

Balipara Foundation, Assam Tourism in talks to encourage community-based tourism



Miss World Japan 2016, Priyanka Yoshikawa, brand ambassador for Balipara Foundation's Elephant Country, is in conversation with Kausar Hilaly, managing director of Assam Tourism Development Corporation (ATDC) to work out their collaboration for encouraging community-based ecotourism and cultural heritage tourism between India and Japan through Assam in the Eastern Himalayas. Yoshikawa met with Hilaly in Mumbai with Naturenomics leaders Sangeeta Menezes and Dalip Pande from the Balipara Foundation to discuss the opportunity. Hilaly has invited Yoshikawa to explore Assam, which is dominated by the mighty Brahmaputra, surrounded by lush green forests and is renowned for its rich flora and fauna. Yoshikawa is the youngest elephant trainer to participate in the Eastern Himalayan Naturenomics Forum on November 2 and 3, 2017. During her visit to Assam, Yoshikawa will travel to experience the biodiverse hotspots and world heritage sites, wildlife safaris, meet the mix of local communities and tribes of the Eastern Himalayas and ride an elephant at tea plantations.

Tea ceremony is an intricate part of Japan's culture and tradition and the Assam Tea festival provides an opportunity to visit the tea gardens and indulge in river cruises. Through Yoshikawa's support as a representative of

both the countries, people, cultural and an exchange of experiences are expected to be an important step towards building Indo-Japan relationship.

Much of Assam and Japan's eco-tourism initiatives are about protecting the natural world and rejuvenating rural communities – the two go hand-in-hand on many of the tours and nature trails – which also helps support the larger environmental issues. The Eastern Himalayan Botanic Ark is an example of energising livelihoods through botany, preserving the nature capital of the Eastern Himalayas and of the perseverance of communities that have nurtured and grown the ark. Yoshikawa will be visiting the Eastern Himalayan Botanic Ark to first-hand experience living with nature, see how the social enterprise nurtures nature and to connect with the communities who live around the ark.

Speaking on these developments and meetings, Naturenomics leaders Menezes and Pande said, “There is ample opportunity for ecotourism in the North East and the Eastern Himalayas through nature, botany, culture, religion and history. Special efforts have, therefore, to be made to improve the requisite infrastructural facilities, overcoming the challenge of connectivity and strengthening overseas publicity and promotion. These efforts are our hope to a better future and a greener tomorrow.”