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Heading: Tourism industry gives thumbs up to 2018 Budget

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 **THE WEEK****BUDGET 2018**

Tourism industry gives thumbs up to 2018 Budget

By Dhriti Gandhi Ranjan | February 01, 2018

The Union Minister of Finance, Arun Jaitley, with an aim to boost tourism, has proposed to develop 10 prominent tourist sites into iconic destinations by following a holistic approach involving infrastructure and skill development, development of technology, attracting private investment, branding and marketing. In addition to this, the minister announced that tourist amenities will be upgraded at 100 Adarsh monuments of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI).

Soon after the announcement of budget, the tourism industry responded positively. Shikhar Aggarwal, Joint Managing Director, BLS International Services Limited, says, "We welcome the positive measures announced by the finance minister in Union Budget 2018. Increased air connectivity via proposed expansion of airport capacity to make possible a billion trips a year will be an impetus for added investment in the development of new tourist destinations," he said.

"Strengthening of existing infrastructure and skill development will enable tourism to realise its potential as an important employment generator in the country. The development of technology in the tourism sector will ensure that tourist hotspots are able to offer an experience that is on par with global standards," he adds.

The finance minister also announced taking up the National Heritage City Development and Augmentation Yojana (HRIDAY) to revitalise heritage cities. Rakshit Desai, MD, FCM Travel Solutions, Indian subsidiary of FCTG, Australia, calls this move great to improve infrastructure facilities.

"Introduction of several initiatives to improve infrastructure facilities in Union Budget 2018 bodes well for travel and tourism sector and will help reinforce India's image as an international tourist destination. Significant investments to address concerns surrounding connectivity, with impetus on development of highways and arterial roads, railways and airport infrastructure is bound to push inbound arrivals. A dedicated focus to promote seaplane activities in the country, along with development of heritage sites and iconic tourist destinations will further enhance appeal of India as a destination of choice," he says

Desai believes that 'Namami Gange' will also provide further fillip to religious tourism from both domestic and international travelers. "Overall, it is a budget with a developmental agenda and could have benefited the tourism sector little more with announcements around simplified GST along with detailed FAQs for the travel industry," he said.