**Ambassador’s Remarks at the**

**‘Incredible India Tourism Roadshow’ in**

**Ho Chi Minh City on 27 November 2019**

It gives me immense pleasure to welcome you all at the ‘Incredible India Roadshow’ being organized by the Consulate General of India in the Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) with the support of the HCMC Department of Tourism, Indian Business Chamber (INCHAM) and India Tourism Office in Singapore. The objective of this event is to highlight the priority accorded by both India and Vietnam to promote tourism between the two countries.

2. The linkages between our two countries have deep historical and civilizational roots, going back over two thousand years. Buddhism is an important aspect of our common heritage.

3. In modern times, Vietnam is a key pillar of India’s Act East Policy and an important partner in our Indo-Pacific Vision. Our bilateral ties are based on strong mutual trust, and understanding, and convergence of views on various regional and international issues.

4. Recent high-level visits have added new depth and substance to our relationship, which is today characterized as Comprehensive strategic partnership.

5. Tourism has been identified as a priority sector for cooperation between both countries.

6. In January 2019, during the Seventh Meeting of Tourism Ministers of ASEAN and India held in Ha Long City, Viet Nam, the ASEAN tourism Ministers launched the **ASEAN-India Tourism Cooperation Year 2019**, and looked forward to enhancing cooperation with a view to increasing two-way tourist visits and promoting greater people-to-people exchanges between ASEAN and India.

7. Tourism indeed has a multiplier effect in promoting partnership between the two countries. As you all are aware, two Indian cities will be connected with two Vietnamese cities with direct flights by the end of this year. There is also an interest to start more direct flights between other cities in both countries. The Kien Giang province is also keen to start direct flights between Phu Quoc Island and India. The start of direct flights connecting major cities in India and Vietnam is of great significance in deepening the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries, especially in areas of trade, investment, culture, tourism and people to people exchanges.

8. There is a significant interest among the Indian business community to do business with Vietnam in recent years and I hope that the direct flight connectivity will further enhance our trade and investment partnership. The Indian corporate sector has a growing interest in investing in and doing business with Vietnam, both bilaterally and as a hub for reaching out to entire East Asia. For example, I am directly coming here, from the Saigon Exhibition and Convention Centre, after inaugurating the India Pavilion at the 14th International Chemical Industry Exhibition where 46 Indian chemical companies led by the Trade Promotion Council of India (TPCI) are exhibiting in the event. This is just one example. There are numerous export promotion visits which are taking place in both directions.

9. In 2018, the number of two-way visits between India and Vietnam was around 163,000. Around 31,000 Vietnamese tourists visited India in 2018, a year-on-year increase of 32 percent. In 2018, about 132,000 Indian visitors came to Vietnam, an increase of 21 percent compared to a year earlier.

10. Although the number of visitors for tourism purpose between both countries has shown a considerable increase in recent years, it is still well below the potential when compared as a percentage of outbound tourists from both countries. For example, in 2017, around 24 million Indian tourists and around 7.5 million Vietnamese tourists visited abroad. According to UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), outbound tourists from India may reach 50 million by 2022. Given these large numbers of outbound tourists from India and Vietnam, our current tourism traffic clearly is well below the mark and there is a huge untapped potential for growth of tourism between the two countries. Both India and Vietnam figure in select list of most improved countries in the World Economic Forum’s “The Tourism and Travel Competitiveness Index 2017”. I think it would be realistic to set a two-way tourist target of 500,000 by 2021 from about 163,000 in 2018.

11. India is renowned for its cultural, historical, religious and natural heritage and offers unique experience unparalleled by any other country in the world. India offers geographical diversity, attractive beaches, numerous World Heritage Sites and bio-reserves. India’s diverse traditions, life styles, colorful fairs and festivals offer a vast variety of choices for tourists. Visitors can also experience a wealth of sports, cultural and leisure activities, such as yoga, meditation, Buddhist tourism, river-rafting and skiing in the Himalayas. India is also an important health-care destination with world-class hospitals, modern medical equipment, qualified and experienced doctors. Indian tradition of extending hospitality is embedded in its rich culture of ‘*Athithi Devo Bava*’ means ‘Guests are God’.

12. There is great potential in promoting Buddhism as a theme to expand our tourism linkages. In August 2018, the Indian government had launched a website Indiathelandofbuddha.in to promote and showcase the rich Buddhist Heritage in India and highlight the major destinations visited by Lord Buddha across the country besides showcasing the Buddhist Heritage left behind by his disciples including the modern monasteries. Special Buddhist Circuit Tourist Trains have been launched for a comfortable, safe and hassle-free tour of important places connected with the life of Buddha.

13. Both countries also are implementing e-Visa regimes to facilitate people to people exchanges. Recently, the Indian government announced a series of measures to promote tourism in India. Last month, India liberalized its e-visa regime with a significant cut in the e-visa fees, which will greatly facilitate tourists from Vietnam visiting India.

* One-month validity e-visa for tourists has been introduced with a visa fee of USD 25.
* The visa fee for one-month e-visa for tourists has been further reduced to USD 10 during tourism off season (April-June).
* Fee for the one-year e-Tourist visa has been reduced from USD 80 to USD 40
* The validity of regular e-visa with a fee of USD 80 has been increased from one year to 5 years, with multiple entries.

14. I believe that the overall travel costs per person to India from Vietnam have come down by 40-50 % due to reduction of costs on three fronts. Firstly, there is a drastic cut in the e-visa fees by the government of India by 75 % from 100 USD to 25 USD. Secondly, the hotel room tariffs in India have significantly come down due to reduction of service tax by the government of India. Finally, the direct flights by Indigo and Vietjet Air have brought down the return airfare to India from Vietnam by 50%.

15. I am confident that the travel trade companies present here today will seize this opportunity and offer attractive packages to Vietnamese tourists visiting India. I also hope that today’s event will enhance cooperation in the field of tourism between companies involved in travel trade in both countries. On our part, the Embassy and the Consulate General of India and the India Tourism Office in Singapore stand ready to extend all help in facilitating your engagements and providing the crucial links between the two sides.

16. India, the land of the Lord Buddha, and Vietnam, with its beautiful Cham temples and beaches, offer great attractions for our people and provide immense opportunity to expand the people to people exchange.

17. Let me conclude by wishing you all a very successful and productive interaction.

Thank you.

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