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Diamonds are for tourists

Diamonds and a holiday in Kerala, plus air tickets at prices less than what these diamonds cost in their homeland, for tourists: Priyadershini S. finds out how this package is possible

Photo: H.Vibhu



Cheaper diamonds for Westerners with no compromise on quality, with a huge fringe benefit of holidaying in Kerala in five star luxury. This is diamond tourism, the brainchild of P.P. Sunny, CEO, Sunny Diamonds. Destination Kerala is to dazzle with the glitter of diamonds as the first batch of French tourists arrive in the city this Sunday to a package that will showcase locally manufactured diamond jewellery (with imported diamonds) along with a relaxing beach-backwater holiday.

This yoking of holiday and shopping for diamonds in Kerala is a concept that will have the traveller and the tour operator, the buyer and the seller all in smiles. Says Sunny about the prospect of this incipient diamond tourism, "I expect a very good response not only for my company, but also for the entire jewellery business. All jewellers can do this, they can participate in this. My target is to bring new customers to Kerala and to create new markets."

Fully paid holiday

Explaining the concept by email from Dubai, writes Joseph Chackola, Chief Operating Officer of the German consultancy firm, CPD, and a consultant with Sunny Diamonds: "In fact we are talking of offering the par quality, par quantity diamonds for about 20 per cent the price in and across Europe.

This price benefit is passed on as a fully paid five star holiday in Kerala." He presented the concept at the recently held Kerala Tourism road shows at Zurich and Frankfurt.

The price advantage, Chackola says, is because of these factors: “The labour cost is about 10 per cent of the cost in Europe. Overhead costs of having an outlet in cities like Zurich, Frankfurt or London would be about 10 - 15 times more expensive than in Kochi. Premiums charged by the brands are in the region of 600 -700 per cent. Most diamond jewellery across Europe is branded.”

On the initial scepticism about buying diamonds in Kerala he adds, “The buyers would like certification and guarantees to establish the quality. This part is taken care of by issuing quality certificates from GIA (Gemmological Institute of America) for bigger stones and from Sunny Diamonds for smaller stones.”

Babu Alex, Business Development Officer, Great India Tour Company who is bringing in the French group, says, “When I had to sell this concept to tour operators abroad I could explain it thus.

If there is a four-nights-five days package to Goa for say, 1,500 euros and one to Kerala for the same amount with a 500-euro worth jewellery as extras, then one can definitely tell the wife that the Kerala package includes a gift for her for 500 euros. She will definitely take the Kerala package. Right?”

Talking about quality, says Sunny, “I am very much for educating the traveller about diamonds, how to identify quality.” (See box) The tourist is taken on a guided tour of the diamond assembling unit put up at the outlet, to watch the entire process of the evolution of the diamond into an ornament, a fascinating process.

Indigenous idea

Tourism Director, V. Venu says, “This diamond tourism is an indigenous idea. It adds a new dimension to travel. Every city tour in Europe has something like this thrown in. This guided tour of a diamond assembling unit will add a brilliant new component to the city. This is what every visitor stands to gain. The prospect of increasing inbound traffic through this sounds interesting and depends on the pricing. It is a very promising offer.”

And as industry captains are sussing out their stands to this pioneering idea, Le Meridien group of hotels has already negotiated what looks like a brilliant deal. Says Sanjay Sharma, GM, Le Meridien, Kochi, “We are going to develop seven signature designs with Sunny Diamonds that will be available only through Le Meridien. These seven designs will be available through tour package. If you book a 1,000 euro-per night stay for a minimum of seven nights you will be eligible to choose one of these specific signature designs. And the market value of this jewellery in Europe will be 7,000 euros.”

With everybody sounding gung-ho about a trend that’s yet to develop, there are the usual fears and doubts. “People must get the confidence that they will get what they ask for. With major brand names promoting this concept, the confidence is sure to build up,” says Sanjay Sharma. Sunny, says that this season has already begun and bookings are on for the next season.

“Yes it will be a hardsell as all novel concepts are. The marketing will focus on conveying the message very clearly to a very defined target audience, which is the only way it will work,” according to Chackola.

And so as the season unfolds one will have to see whether destination Kerala will also be

destination diamond.

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