

**ED FULLER**

President, Orange County Visitors Association

With increasing disposable income among the Indian middle class and expansion of air connectivity, the state of Orange County in California, USA is set to establish its presence in India. **Ed Fuller**, President, Orange County Visitors Association, in an email interaction with **Disha Shah Ghosh** throws light on their tourist offerings, decision to focus on India, and joint partnership with Brand USA.

## 'We will augment our efforts in the Indian market in 2017'

**Q. What made you decide to penetrate in the Indian market?**

**A.** Visit Orange County California sees the long range potential of the Indian market for a number of reasons: The expansion of air service from the Middle East, Europe and Asia to Southern California; three-days-a-week service through San Francisco, Orange County has more visitors than Los Angeles/San Francisco and San Diego because of the location being, 'The Heart of Southern California'; the destination includes Disneyland and the 43 miles of beach. Besides, the potential growth of India as it now has an annual GDP of 2.1 trillion, creating an expanding middle class, which means the capability to travel. India's expected travel spend by 2020 will exceed USD 40 billion.

**Q. Which traveller segments is Orange County looking at focusing in the Indian market?**

**A.** The Department of Commerce and CIC research indicates that the average visitors from India are couples when visiting California, with only 8.2% bringing children. Most (57%) of the visitors come for tourism. The balance visitors are families and business travellers. Orange County is centered next to Disneyland, but close to Sea World, Beverly Hills and Universal Studios. Orange County is the best location for fun and leisure activities including beaches, dining, whale watching and cruising.

**Q. What attractions and products you are looking at promoting in India?**

**A.** Our location has access to five entertainment parks with Disneyland in the heart of Orange County. There are some great beaches with water sport activities. Also, we are promoting exceptional events like the Newport Beach Film festival, Pageant of the masters in Laguna Beach, along with a wide variety of resorts and hotels priced for luxury and value. Parks and entertainment is a highlight with a wide variety of Food & Beverage options; many of our guests come back year after year. Additionally, the weather is

perfect, almost 12 months of the year.

**Q. Are you looking at any activities to educate the Indian travel trade?**

**A.** We are pioneering in India in 2016; we are starting to build awareness. 2017 will be the year to augment our efforts.

**Q. What kind of air connectivity does Orange County enjoy from the Indian market?**

**A.** British Airways, Swiss Air, Turkish Airlines and other European carriers have been the initial corridor to and from India for years from Southern California. Asian carriers have expanded their service recently, but the biggest change has been the expansion of Emirates, Etihad Airways, Qatar Airways arriving in Southern California. Air India has started service in December 2015 between New Delhi and San Fransisco. The most convenient corridor is the Middle East.

**Q. Why did you decide to appoint a representative arm in India?**

**A.** We currently have offices in Beijing, Shanghai, Dubai, Mexico City and Tokyo. Our belief in India's future and its continued growth is a primary reason. Visit California reports that in 2015, California had 273,000 Indian visitors. They are expecting a 9.5% growth in visitors in 2016. This is a market that has potential. In May 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced his goal of modernising and growing India. Previously, Thailand and Scandinavia had been the most popular destination for Indians. We believe that USA will move to the top of the list.

**Q. Elaborate on your trade activities with Brand USA.**

**A.** We rely on our operations and Visit California for our tactical and strategic initiatives in the 11 countries we are working in. They are a critical partner and we rely on Brand USA to promote and encourage visitors. ♦

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