

## Nepal to connect Pokhara with India through air

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Pokhara: Nepal is planning to air connect one of its major tourist destinations - Pokhara – with Indian cities to attract more visitors from the neighbouring country.

Headlines:

The initiative is also aimed at easing travel hazards of pilgrims to Muktinath Dham, a shrine of Lord Vishnu, besides boosting local trade.

"There have been talks about establishing direct air connectivity between Pokhara and some cities like Lucknow, Kolkata, Patna and Varanasi. As of now, Lucknow has been almost confirmed."

"If plans have their way ahead, Pokhara would be in for more Indian arrivals which would add vigour to trade in the town," Shradha Shrestha, a senior official of Nepal Tourism Board, Pokhara, said.

Under its ambitious 'Nepal Tourism Year 2011' project, the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB) has envisaged promotion of Pokhara, a picturesque valley town 200-km west of Kathmandu, as a hot destination for three-pronged tourism in adventure, pilgrimage and air-sports.

"We are promoting Pokhara as a pilgrimage centre, especially to attract Indians. The valley is the gateway to Muktinath Dham. Thousands of pilgrims from southern parts of India and Kolkata flock the town every year," Shrestha said.

However, maximum Indian arrivals are from Delhi and National Capital region which includes Gurgaon, Noida, Faizabad and Ghaziabad, the official added.

In context to air sports, Pokhara is the only place in the Himalayan nation to host paragliding, mountain biking and Ultra-light aircraft, which gives a feeling of flying like a bird.

"Air sports activities are only available in Pokhara. Capitalising this, we would be focusing on their promotion and development," Shrestha said.

The valley has great potential to become an adventure tourism hotspot, as major trekking route in Nepal starts from here. Besides, rivers Seti and Kali Gandaki are sought-after waters for rafting and kayaking.

Many tourists visit the valley as a gateway for trekking of the Annapurna range of the Himalayas, said Shrestha.

Hotspots like Devi's Falls, International Mountain Museum, Annapurna Museum, Caves and World Peace Pagoda also are frequented by travellers.

Pokhara attracts about 125,000 tourists a year with maximum arrivals from the UK, Japan, China and India, which contribute around 45,000 visitors approx.

Picturesque lakes like Fewa, Begnas and Rupa are the favourites among foreign visitors.

**Though air sports is popular among Indian youth, very less are seen to go for extreme adventure activities like trekking and rafting, the NTB official added.**

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