

Ilam district promoting tea tourism in Nepal

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Even as travel trade entrepreneurs are exploring new avenues to cater to tourists, locals in Ilam have started to promote tea tourism to attract more visitors to the district. Locals aggressively engaged in implementing the concept are hopeful that it (tea tourism) would enable visitors to enjoy the serenity and vibrancy of tea estates and also help planters and producers promote their products and establish business networks. Interestingly, one of the biggest supporters in this project is Thomas Holes, a German national who has been working to foster organic tea production in Nepal and help the produce gain access to the international market.

“It offers a huge potential,” said Holes, who is in Ilam for the second time this year. And this time he has even brought 12 of his friends here who he says have expressed immense satisfaction. Traveling around the tea estates, interacting with workers and spending nights in farmers’ cottages are exciting experiences for us, he said. Tea tourism is not a new concept in the region though. Darjeeling, the town on the other side of the border, has gained popularity from the tea tourism the government of India promoted in the past.

In Nepal the concept was imported and is being pushed by Gorkha Tea Estate. “Increased interest of overseas buyers, visitors and researchers and inflow of a substantial number of study teams to Ilam has also raised the importance of tea tourism,” said Uday Chapagain, a tea producer.

He told the Post that tourists who visited the place in the past had invariably expressed their highest delight and pleasure after living with planters, interacting with locals and going around the place.

Their responses had triggered in his mind the idea of tea tourism and its potential. Chapagain has built a dozen cottages and developed other necessary infrastructure and facilities to cater to visitors’ needs and lure them to extend their stay in Ilam.

“If this concept gains popularity, each farmer will be directly able to enjoy a sound financial return from tourism,” said he.

A substantial number of visitors from the US, Japan, Sri Lanka, China and Switzerland, among others, have been frequenting Ilam and other tea producing districts in recent years to study tea and understand its production.

“Under tea tourism, we have made arrangements whereby visitors can stay at farmers’ homes as paying guests,” said Dorje Lama of Fikkal.

He elaborated that dozens of farmers of Sundarpani who are associated to Gorkha Tea Estate are already enjoying the benefits and many more are preparing to join in.