

Tourism can generate 46 mn jobs by 2025: US envoy

US Ambassador to India Richard Verma said here on Wednesday that if the right investments are made, tourism in India has the potential to support 46 million jobs by 2025.

The envoy lauded the government of India's decision to allow 100 per cent FDI in civil aviation and called it "a step in the right direction".

"I have seen first-hand the economic impact that regional connectivity brings to communities throughout India and its great potential to create opportunities for both business and skill development. We also welcome India's commitment to sustainable aviation through its pledge to limit carbon

dioxide emissions in coordination with the International Civil Aviation Organisation," Verma said.

Speaking at the Tourism Conference organised by the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce, he said air connectivity and infrastructure development, such as road connectivity, public transit, restaurants, hotel space, as well as a focus on sanitation and safety hold the key to tourism development, according to a release here.

He said capacity building and good customer service are also the key to bringing about qualitative changes in the tourism sector in India.

Verma revealed that in 2015, the United States was India's largest source of foreign tourists. Over 1.2 million American visitors came to India, accounting for 15 per cent of total foreign travellers. The e-tourist visa programme has also been an immense success. Visitors from the United States were among the top users of the e-tourist programme.

As against this, the US received more than one million Indian visitors, who contributed nearly \$11 billion to the American economy. The number of Indians visiting the US annually has doubled since 2009.

"Last year the number of Indian students in the United States reached 130,000, the highest number ever," he said.

The US Administration has set a goal of welcoming 100 million international visitors annually by 2021 through the National Travel and Tourism Strategy.

The Ambassador said that the US and India have agreed to become Travel and Tourism Partner Countries for 2017. This partnership will further support US-India trade in travel and tourism services and people-to-people exchanges.

US Secretary of Commerce Penny Pritzker will be in India for the Strategic and Commercial Dialogue in August this year and help take this initiative forward.

"Ahead of the Prime Minister's visit, we also signed a Memorandum of Understanding to facilitate India's participation in the Global Entry programme, marking a significant milestone for tourism and aviation security," the envoy said.

"We are currently working on the technical arrangements to bring this program online for Indian travellers," he said.

The ambassador said that in 2015, for the first time in history, the US Mission in India processed more than 1 million non-immigrant visa applications in a single year.