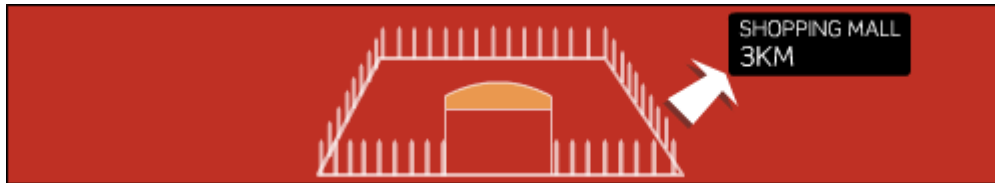


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Rush to get aboard Golden Chariot

DH News Service, Bangalore:

Though there is still one and a half months to go for the proposed Golden Chariot to chug off, the tourism department is already flooded with calls from holidaymakers eager to book tickets in advance.

According to Tourism Secretary I M Vittalamurthy, the department has been receiving a lot of enquiries over advance ticket booking. The response has been overwhelming ever since the announcement of the date of commissioning of the Golden Chariot, he said.

The Chariot is scheduled to roll out in November.

No, not dosa again!

He said the high fare of the luxury train (fixed at \$300 per night) would not have any negative impact on its success as the earning power of the middle classes has gone up considerably. "People have money and they want to spend it on quality things... They are fed up of eating the same old masala dosa every day," he claimed.

Mr Vittalamurthy said that the department had not yet decided on when to start issuing advance tickets.

"We have to appoint an agency to operate the ticketing system and will then finalise the date," he said.

No pressure

One piece of good news is that there has been no political pressure to include any district or place on the Chariot's route. "The project would have suffered delays if there was any such pressure," Mr Vittalamurthy said.

The Golden Chariot will showcase the historical

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- Rabindranath Tagore

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monuments of Mysore, Srirangapattana, Sravanabelagola, Halebeedu, Belur, Hampi, Badami, Pattadkal and Aihole, besides the Kabini forest, during its six-night-and-seven-day journey starting every Sunday. The train is scheduled to culminate in Goa.

In fact, it was because of political interference that Deccan Odyssey, Maharashtra's luxury train, failed to perform up to the mark. "Almost every politician in Maharashtra wanted the train to pass through their constituency, making the whole trip uninteresting," he stated.

He said the Golden Chariot would altogether have 19 coaches, including 11 passenger coaches, one conference coach, two dining restaurant cars, one lounge bar, one spa and one for a gym.

The train will have 26 twin beds and 17 double bed cabins as well as one cabin for the physically challenged. Every cabin will have an LCD TV with a six-channel DVD station and six satellite channels.

"Every tourist in the train will have two exclusive attendants, to provide a 'king-like' treatment," Mr Vittalamurthy said.

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