic and conservation benefits to remote communities.

Global Himalayan Expedition

The Webinar was presented by Chief Operating Officer, Global Himalayan Expedition, which is a social enterprise that conducts Impact Expeditions to bring Solar Energy to remote Himalayan Villages.

Astrostays:

- During the webinar, the participants briefed about Astrostays which is a community-driven astro tourism model that puts communities at the heart and center of the tourism model.
- The program is aimed at empowering and strengthening communities by diversifying economic bases and creating new opportunities for livelihood creation using astro tourism as a key development intervention.
- This model is also an innovative form of experiential and sustainable tourism that generates economic benefits

for remote and rural regions of the world that have access to clear night skies while creating unique life-changing experiences for travellers.

- Trained on basics of astronomy and know-how of operating telescopes, the local homestay owners (mostly women) conduct night sky gazing sessions for the incoming tourists, creating a new channel of revenue generation for the communities, that has eventually led to increase in stimulus to local economy, reducing local youth migration and preservation of age-old cultural Himalayan heritage.

Major destinations of Astro-tourism in India

The presenters also highlighted on some of the major destinations which can be promoted as Astro-tourism destinations in India such as Pangong Lake (Ladak), Rann of Kutchh (Gujarat), Mandu (Madhya Pradesh), Lahaul & Spiti (Himachal Pradesh) etc. They further intensified on promoting National Parks & Wildlife Sanctuaries as Astro-tourism destinations during night.

What is Astro-tourism?

It refers to any kind of tourism that involves the night sky or visiting facilities related to astronomy like observatories, and combining that with a broader sense of ecotourism where interaction with nature is what the visitor experience is about

Global Himalayan Expedition (GHE)

- It is the one of the world's first organizations using the force of tourism coupled with technology to bring solar energy to these remote communities, **as recognized by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) and the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO).**
- **GHE has electrified 140 villages and lit up the lives of more than 60,000 people** through an innovative concept of

Impact Tourism.

- GHE's work of remote rural electrification has been documented by National Geographic, BBC and NDTV to reach out to a worldwide audience and has been internationally recognized and awarded by the WTTC and the World Tourism Awards.
- **The United Nations has recognized GHE as one of the successful case studies in sustainable tourism impacting SDG Goal No 7.**