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Now, tourists can go down story trails

Kamini Mathai, TNN Oct 29, 2008, 04:36am IST

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CHENNAI: After temple tourism, heritage tourism, eco-tourism and medical tourism, Chennai opens a new chapter - storytelling tourism. The Chennai-based World Storytelling Institute, started by Eric Miller and Jeeva Raghunath, will be hosting its first storytelling tourism project from November 2 to November 15. There will be 18 participants from the US in this first tour - led by two professional storytellers Nancy Wang and Robert Kikuchi-Yngojo of a storytelling group called Eth-Noh-Tec - who will spend the fortnight learning about storytelling in Tamil Nadu as well as receive rudimentary training in the various styles.

"You could say that storytelling tourism is a type of eco-tourism, as participants learn stories about nature. It is also a type of language tourism as participants learn some of the local language. Storytelling tourism links tourism, literature and ancient history and culture, and initiates conversations between people," says Miller.

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The November tour will expose the "tourists" to 'kathaiyum pattum' (story and song) - the telling of grandmother's stories, raja-rani stories etc taught by members of Chennai's fishing communities and the Irula tribal communities of Chenglepet area; 'villupattu' (bow song), a more professional folk storytelling method; and 'katha kalak chebam', a devotional form of storytelling. Most of the storytelling will be in Tamil with interpreters giving the English versions.

The tour will end with participants presenting an evening of international storytelling on November 14 at Alliance Francaise, College Road, an evening that will include stories which participants will have brought with them from the US, as well as stories and styles they may have learned in their two weeks here.

"Last year, Eth-Noh-Tec chose China for their tour. This year, I insisted they try Tamil Nadu," says Miller. "We are planning one every year. This year, it is the regions in and around Chennai but next year, we will be taking the tourists to the places of the legendary Kannagi, one of the protagonists of the epic Silapadikaram. We will be covering Poompuhar, Madurai, Pollachi and will go right up to the Kerala border," he adds.

Miller says there is a growing interest in contemporary storytelling in the city and this tour is a culmination of that.

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