

Torrent Group's UNM Foundation-managed Lokmanya Tilak Garden (Victoria Garden) tops City Beauty Competition

Full of heritage monuments and a variety of flora, the Garden gets over 10 lakh visitors per annum

Ahmedabad, March 11, 2024: Adding a feather in the cap of Ahmedabad, Lokmanya Tilak Baugh (Victoria Garden) – managed under Pratiti initiative of Torrent Group's CSR arm UNM Foundation – has been declared winner in the Green Space Category of the City Beauty Competition.

The Awards were announced in five categories - Heritage Category, Green Space Category, Commercial Category, Waterfront Category and Ward Category. Each category comprised three awards.

Ahmedabad's Lok Makya Tilak Garden (Victoria Garden) ranked 1st in the Green Space Category with Swami Vivekananda Park in Kodinar and Flower Park in Ahmedabad ranking first and second runners-up respectively.

The Awards ceremony was held on Monday, at Gandhinagar, under the chairmanship of Shri Ashwini Kumar (IAS), Principal Secretary, Urban Development and Urban Housing, Government of Gujarat. The Award was handed over to Shri M. Thennarasan (IAS), Municipal Commissioner, Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation (AMC).

The City Beauty Competition (CBC) was launched by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Government of India in December 2022, aiming to provide an opportunity to Civic Wards and the Cities to showcase their initiatives towards creating beautiful public spaces and add value to urban life. After the State-level selection, the list will now be sent to the Government of India for national-level winners' selection.

As part of the selection process, entries were invited from cities and the ULBs. The State Governments appointed Third-Party Agency (TPA) for on-ground verification and validation and constituted an independent Jury comprising eminent experts to evaluate the entries for the Awards.

Total 252 entries were received from 144 Urban Local Bodies (ULBs) from across the country of which 174 entries qualified for TPA survey.

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The Award to Victoria Garden in the category of “**Green Spaces**” showcases the botanical brilliance of the city. It also reinforces Victoria Garden’s identity as the epitome of urban elegance weaving nature's tapestry into the fabric of the city. Every day about 2500 to 3000 visitors including morning walkers visit the Garden which works out to about 10-11 lakh footfalls per annum.

Commenting on the development, Ms. Sapna Mehta, Chairperson of UNM Foundation, said, “This accolade is not merely a recognition of the efforts of UNM Foundation towards preservation, restoration and development of green cover in Ahmedabad city, but is also a reflection of the growing importance for vibrant and aesthetic public spaces for an ever-expanding city like Ahmedabad. We express our gratitude to Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation for reposing faith in our initiative “Pratiti” and bestowing us with the responsibility to manage and develop this heritage Lokmanya Tilak (Victoria) Garden. We congratulate the citizens of Ahmedabad as they are the real winners of the Award for showing their affection and care for the Nature.”

Victoria Garden – a pride of Ahmedabad

The Victoria Garden in Ahmedabad is one of the oldest gardens in the Country. In 1897, a group of civic-minded citizens together thought to commemorate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria. Taking the idea forward, the jail garden yard across the then jail was converted into the Victoria Garden. In 1910, a marble statue of Queen Victoria sculpted by artist H G Mhatre was installed at the Garden (later shifted to a city museum).

Over the time, Victoria Garden became a place of heritage importance for the people of Ahmedabad and has added to the architectural and cultural landscape of the city, which is also the UNESCO World Heritage City.

In order to preserve its monumental significance and create a vibrant open space for the citizens, the Garden was redeveloped under “Pratiti” initiative funded by the UNM Foundation of the Torrent Group. The Garden, which is spread over an area of approximately 25,268 square meters, is managed with a staff strength of approx. 45 people including 20 Security Guards and 25 Landscaping and House Keeping staff working in three shifts.

Preserving heritage monuments

The restoration and redevelopment at the Garden retained existing water features with modern fountain installations and old speaker structures – used to broadcast music and news. The Garden houses the statue of Lokmanya Tilak sculpted by M K Kolhatkar and unveiled by M K Gandhi

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(Mahatma Gandhi) in 1929. Also, a 110-year-old fountain built by Dr Baryon Nanavati in 1910 is retained while a refurbished ‘Mahagujarat Shahid Memorial’ built in 1960 at the Garden reminds of the heroes of ‘MahaGujarat movement’. A Bandstand created in 1906 gives a glimpse into the weekly recreational activities happening in that era.

In the post-Independence era, an important development has its roots in Victoria Garden – the formation of Self-Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) founded under the leadership of veteran reformist Late Smt. Elaben Bhatt in 1972. In 2023, former US First Lady, Ms Hillary Clinton had paid a visit to the Garden and unveiled a plaque for 50th anniversary of “SEWA”.

The vegetation and plantations

About 785 trees of over 30 different species, more than 35,000 flowering shrubs including different types of grass and shrubs of over 100 species and a large heritage tree namely “BAOBAB” of African native makes the Garden a unique attraction for visitors. The tree species include Medicinal, Nesting, Foraging, Fragrant Flowers, Scented leaves, Flower Colour, Flowering and Fruiting season, Edible Parts, Timber, Dyes and tans etc.

Post the restoration and redevelopment, the Garden has been given a facelift with additional facilities for the walkers and visitors.

Besides the new walkways, a ramp for easy access to physically-challenged, special-designed dust bins for touch-free garbage collection, siting gazebo near the water features, gym for different age groups and children play area including sand-pit arrangement were created. Also, at the entry plaza, turnstile gate is designed to prevent animal entry in the garden. There is also R.O drinking water facilities with water cooler, energy-efficient light fixtures, percolating well for ground water, along with modern naturally-ventilated toilet blocks for male & female.

Pratiti – An initiative of Torrent Group's UNM Foundation

UNM Foundation is a charitable arm of the Mehtas of Torrent Group with its commitment for environment care and biodiversity conservation. Under the “PRATITI” initiative UNM Foundation has creatively developed and maintained garden spaces across 15 parks covering an area of over 1,00,000 Sq.mt at Ahmedabad, Surat, Daman & exploring similar possibilities at other locations in the country. This is an ambitious initiative jointly taken up with India’s leading landscape design firm M/s. Prabhakar B. Bhagwat for developing the public parks in the city to enrich urban life with elegant garden spaces.

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The redevelopment of the heritage garden “Victoria Garden” was amongst the most challenging redevelopments. It was completed by a fusion of heritage & modern amenities to preserve the nature and attract visitors.

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