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KERALA CALLING

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APRIL 01, 2022_VOL_42_No_6



Kerala
**GATEWAY
TO THE TROPICAL
GETAWAYS**

THE NEVER-ENDING FOUNTAIN
OF UNFORGETTABLE EXPERIENCES...

WALKING THROUGH THE
MISTIC
BEAUTY- **THEKKADY**





WHEN DREAMS SET SAIL & TIME STANDS STILL

Romanticism tells us that in order to make the most of our human potential we must have as many different experiences as we can. We must open ourselves to a wide spectrum of emotions; we must sample various kinds of relationships; we must try different cuisines; we must learn to appreciate different styles of music.

-Yuval Noah Harari in *Sapiens*

It will not be an exaggeration to claim that the state of Kerala has the potential to offer different experiences, a wide spectrum of emotions, various kinds of relationships, different cuisines, styles of music and much more, and that the Department of Tourism is doing its best to offer that variety to anyone who wishes to make the most of their human potential. In fact, that is the whole thrust behind the concept of "Revenge Tourism" as P.A.Mohamed Riyas, the Minister for Tourism puts it! In the post-COVID scenario, Kerala is all geared up to be India's "total holiday destination" so that tourists and travellers can make up for lost time and opportunities.

Besides helping people travel to the various cities and villages, the famous historical sites and pilgrimage centres – the staple of any tourist package – Kerala has gone an extra mile to offer even unscheduled tourism experiences to those who savour impromptu trips and out-of-the-ordinary sights, and that too, within the safe bubble of Caravan Tourism. Thus, under the aegis of Responsible Tourism, visitors to Kerala are invited to literally design their own road map, without compromising their comfort, safety or desire for adventure.

The casual conversation between P. A. Mohamed Riyas and Cmdr Abhilash Tomy – that is captured in this issue of *Kerala Calling* – reveals another aspect of Kerala's waterways. Cmdr Tomy remarks that kayaking and rafting on rivers are excellent ways to discover the hidden scenic beauties of Kerala. And their potential is best tapped through explorations rather than competitions.

Dr. Vinod K. Jose, Editor, *Caravan*, gives us an up-close-and-personal view of Wayanad, his native district, in "why a trip to Wayanad is not just a trip for the mind and body, but for the soul and intellect as well". Read it to learn how Wayanad reserves its riches for those who are interested in a long and leisurely stay in that green district.

Another irresistible temptation of Kerala is the charm of its backwaters. Those who come to embrace Kerala will never miss a cruise on the serene and still waters of the backwaters! It will be an unforgettable cruise where your mind is rocked to the rhythm of ripples!

If this edition of *Kerala Calling* inspires you to travel, pack your bags and come to this alluring and welcoming getaway – Kerala!

S. Harikishore IAS
EDITOR

EDITOR

S. Harikishore IAS

ADDITIONAL EDITOR

K. Abdul Rasheed

DEPUTY EDITOR

V. P. Aswathy

EDITOR IN CHARGE

C. Rajesh

ASSISTANT EDITOR

A. Anchitha

CIRCULATION OFFICER

A. C. Abhilash

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Deepak Mouthatil

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**I & PRD Photography Division,
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V. V. BIJU**

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keralacalling@gmail.com

facebook.com/KeralaCalling

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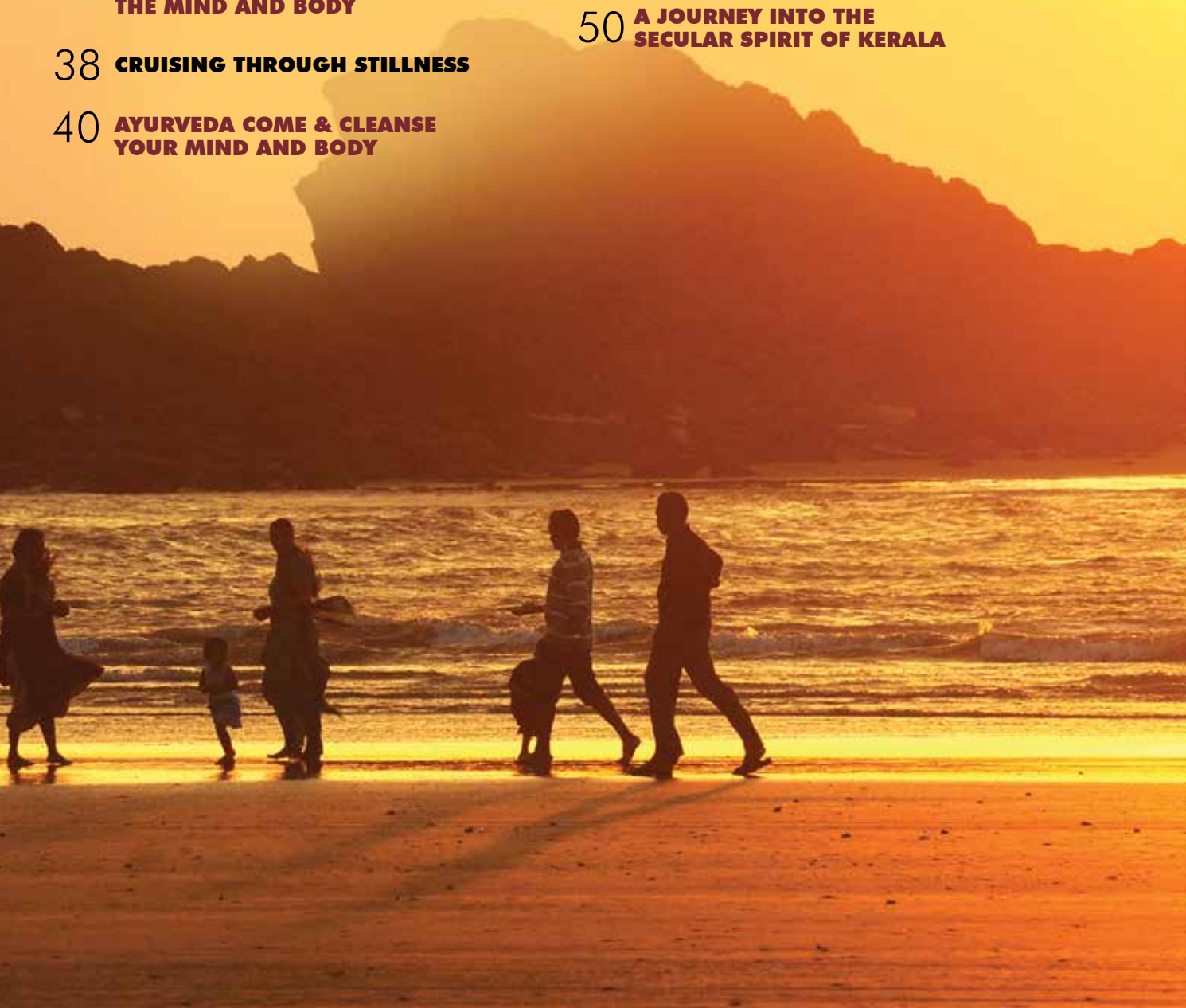
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NEVER-ENDING FOUNTAIN OF UN



P.A. MOHAMED RIYAS
MINISTER FOR TOURISM

A visit to Kerala is something beyond imagination. The mission of the government is to make Kerala the prime destination in the maps for tourists from around the globe. The fact is that the State has elements of attraction for international and domestic travellers alike.

“It is better to travel well than to arrive,” said Sri Buddha about life. However, it beautifully encompasses the charm of continuous travel. Journeys make and shape mankind, perpetual journeys from one place to another and from knowledge to wisdom. Each expedition helps one reinvent oneself. The people we meet on our way, their experiences, new terrain and geography, all have the power to transform one’s perspectives of life. In a way, one could say that a journey is successful and meaningful only when it succeeds in the same.

Different people prefer different forms of travel. Some like to visit popular tourist destinations, others move from one major city to another. Some like to experience witnessing places of historic relevance, some others prefer pilgrimages to sacred destinations. As we know, most tourists plan their entire journey schedule prior to their departure. Then there are some who choose to go on impromptu expeditions, with no schedules drawn out, traveling on whatever means is available at the point, often going offbeat. There are travellers who go for trips to villages, understanding the pulse of the lifestyle and culture. All things considered, the quintessential desire to travel, for man, has been nothing but insatiable since forever. Even the new continents were discovered as part of such ventures.



FORGETTABLE EXPERIENCES...

THE DAY IS SOON ARRIVING, WHEN THINGS REACH A STAGE WHERE EVERYONE FEELS THAT KERALA IS THE PLACE TO WITNESS FIRST IN INDIA. STRATEGIZED ADVANCEMENTS ARE BEING MADE CONSISTENTLY TO GROW KERALA IN THIS REALM, BRINGING TO REALITY SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT.

A trip and the gratifying experience, can reach its completeness only when all the facilities and arrangements are taken care of sans compromise. When the destination promises the visitor a safe and secure haven for zestful exploration, sightseers turn into frequent visitors, and eventually make it their second home. The State Tourism Department has made Kerala the destination to be in. All arrangements for safe travel have been made, let the ventures begin!

Why Kerala?

Each traveller has their own unique taste, and Kerala without a doubt has something for everyone. Places of scenic beauty that capture the eyes of seekers of serene landscapes, abodes of different geographies, exclusively unique and diverse art and culture, historic destinations for fact finders and story seekers, Ayurveda experiences in the domain of medicine, remote locations that gift the visitors the joy of privacy - Kerala

has it all. This separates it from all other states in the country, putting itself on a tier of its own. The day is soon arriving, when things reach a stage where everyone feels that Kerala is the place to witness first in India. Strategized advancements are being made consistently to grow Kerala in this realm, bringing to reality Sustainable Tourism Development.

Revenge Tourism

The world was locked-up in the pandemic situation. Traveling and moving around freely was close to impossible. Now, we have survived the challenges, and the world prepares to open completely, welcoming visitors with both hands, in the post-pandemic scenario. Attracting tourists in this period of revenge tourism is the idea, and that is where the Kerala experience stands out on top.

It is in this situation that new schemes including Caravan tourism

become key components. Caravans are prime attractions put forward by Kerala, after houseboats which it is famous for, and already they have become a trend in Kerala Tourism. In the first phase post COVID, all the possibilities of Domestic Tourism will be explored in detail. Caravan Tourism will pioneer the plan to discover, optimize, and grow new destinations making use of all potentially exploitable possibilities. Developing regional destinations is another step towards the mission. Several unique schemes and ideas are being implemented for the same.

A progressing trend that can be seen is the women travellers, venturing solo and in groups. More and more female trippers can be seen riding to tourist destinations on

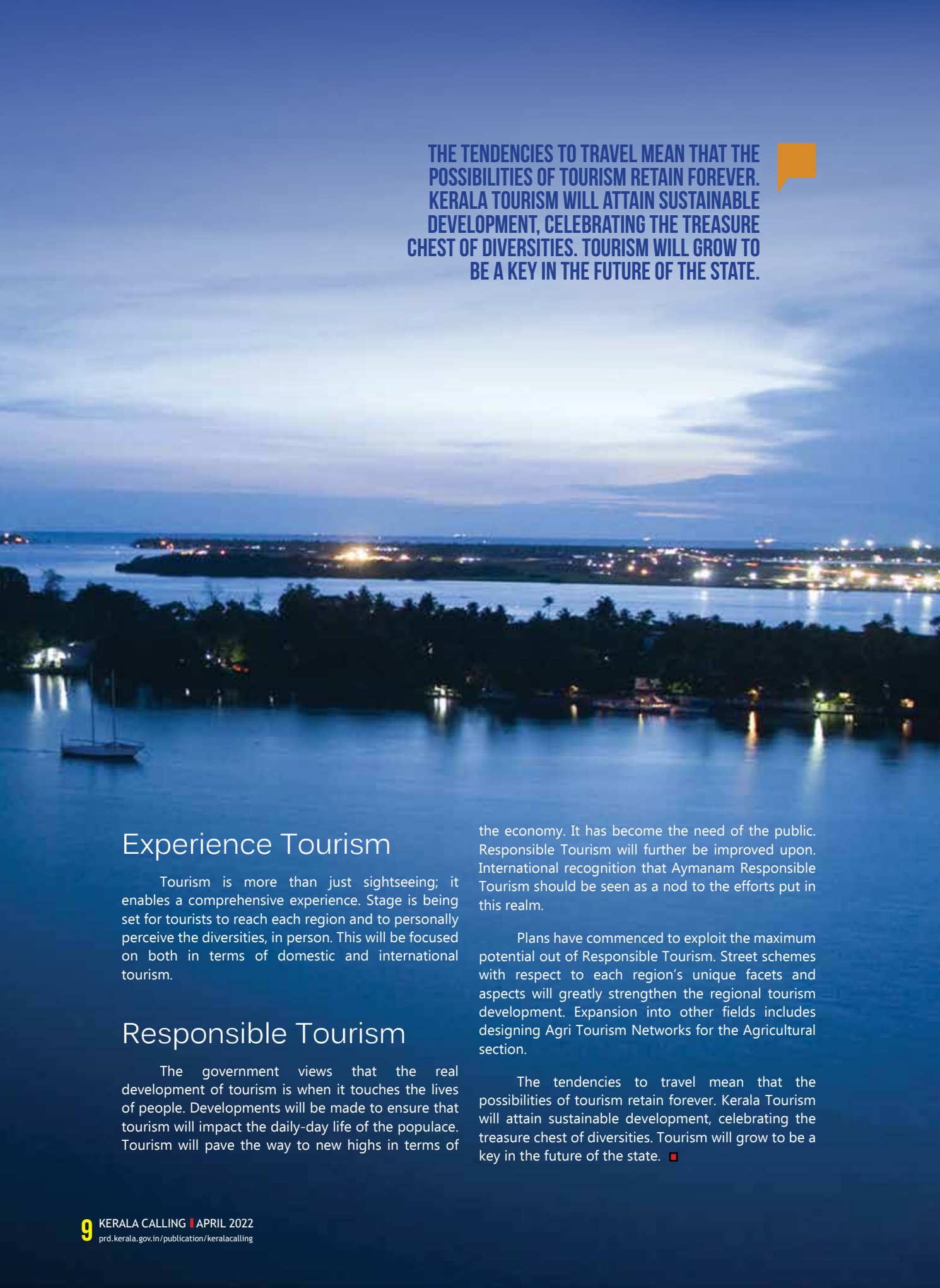
motorbikes and so. To delve deep into such opportunities and to maximize their impact, plans have been designed to make all locations more women friendly.

More plans are envisioned to expand the horizons in various other spheres including eco-tourism, sports tourism, water tourism, and heritage tourism. The spices and flavours of Kerala is a signature, as each region has its own exclusive dishes. Successfully connecting this to tourism is a development that will eventually present immense potential. For the same, Kerala is stepping into focusing on food streets. Literary tourism, and Biodiversity Circuits which will aid in studying the environment, are also new domains of the plan.

A PROGRESSING TREND THAT CAN BE SEEN IS THE WOMEN TRAVELLERS, VENTURING SOLO AND IN GROUPS. MORE AND MORE FEMALE TRIPPERS CAN BE SEEN RIDING TO TOURIST DESTINATIONS ON MOTORBIKES AND SO. TO DELVE DEEP INTO SUCH OPPORTUNITIES AND TO MAXIMIZE THEIR IMPACT, PLANS HAVE BEEN DESIGNED TO MAKE ALL LOCATIONS MORE WOMEN FRIENDLY.



THE TENDENCIES TO TRAVEL MEAN THAT THE POSSIBILITIES OF TOURISM RETAIN FOREVER. KERALA TOURISM WILL ATTAIN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, CELEBRATING THE TREASURE CHEST OF DIVERSITIES. TOURISM WILL GROW TO BE A KEY IN THE FUTURE OF THE STATE.



Experience Tourism

Tourism is more than just sightseeing; it enables a comprehensive experience. Stage is being set for tourists to reach each region and to personally perceive the diversities, in person. This will be focused on both in terms of domestic and international tourism.

Responsible Tourism

The government views that the real development of tourism is when it touches the lives of people. Developments will be made to ensure that tourism will impact the daily-day life of the populace. Tourism will pave the way to new highs in terms of

the economy. It has become the need of the public. Responsible Tourism will further be improved upon. International recognition that Aymanam Responsible Tourism should be seen as a nod to the efforts put in this realm.

Plans have commenced to exploit the maximum potential out of Responsible Tourism. Street schemes with respect to each region's unique facets and aspects will greatly strengthen the regional tourism development. Expansion into other fields includes designing Agri Tourism Networks for the Agricultural section.

The tendencies to travel mean that the possibilities of tourism retain forever. Kerala Tourism will attain sustainable development, celebrating the treasure chest of diversities. Tourism will grow to be a key in the future of the state. ■



V.R. KRISHNA TEJA IAS
Director, Department of Tourism

KERALA TOURISM BACK TO HIGH GROWTH TRAJECTORY AS INDIA'S TOTAL HOLIDAY DESTINATION

Putting the pandemic-triggered crisis behind, tourism activities in Kerala are back in full swing as India's total experiential holiday destination.

Visitors have started thronging all tourist centres in the length and breadth of the State. The stakeholders have quickly reconfigured their products and services to meet the demands and preferences of the post-COVID world.

Added to our core assets are a slew of new products like the Caravan Tourism initiative, Keravan Kerala.

Also, the State has hit a new strategy of unveiling the whole state before the world. Every little hamlet has some pleasant surprise for visitors, who are



keen to explore the unexplored.

Caravan Tourism is an upfront initiative, which has elicited a keen response from the industry within a short span of its launch. This mode of vacation will offer the visitors a customised experience by facilitating their travel through a circuit of their choice in any part of the State.

They can stay close to nature, move leisurely in a healthy ambience and enjoy the local flavours in all their diversity before heading back home with enduring memories.

Over the decades, much of our tourism has centred around a few select locations, such as backwater hubs, hill stations and seafront locales. These destinations continue to be our core strength. At the same time, we are also making a strategic shift towards extending tourism to the entire Kerala. Local communities and civic institutions are key partners in this endeavour, along with a slew of tourism enterprises.

Our globally-acclaimed Responsible Tourism initiative has a central role in this unique initiative. The Tourism Department will be there as a facilitator and regulator to see that all activities are environmentally and culturally sustainable.

Kerala is one of the few places in the world where tourists can plan a hybrid mode of holidaying. We are a small but well-connected state where tourists can reach a backwater hub like Alappuzha to high-altitude Munnar within hours.

Considering its huge potential, Kerala is eminently qualified as a long-stay destination for all sorts of holiday-makers. Another distinguishing feature of Kerala is that it is an advanced society where tourists from any part of the world can have a great time.

Now, the big challenge before us is to effectively tell the world that here is a safe and secure place, famed for its panoramic settings, eclectic milieu and tourist-friendly culture.

The Tourism Department has drawn up a complete information and marketing campaign to bring both domestic and foreign tourists to the state all through the year. The Department, in partnership with the stakeholders, has embarked on a 360-degree campaign for the revival of tourism. Tourism Minister PA Mohamed Riyas is directly monitoring the progress of the campaign.

KERALA IS ONE OF THE FEW PLACES IN THE WORLD WHERE TOURISTS CAN PLAN A HYBRID MODE OF HOLIDAYING. WE ARE A SMALL BUT WELL-CONNECTED STATE WHERE TOURISTS CAN REACH A BACKWATER HUB LIKE ALAPPUZHA TO HIGH-ALTITUDE MUNNAR WITHIN HOURS.

Kerala Tourism has resumed the roadshows in India and abroad as part of the direct messaging exercise. Already roadshows in Madrid and Milan and Partnership Meets in New Delhi, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad and Bengaluru have been organised with many more in other key cities on the anvil in the coming months. This high-voltage campaign has also leveraged all available digital platforms.

Kerala has also made a mark in major post-pandemic tourism fairs by participating in international travel trade events like BIT Milan. The state was also showcased at the International Mediterranean Tourism Market (IMTM) in Tel Aviv. We have also stepped up the marketing drive to attract domestic tourists from all parts of India.

The State, at the initiative of the Tourism Minister, has initiated a dialogue with Abu Dhabi to work together for the promotion of tourism. A high-level delegation from the emirate will be visiting Kerala soon for further deliberations to take the partnership forward.

Through the promotional activities, we have also informed the world about a variety of new themes like Change of Air, Long Stays, Homestays, Drive Holidays, Honeymoon holidays, work actions, adventure tourism, festivals and cultural events, which will keep visitors engaged through all seasons.

Kerala Tourism has always demonstrated its resilience. We have quickly recovered from the devastating floods that hit the state in 2018 and 2019. True, the COVID-19 pandemic has been the severest blow suffered by tourism the world over. But it is a fact that Kerala Tourism was not completely down in the dumps. Our statistics vouch for that.

Over the decades, Kerala has emerged as a global tourism brand. Our success is largely due to the robust public-private partnership of the ecosystem. It was in acknowledgement of the key role of private enterprises that the government came out with a couple of handholding schemes for the entrepreneurs and service providers to revive their activities. During the pandemic, most of the classified homestays in Kerala remained shut. Now, they are back in business. So are other hospitality services like tour operators, hotels and resorts and other ancillary units. ■

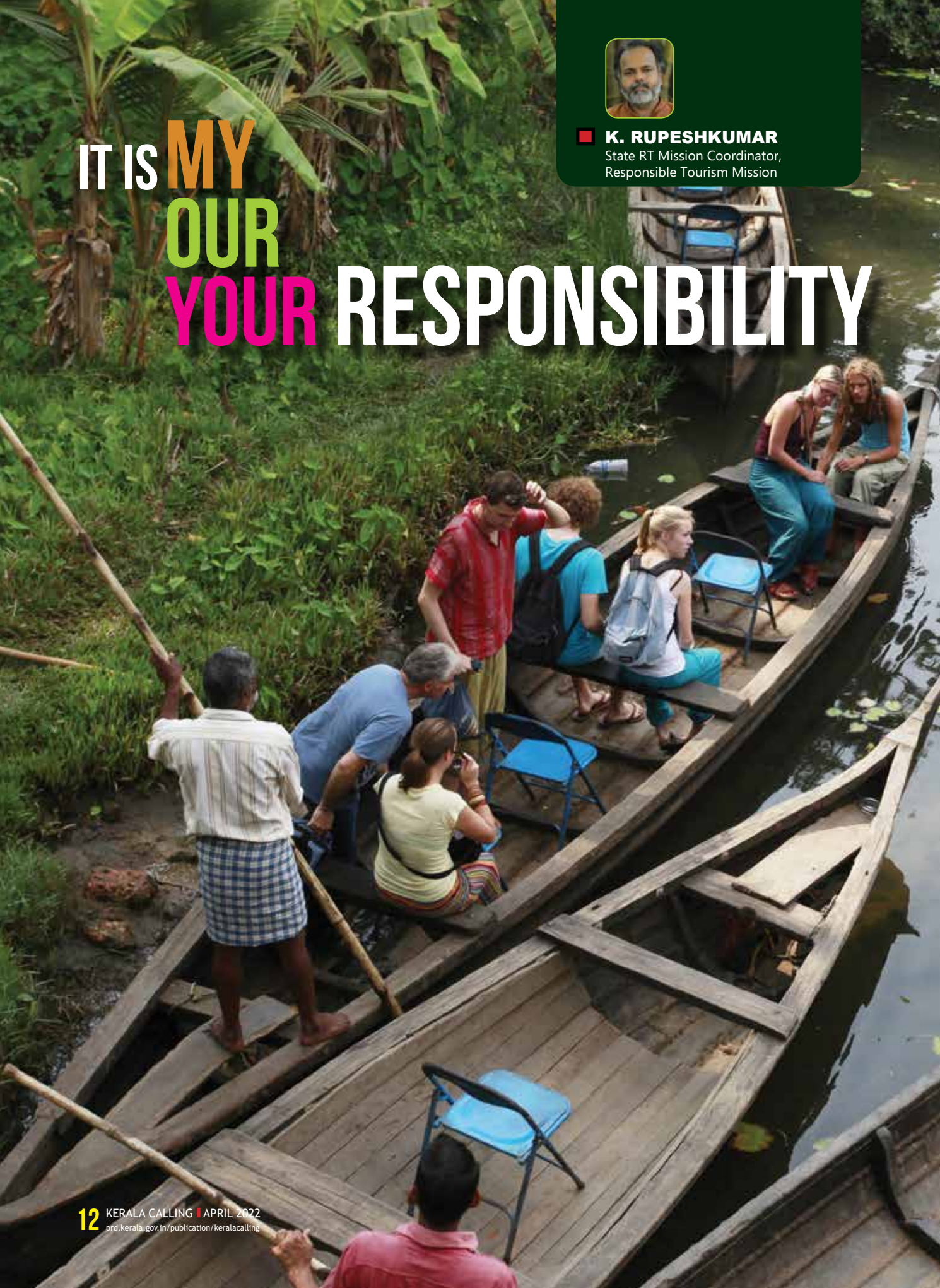
Tourist Statistics

Year	Foreign	% Variation	Domestic	% Variation	Total	% Variation
2017	1091870	5.15	14673520	11.39	15765390	10.94
2018	1096407	0.42	15604661	6.35	16701068	5.94
2019	1189771	8.52	18384233	17.81	19574004	17.2
2020	340755	-71.36	4988972	-72.86	5329727	-72.77
2021	60487	-82.25	7537617	51.09	7598104	42.56

IT IS MY OUR YOUR RESPONSIBILITY



■ **K. RUPESHKUMAR**
State RT Mission Coordinator,
Responsible Tourism Mission





Responsible Tourism (RT) is an alternate tourism approach came up during late 60s/early 70s environmental concerns of mass tourism mainly conceived with three kinds of responsibilities which are termed as the 'triple bottom-line' economic responsibility, social responsibility and environmental responsibility.

Government of Kerala decided to practice Responsible Tourism in an experimental basis at the 4 selected destinations and the first phase of Responsible Tourism in Kerala got started in 2008. Through various phases of development, in 2017 Responsible Tourism Mission was formed to lead the responsible Tourism activities in the state.

Responsible Tourism Mission is systematically working to link the local community directly or indirectly with tourism sector through awareness creation, trainings & capacity building programmes, creating/identifying RT Mission units across the state and link the units with tourism. At present there are 23786 individual/group units, out of which 16660 women owned /leading units, are registered with RT Mission under various categories like cloth bag making units, paper bag making units, handicraft making units, various farming units, farm supply units, artists, artisans, RT chauffeurs, community tour leaders, farm visit units, home stays, farm stays, tended accommodation units, ethnic cuisine units and so on.

Activities and Major Projects of RT Mission

1. Trainings and Skill Development

There are different domains in which the local community can get and in generate income directly or indirectly from the tourism sector. RT Mission is identifying these possibilities, train the local community and equip them to enter into the tourism sector directly or indirectly.

2. Experiential Tourism Packages

The concept of Experiential Tourism Packages has been derived from Village Life Experiential (VLE) Tour Packages. The VLE packages in the tourism sector were first introduced by the Kerala Tourism through Responsible Tourism. It was brought forward with the aim of protecting the native crafts, traditional jobs and the village life of Kerala. The main highlight of this idea is that it ensures public participation for tourism development thereby supporting farmers, small-scale entrepreneurs, traditional artisans and so forth. Currently, RT Village Life Experience is an ideal model that has received praise and appreciation from all over the world.

STREET Project

STREET is a participatory tourism development project being implemented by the Responsible Tourism Mission in 10 selected places of Kerala based on the UNWTO's new

BEYPORE INTEGRATED RT DEVELOPMENT PROJECT IS A PROJECT OF RT MISSION TO ELEVATE BEYPORE DESTINATION AS AN INTERNATIONAL RT DESTINATION WITHIN 4 YEARS. BEYPORE IS A WATERSCAPE WITH ABUNDANT POTENTIAL FOR TOURISM BUT NOT EXPLORED MUCH.



tourism motto, 'Tourism for Inclusive Growth'. Developing/rebranding destinations into theme-based streets and widening the area of tourism activities so as to reduce the tourist concentration in the main points is the aim of the project.

Beypore Integrated RT Development Project

Beypore Integrated RT Development project is a project of RT Mission to elevate Beypore destination as an international RT destination within 4 years. Beypore is a waterscape with abundant potential for tourism but not explored much. The place is also having a strong historical and cultural background aged centuries. Local community integration in tourism is not much practiced at Beypore even it is already a destination. Through the project Beypore will be converted as an international RT destination with cent percentage local community involvement.

3. PEPPER Project

PEPPER is an initiative of RT Mission piloted at Vaikom Taluk in Kottayam District of Kerala. This initiative encourage concern LSGs to develop proposals for the potential tourism projects in their locality, which are derived from the ideas and suggestions evolved in discussions of Special Tourism Grama Sabhas. This participatory model tourism development project of RT Mission has not only developing the local economy, it also strengthen and develops the social and cultural setup of the locality.

4. Model RT Village Project

Model RT Village project is designed to develop the potential places as cent percent responsible tourism practising destinations. A set of activities to be completed by in the project area to become a model RT Village. RT Mission is doing this project in association with the respective LSG. Aymanam is the first Model RT Village of Kerala. The project is in progress at 15 other LSGs.

5. Kerala Agri Tourism Network

Kerala Agri Tourism Network is another important project of RT Mission to link the farmers and farming activity with tourism and generate additional income through tourism. The project also envisaged to promote agricultural activities and environmental protection through tourism.

6. Experience Ethnic Cuisine Project

Experience Ethnic/Local Cuisine Network is a project to support and promote the women folk in the local community to involve in tourism without any additional investment. Though this project RT Mission ensure the facility for the tourists to enjoy the authentic local cuisine in local houses which generates income to housewives/unit members who are participating in the project. ■



Recognitions and Awards

The activities of RT Mission which are well appreciated international level as model responsible tourism practices/activities and recognised by various national and international awards. The International Awards are :

- 1. World Travel Mart Responsible Tourism Awards-2017**
Category: WTM Highly Commended Award
Recipient: Kumarakom Responsible Tourism Project, RT Mission
- 2. World Travel Mart Awards-2018**
Category: Best in Responsible Tourism
Recipient: Kerala Tourism, Responsible Tourism Mission
- 3. World Travel Mart Awards-2018**
Category: Best for Managing Success category Gold Award
Recipient: Kumarakom Responsible Tourism Project, RT Mission
- 4. PATA Awards 2019**
Category: Women Empowerment in Tourism Sector- Gold Award for
Recipient: Responsible Tourism Women Empowerment Activities at Kumarakom
- 5. World Travel Mart Responsible Tourism Awards-2020**
Category: Meaningful Connections – Highly commended
Recipient: Responsible Tourism Mission Kerala
- 6. World Travel Mart Responsible Tourism Awards-2021**
Category: Increasing Diversity in Tourism- One to Watch
Recipient: Aymanam- Model RT Village-Responsible Tourism Mission Kerala
- 7. Travel + Leisure Global Vision Award 2022**
Recipient: Responsible Tourism Mission Kerala
- 8. Aymanam Model RT Village is listed as one of the must watch destination in 2022.**





Dr. MANOJ KUMAR K.
MD, Kerala Tourism Infrastructure Ltd.

SEAMLESS INFRASTRUCTURE

INFRASTRUCTURE IS DEFINED AS THE PHYSICAL FRAMEWORK THAT DERIVES FUNDAMENTAL FACILITIES AND SYSTEMS THAT ASSISTS THE SUSTAINABLE FUNCTIONALITY, PROVIDING SUPPORT TO ECONOMY FOR FASTER GROWTH AND ALLEVIATION. VIEWING TOURISM AS A NATIONAL ASSET, SHAPING OF INFRASTRUCTURE INDICATES DEVELOPMENT FOR THE HOST ALONGSIDE THE VISITORS.

Tourism and hospitality is the prime revenue-generating sector in most countries around the world and more so in a developing country like India. India offers geographical diversity, world heritage sites and niche tourism products like cruises, adventure, medical, eco-tourism and thereby a truly experiential and exotic experience to its visitors worldwide.

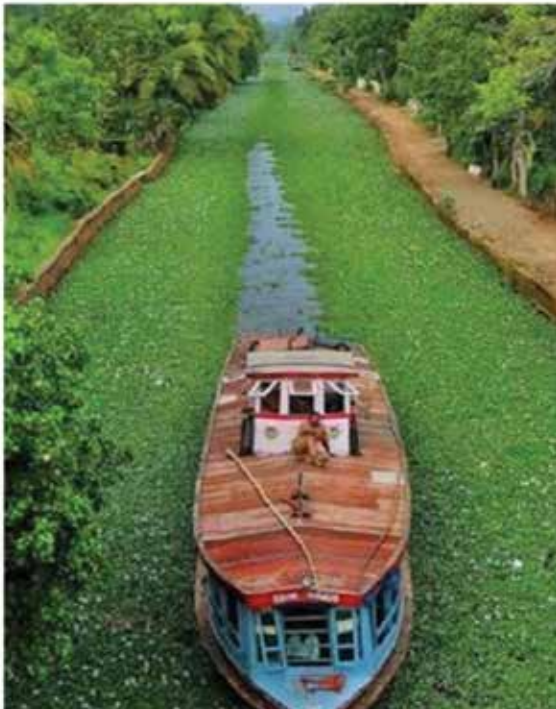
As for Kerala, the southernmost tip of the subcontinent, which has also been named one of the ten paradises of the world by 'National Geographic Traveller', tourism had developed as an important sector by the late 1980s. By the early 2000s, Kerala was able to garner a full-fledged flourishing industry via tourism. Kerala marked its position for being a tropical haven in India; the bounties of nature that included geographical and ecological peculiarities added to its value as a tourist hub, especially since it has taken the role of a gateway to many other tropical destinations like Lakshadweep, Andaman, Male etc. Today, growing at a rate of 13.31%, Kerala is one of the most visited tourism destinations in India.

Kerala is abundantly blessed with waterbodies including canals, lakes that form extensive backwater channels all through the state on one side, and the all-embracing coastline on the other side. The magnificent mountain ranges and hilltops are an equally popular feature



of Kerala with its rich granaries of indigenous flora and fauna. An important feature of Kerala that remarkably sets it apart is the fact that there is so much versatility in terms of terrains and natural experiences across very short distances. This vivid variety in its natural aspects has aptly been honoured by the name 'God's Own Country'.

While this is an important reason why tourism flourished in Kerala, there is also a need to mention the heritage of Kerala which has also immensely contributed to it. Apart from its natural heritage, the State is sought for its cultural and built heritage. Courtesy of its very dynamic history, Kerala has a lot of stories and legacies to showcase.



KERALA MARKED ITS POSITION FOR BEING A TROPICAL HAVEN IN INDIA; THE BOUNTIES OF NATURE THAT INCLUDED GEOGRAPHICAL AND ECOLOGICAL PECULIARITIES ADDED TO ITS VALUE AS A TOURIST HUB, ESPECIALLY SINCE IT HAS TAKEN THE ROLE OF A GATEWAY TO MANY OTHER TROPICAL DESTINATIONS LIKE LAKSHADWEEP, ANDAMAN, MALE ETC.



Thereby it can be said that tourism infrastructure is an enabler for overall economic and infrastructure development.

Tourism infrastructure is a broad category that includes accommodation, event venues, parks facilities, dining and entertainment precincts; cultural and arts amenities, transport networks and interchanges; aviation, maritime and road infrastructure, and more. There are certain aspects that need to be given special attention in order to ensure a seamless experience for the visitors.

Since tourism mostly deals with the experiences one gains from travel destinations, the core idea is to identify tourism projects, areas of investment, and types of investments, etc, to develop the destination. Tourism Infrastructure will have to cater to destination development and maintenance as well as experience building for the visitors. This can be achieved by facilitating smooth travel options, better accessibility, and promotion of tourism products like Kettuvallam, Caravans, Uru, etc., that can deliver an assortment of experiences to the visitors.

The future of tourism in Kerala will be marked by a newly devised scheme to enhance the existing entities by taking advantage of the linear structure of Kerala. To achieve this, the various visual corridors of Kerala will be delineated, focusing on the existing north-south movement networks primarily facilitated by the linear structure of the state. Visual corridors will be designed with state-of-the-art facilities that provide unique experiences to tourists. The corridors will be focusing on different aspects like the coastline, water bodies, cultural heritage, built heritage, etc.

Coastal Highway Corridor, National/State Highway Corridor, Rail Corridor, Water Corridor (Canal, Lake etc.), Hill Way Corridor, etc., are some of the proposed corridors. These corridors will run parallel in the north-south direction with intermittent tourism nodes connecting laterally in the east-west direction. These nodes will include tourism facilitation services like amenity centres, interpretation centres, fuel stations, motels, etc., which will act as tourism hubs. This sort of approach would work in favour of the state as it has a lot of untouched potential and prospects that are waiting to be discovered. Since this mode promotes an exploratory approach, it is imperative that more opportunities are identified and taken advantage successfully. ■

Be it the ones of the exuberant trade that decked the shores of the state, or the ones of the struggles and revolutions that changed the image of society in Kerala. These are quite evidently marked by the plethora of built heritage and traditional knowledge that are still lying untapped in various parts of the state.

While flourishing tourism itself ensures an overall improvement in addition to infrastructure, it is also a key aspect of successfully developing destinations that will draw tourists from around the globe. In addition, tourism will eventually encourage investments which will in turn help in the value addition and up scaling of the locality as well.



SAROOP ROY B.R.

Assistant Professor & Co-ordinator,
Centre for Responsible Tourism, Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies

THE DIGITAL SIGNATURE

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT) PLAYS AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THE TOURISM INDUSTRY AND HAS MADE CHANGES IN THE WAY IT INTERACTS WITH ITS CUSTOMERS BY FACILITATING REAL-TIME ACCESS TO INFORMATION FROM ANYWHERE IN THE WORLD.



The application of ICT could be seen in various areas like reservation systems, transportation sector, accommodation sector, enhancement of tourist experience, destination management as well as steps towards implementing sustainable tourism. The current decade has witnessed the development of more novel technologies in ICT like Augmented Reality, Virtual Reality, Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, Voice Technology, Wearable Technology, Mobile Apps, Big Data Analytics, Blockchain Technology etc. The tourism industry has capitalized on it to improve its operational efficiencies and to meet the demands of the customers.

Kerala Tourism has been effectively using ICT for the tourism business for the last two decades since it launched its official website www.keralatourism.org in

1998. The website has earned one of the top positions in the tourism sector surpassing the Incredible India website of India tourism and that of many other state tourism departments. Analytics of the website in March 2022 reveals that it ranks 120153 globally, 7757 in India and 47 in the Travel and Tourism sector in India. The total visits to the page were 541.5K and the average duration of the visit was 1 minute and 54 seconds in March 2022. The search engine optimisation for the website is so good that it comes second in google search results if one searches for Kerala. The webpage is currently available in 11 foreign languages and 9 regional languages making it more accessible to users.

Kerala Tourism has effectively used social media for its



THE RECENTLY LAUNCHED WHATSAPP CHATBOT, 'MAYA' ACTS AS A VIRTUAL ASSISTANT TO TRAVELLERS WHO NEED INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE ABOUT DESTINATIONS, PRODUCTS, FACILITIES, ETC. AS TEXT OR VOICE MESSAGES.

promotional purpose with its Facebook Page, Twitter and Instagram pages having 4.30M, 1.9M and 464K followers respectively. The Facebook page of Kerala Tourism holds the most liked tourism page in South Asia since 2019 and currently ranks second position in Asia after the Visit Dubai page. The YouTube channel launched on 6th May 2007 is flooded with promotional videos and has currently 280K subscribers and views of more than 11 crores.

Kerala Tourism has closely followed the recent technological advances in the information and communication sector and adopted them for its promotional aspects as well as for easy guiding of tourists.

The Quick Response (QR) Code Aided Tourism Search introduced in 2015 by Kerala Tourism optimised the interactive feature of the website and made it easier for travellers to scan and spot destinations and related information on the official website.

The Virtual Reality applications have helped in creating 360° virtual tours of the tourist attractions in Kerala for the potential visitors to learn more about how to prepare for the next visit to Kerala using a mobile phone, desktop and Virtual Reality Headset.

The Augmented Reality videos have brought to life some of the most picturesque visuals from the state that would help to gain a better idea of the natural and man-made wonders that adorn our landscape. The Augmented Reality supported Mobile app 'Muziris Virtual Tour Guide,' is a personal guide for the tourists visiting Muziris.

The Kerala Tourism Mobile App help the tourists to find new tourist attractions, record their travel experience and provide the facility to upload and share pictures taken from a tourist spot. The real-time audio guide of the app provides tourists with five tourist spots around their current location. The app also spots hotels, restaurants, toilets, and other facilities for the visitors.

The recently launched Whatsapp chatbot, 'Maya' acts is a virtual assistant to travellers who need information and assistance about destinations, products, facilities, etc. as text or voice messages.

It is not only the Department of Tourism but also the tourism industry that has capitalised on the changing trends of ICT. International conferences on Tourism Technology are being hosted regularly by the tourism industry in Kerala themselves to get them updated on the new trends in ICT. One could witness not just the usage of websites and social media platforms for marketing purposes, but the innovative application of augmented and virtual reality, and artificial intelligence by the tourism industry. The first robotic restaurant in Kerala, 'Be at Kiwizo' opened in Kannur in 2019, where robots attend the table and entertain kids by playing games and dancing with them is a testimony to this.

With Kerala already catching up with these new technological innovations and started offering new innovative products and experiences for the tourists, there is no doubt that it would emerge as one of the leading tourism destinations. ■



ABHIJITH H.

A.J. College of Science & Technology, Thonnakkal



HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ENGROSSED IN TRAVELLING IN A MOTOR VAN THAT IS EQUIPPED LIKE A MINI-HOME? THEN LET ME TELL YOU, IT IS POSSIBLE IN GOD'S OWN COUNTRY. AS THE GOVERNMENT OF KERALA IS UP WITH A COMPREHENSIVE, STAKEHOLDER FRIENDLY CARAVAN TOURISM POLICY, PROMISING THE VISITORS A SAFE, CUSTOMIZED AND CLOSEST-TO NATURE TRAVEL EXPERIENCE.

GO CARAVANNING

A caravan, also known as a travel trailer, on wheels provides a homely feel, on a journey or vacation, without relying on a motel or hotel, as the caravans are loaded with all the necessary facilities for a comfortable stay such as sofa-cum-bed, kitchenette with fridge and oven, dining table, toilet cubicle, partition behind the driver, air conditioner, internet connectivity, audio-video facilities, charging system along with GPS with its nonintrusive mode of development, will enhance the potential and attractiveness of Kerala as a tourism destination. The Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC) has announced the launch of Kerala's first Caravan Tourism package, under which tourists will be able to avail all comforts while travelling on a luxury caravan by paying



INR 3999 plus tax per person per night.

Tourism Minister of Kerala P.A Mohamed Riyas pointed out while unveiling the policy that Keravan offers attractive investment, like other successful tourism products of Kerala launched since the 1990s, Caravan Tourism is also to be developed on PPP mode with private investors, tour operators and local communities being key stakeholders. Minister also added that the policy envisages laying down the broad framework for the development and encouragement of Caravan Tourism in Kerala, predominantly in the private sector through incentivizing the purchase of caravans and establishing caravan parks, chalking out the process along with procedures for its operations and approvals.

Keravan Kerala offers big opportunities for investors to operate specially built caravans for travel, and leisure stay. Eco-friendly caravans parks across the state enable the visitor to spend their valuable time and explore the destination of their choice.

According to V R Krishna Teja, Director, of Kerala tourism, going by Kerala's inherent strengths of natural beauty and tourism-friendly -culture, Caravan Tourism has immense scope for the state. Besides offering fresh experiences for the tourists, local communities stand to gain substantially by enabling them to showcase their culture and products before the visitors.

Setting up of Caravan Parks and Village life experience powered by the Government of Kerala would aim at exploring the possibility of turning accessible but unexplored places in the state into alluring destinations for the travellers to park and stay. The main motive behind the initiative is designed to make tourism act as a sustainable activity that would bring benefits to local communities along with boosting the scale of

opportunities for the industry.

A caravan park will be a completely safe and secure zone offering a hassle-free and stress-free environment to tourists, protected with necessary features like a compound wall, adequate security and safety arrangements, patrolling and surveillance cameras. The park authorities will maintain effective coordination with local authorities and medical establishments to attend to medical emergencies. The minimum land required for a park will be 50 cents, with at least 5 parking bays. The park design should be compatible with its surroundings, causing the least possible disturbance to the site. Landscaping and plantation have to be planned to ensure privacy, and green cover and take into account such factors as wind, dust and noise. The parks in hilly and ecologically fragile areas will have to incorporate creative architecture in conformity with local heritage. The parks should have proper water harvesting structures. There should be strategically located open space for recreation, a forecourt, a drive-in area and turning circles. The parks will have Tourist Facilitation Centres to inform the visitors of amenities and services available.

Eco-friendliness being a major feature of Caravan Tourism, preferably Bharat Stage VI Compliant vehicles will be pressed into service. Assuring complete security of the guests, there will be IT-enabled real-time monitoring of caravans. The State Motor Vehicles Department in accordance with the Central Motor Vehicles Rules would fuel up the Keravan Project.

The caravan tourism policy announced by the state received a good response within weeks, auto major Bharat Benz announced it would roll out a world-class, ready for road tourist caravan in the state for the tourism industry, seizing on the huge opportunities awaiting the tourism sector in the post-pandemic scenario. ■



■ **PRADEEP MURTHY**

Director – MuddyBoots Vacations,
Treasurer- Adventure Tour Operators Association of India

IT'S TIME FOR ANOTHER ADVENTURE

CAPTURING EVEN A SMALL PERCENTAGE OF ADVENTURE TOURISM CAN PUT KERALA'S TOURISM REVENUES INTO A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT LEAGUE, AND THE GOOD NEWS IS THAT WE HAVE THE NATURAL RESOURCES TO DO THAT.



Kerala has long been famed for its natural beauty, its beaches, mountains, rivers and valleys. Every marketing campaign of Kerala Tourism harps on the stunning views and spectacular locations, yet we, as a state, are yet to fully leverage these in an inclusive manner that enables visitors to immerse themselves in our natural ecosystems. Increasingly, travellers want to “do”, to “experience”, to “be part of it”, to be “immersive” – a pointed divergence from traditional sightseeing holidays. Capturing even a small percentage of Adventure Tourism can put Kerala’s tourism revenues into a completely different league, and the good news is that we have the natural resources to do that. Many other parts of India suffer from other factors such as challenging weather conditions (Himalayas) or remote access and challenging connectivity (North East). But Kerala is fortunate to have excellent connectivity, a relatively small geographic footprint where different locations are not too far away from each other, fairly benign weather and a highly educated population. In addition, adventure tourism scores highly on positive local community impact and employment generation since it is almost entirely service based.

Adventure tourism made its entry into Kerala in the early 2000s, and gained steam after 2010 with numerous entrepreneurs across the state offering a myriad of activities. Wayanad in the north and Idukki in central Kerala are popular for amazing trekking trails through plantations and forests. The views are breathtaking and the deep insight into the local flora fauna when going with a trained activity guide is certain to kindle a love for nature even in the most cynical of minds. Newer trekking trails are mushrooming across the state, whether it is Kannur in the north or Trivandrum in the south. Cycling is another activity that has attracted guests from across India and abroad - the undulating landscape and interesting local sights en route keeps travellers engaged, offering a far closer engagement with the local community than is ever possible in a taxi. Cycling trails are popular all along the coast given the flat and easy terrain, but many enthusiasts also love to explore the hilly regions of Idukki and Wayanad on cycles too.

Kerala has numerous waterways, big as well as

ADVENTURE TOURISM SCORES HIGHLY ON POSITIVE LOCAL COMMUNITY IMPACT AND EMPLOYMENT GENERATION SINCE IT IS ALMOST ENTIRELY SERVICE BASED.

NEWER TREKKING TRAILS ARE MUSHROOMING ACROSS THE STATE, WHETHER IT IS KANNUR IN THE NORTH OR TRIVANDRUM IN THE SOUTH.

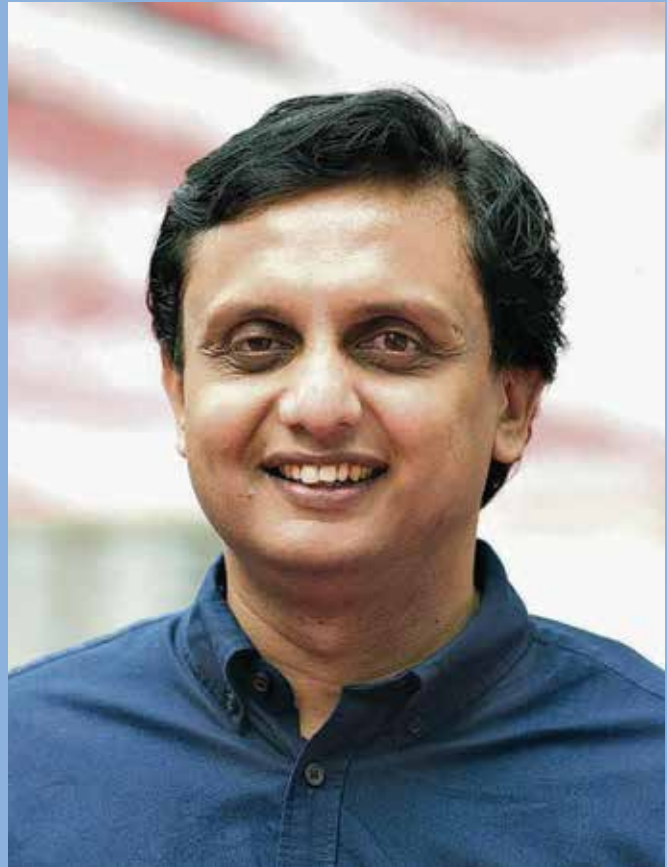
small, so adventure tourism entrepreneurs have been eager to offer water based activities such as kayaking, bamboo rafting, canoeing etc, in the gentle placid waters. These are available all across the state, though popular locations include Vembanad Lake, Ashtamudi kayal and the Valiyaparamba backwaters, of north Payyanur. Even Kerala’s Minister of Tourism, Mohamed Riyas and his family enjoyed some kayaking in Kannur district, which greatly aided the popularity of the activity.

In addition to these, Kerala offers numerous outdoor activity options – be it scuba diving in Kovalam, surfing, camping, 4x4 rides etc. A relatively newer activity that is increasingly gathering steam is Zipline rides – first introduced by Muddy Boots in Wayanad in 2010, ziplines ranging from small 100meter ones to giant ones several hundreds of meters long have appeared across the length and breadth of the state. Ziplining is a fairly safe activity offering a great adrenaline rush, as long as it’s constructed and operated according to safety guidelines.

Speaking of Zipline, the Kerala Adventure Tourism Promotion Society was also nominated as the apex body for facilitating and regulating adventure tourism in the state. This was a very welcome move – it is essential that the government ensure that adventure tourism activities are conducted in a safe and responsible manner. After a two year hiatus because of COVID, registrations, inspections and licensing has resumed and is expected to cover all adventure tour operators in the state. The Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies (KITTS) has also begun to offer courses in adventure tourism and nature based tourism, so as to build resource pool of skilled, trained resources. All of this will greatly help assure travellers, especially those from abroad. Recent pronouncements by the government suggest that adventure tourism is one of the key focus areas for the future. For this to happen, the inspection and licensing must continue, and also importantly, Kerala must be marketed globally as an adventure tourism destination. This can be in the form of targeted marketing campaigns, assistance for entrepreneurs in this space, participation in adventure tourism focussed international shows and incentives for development of adventure tourism. As an industry, we are confident that adventure tourism in Kerala is headed for a golden future, as the government and the industry continue to work together in a holistic fashion. ■



Abhilash Tomy



P.A. Mohamed Riyas
Minister for Tourism

“KERALA IS AN IDEAL LOCATION FOR SAILING”

ABHILASH TOMY

*I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky,
And all I ask is a tall ship and a star to steer her by;
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,
And a grey mist on the sea's face, and a grey dawn breaking.*

(From Sea Fever by John Masefield)

Cdr. Abhilash Tomy is the first Indian and second Asian to have sailed around the earth solo, non-stop and unassisted. A naval aviator, Abhilash was attracted to seafaring and adventure at a young age.

His participation in the Golden Globe Race 2018 ended tragically with an accident and spinal injury. Now recovered, Abhilash is planning to race again in GGR2022. Abhilash is the recipient of the Tenzing Norgay National Adventure Award and the Kirti Chakra for valour and courageous action.

Minister for Tourism **P.A. Mohamed Riyas** had a tete-a-tete with the well-known solo sailor **Cdr. Abhilash Tomy** for Kerala Calling. During the conversation, the Minister asked for suggestions for furthering the Adventure Tourism scenario in Kerala and Abhilash came up with some healthy suggestions that would encourage the youth in the State to venture into adventure tourism.

Excerpts from the conversation

Minister: We are proud of you, as the first Indian to sail around the globe on a lone boat. As a person who has travelled to many parts of the world, Kerala, Department of Tourism is delighted to know your valuable views on Kerala where adventure tourism has endless possibilities.

Abhilash: It is a great honour for me to be invited by the Government of Kerala. In my views, we are loaded with resources. We are blessed with many hills, rivers and sea fronts so we can make the most out of it by fastening tourism with human resource management. Offers to swim in the sea, river rafting or mountaineering at a very young age would provide a foundation for personality development. Apart from that, it will help cope up with uncertainties. Practicing such adventurous activities would lead the towards a brave

society. Not only that, but if this becomes a part of our community, it will keep track of the tourists putting impact on our revenue which is beneficial for the State.

Minister: Kerala is one of the states having the largest coastal line, even though ours is a small state; half of it is connected with the sea. Looking from the north, Kasaragod, Kannur, Kozhikode, Malappuram, Thrissur, Ernakulam, Alappuzha, Kollam, Thiruvanthapuram, all are coastal districts so the possibilities are infinite. As an officer in the Navy, you are familiar with the sea; along with that you also have experience in travelling to many corners of the world. In your opinion, how we can use our state in such a way.

Abhilash: I have sailed over many parts of the world;



The Netherlands is on a 50 degree north. I have sailed almost all over including the UK, France, South Africa, Australia. All of these places are terribly cold and water there is equally cold. While sailing if the water drizzles on the body, it freezes the brain. We cannot even think that's hard how the sailing condition is.

But, If you look at the water in Kerala it is warm approx 25 degree Celsius, which is a pleasant temperature noticing these backgrounds we need to encourage sailing. Kerala is an ideal destination for sailing, not only for sailing but for kayaking as well.

There are many more historical connects, from 1400AD, people from Europe approached our land through seas. By syncing the historical connects we can develop our tourism sector much more effectively. Plus we have many natural harbours. Along with that, people who live by the sea are equally curious. Millions of people flocked to the shore during the Bepore Water Festival which shows the natural curiosity people possess. Understanding that, we need to break the barrier and take people across the coast to the sea. If this happens, it would be a great success.

Minister: When it comes to Bepore Water Fest, I am representative of the Bepore constituency and we did not expect such a large turnout. We actually planned a ten days event. Then it was shortened to four days. When it went that way, we witnessed a rare full participation, so we decided to celebrate it every calendar year. The Department of Tourism intends to



work on understanding the potential for such adventure tourism spots. But at the same time we have other water bodies such as rivers, lakes and backwaters. How can these to be active parts of adventure tourism in your views?





Abhilash: Backwaters of Alappuzha are the perfect destination for sailing. Looking on Isalmere in Netherlands, they have built a reservoir using fresh water. Likewise, Alappuzha is proud of its fresh water. So it will be splendid if the Department of Tourism takes a small initiative to organise a national tournament for sailing. That would be a breakthrough as it would attract people along with tourists. Usually we sail at sea water, and it consists of salt, along with disposals. On the other hand the reservoir in Alappuzha is very clean. A sailing championship came in to my mind when I visited there. It would be beneficial to the State if it takes place over there.

Minister: We have made a special note of it, is there any other suggestions like this?

Abhilash: White Water Rafting and Kayaking can be done on rivers. We can set up it as an exploration rather than making it a competition. Cochin Paddle club, along with the Jelly Fish Water Sports have started exploring this through Kayaking, which opens a great opportunity for us. The rivers in Kerala flow through scenic places. If people come and watch the beauty of it, they will definitely come back again and again which will ultimately generate employment to the youth and income to the State

Minister: We can think of it. The Nehru Trophy Boat Race is very active in Alappuzha; similarly, there are different possibilities in different parts of Kerala. After evaluating all that, rivers should be used effectively understanding their uniqueness. The Tourism Department is working on such a mission. Accessibility is a major problem in the State. Kerala possesses the highest number of vehicle usage among other

WE CAN THINK OF IT. THE NEHRU TROPHY BOAT RACE IS VERY ACTIVE IN ALAPPUZHA; SIMILARLY, THERE ARE DIFFERENT POSSIBILITIES IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF KERALA. AFTER EVALUATING ALL THAT, RIVERS SHOULD BE USED EFFECTIVELY UNDERSTANDING THEIR UNIQUENESS.

states, it is estimated that one third of the population owns a vehicle, that's because Kerala is thickly populated and possibilities of road development has limitations due to vast density. That's why the Government is working on Coastal and Hill Highways even being under limitations. Looking forward to the future, the coastal route is of great importance. Some of its designated areas have to be turned into tourist spots, where people can have fun, relax, and even it would open up a comfort zone for long distance travellers. This plan seems to be useful and effective when travelling from Kasaragod to Thiruvananthapuram. Glad to be able to talk so much, let me know if you have any further suggestions.

Abhilash: it's a big honour for me to consult this closely with the Government. ■

(Compiled by Abhijith H. and Sreeraj S.K.)

FALL IN LOVE WITH WATERFALLS



Thusharagiri Waterfalls



Kanthanpara Waterfalls



Gavi Waterfalls



Adyanpara Waterfalls



Athirapilly Waterfalls



Soochipara Waterfalls



JAYAKUMAR K.K.
Chief Spokesperson, Kochi Metro



Water Metro

QUENCH YOUR THIRST FOR SCENIC BEAUTY

After witnessing the newest advancements in air, rail, and road transport, Kochi is bracing up for repeating the same in terms of water transport. The construction of the Kochi Metro which includes 78 modern electrical and hybrid boats which would connect 10 Kochi islands across a distance of 76 kms, is advancing rapidly. Integrated Urban Regeneration is another modern scheme, which connects six canals in Kochi to the way metro, by cleaning and making them suitable for travel.

The construction of both plans is progressing promptly. As the Water Transport Service is connected to the Kochi Metro Train Service which has already become a sensation among the citizens and is attached to the Kochi Mobility Hub in Vyttila, Kochi will turn itself into a city with fast, convenient, eco-friendly city navigation. Both these plans are executed by Kochi Metro Rail Ltd, which is under the leadership of Lokanath Behera, former DGP of Kerala State Police. Kochi Water Metro opens up the possibility to relish the scenic beauty of lakes from the comfort and opulence of luxury ships, that too at affordable rates.

MARKET CANAL AND EDAPPALLY CANAL ARE THE CURRENT TOP PRIORITIES FOR KMRL. EDAPPALLY CANAL WILL BE MADE COMPLETELY FIT FOR NAVIGATION.



City Navigation Simplified: The New Attractive Canal Transport Scheme

The Integrated Urban Regeneration and Water Transport System (IURWTS) scheme will connect canals in Kochi city, making them suitable for travel. Under the scheme, Edappally Canal, Market Canal, Thavara Canal, Thevara-Perandoor Canal, Chilavannoor Canal, and Konthuruthi Canal, will be focused on, travel possibilities restored and improved, and preventing logging.



Market Canal and Edappally Canal are the current top priorities for KMRL. Edappally Canal will be made completely fit for navigation. The glory of the Market Canal will be restored by bringing to reality the best amenities and footpaths. LIDAR Survey, Bathymetric Survey, and Geo-Technical studies have all been carried out for the same. The project is funded by KIIFB.

Kerala Coastal Zone Management Authority has studied the project report and has recommended the Central Environment Ministry for final approval. The first stages of the project are being undertaken to expect the Central approval to be granted as soon as possible. KMRL aims to execute and complete this project at the earliest, as it will set the stage for a meaningful change in the lives of the Kochi populace.

A modern Waste Management Plant will be established for Kochi, in cooperation with Kerala Water Authority. This will solve the waste management problems that Kochi has been facing for a long time back. The project will be implemented through a unified functioning of various departments. The Pollution Control Board and Wild Life have already approved the project. The project has also received clearance from the State Wetland Authority under the Kochi Corporation's approval.

KOCHI WATER METRO IS NOT A MERE TRANSPORTATION PROJECT. IT ENSURES TOURISM THAT AIDS IN THE INTEGRAL GROWTH OF THE LIFESTYLE OF THE ISLAND RESIDENTS AND EXPLOITS ALL BUSINESS POSSIBILITIES.



Kochi Water Metro

The Kochi Water Metro will service in 15 routes in Kochi. This interconnects 10 islands, bringing with it the scenic magic of lake views and mangroves. 78 new model boats will service across a distance of 76 km. There will be 38 boat jetties. The daily commutes of the residents of these islands, which are more than 1 lakh in number, now receive a touch of modernity. Kochi Water Metro is not a mere transportation project. It ensures tourism that aids in the integral growth of the lifestyle of the island residents and exploits all business possibilities.

Powered electric boats, which brought in a new wave in the realm of water transport, are being constructed for the water metro. 23 boats with a seating capacity of 100 persons and 55 boats with a seating capacity of 50 persons are being arranged. Boats will service every 10-20 minutes.

The boats with a seating capacity of 100 persons are being constructed in the Cochin Shipyard. The construction of 14 of these is progressing. One boat has been handed over after construction. The boat is also unique in that it can be powered by both battery and diesel generator. ■





BF FIROS

Senior Journalist & Writer

Varkala

LET'S DO PARAGLIDING FROM THE CLIFF!

"Papanasam is endowed with such natural beauty. The tourism department should think of introducing activities such as water scooters. What I find most appealing here is the cliff, and of course, the helipad, which we don't find anywhere else. The helipad can be used for further promoting tourism activities. What about a short helicopter trip, lasting 10 minutes or so, taking the tourists around the sea and back? It will be an exhilarating experience for tourists who will be able to enjoy the sea and cliff from up in the sky."

These words by Bosky Christopher, a Mumbai-settled Keralite, about Varkala sum up the untapped potential of this internationally renowned tourism destination.

What makes Varkala distinguishable from other tourist destinations in Kerala is the long cliff facing the Arabian Sea. This geographical rarity, termed by geologists as Varkala Formation, is one of the prime distinctive factors that has put the Papanasham beach, also called Varkala beach, at the top of the world's tourism map, attracting travellers from across the world. The Geological Survey of India is planning to declare it as the 27th geological monument of India.

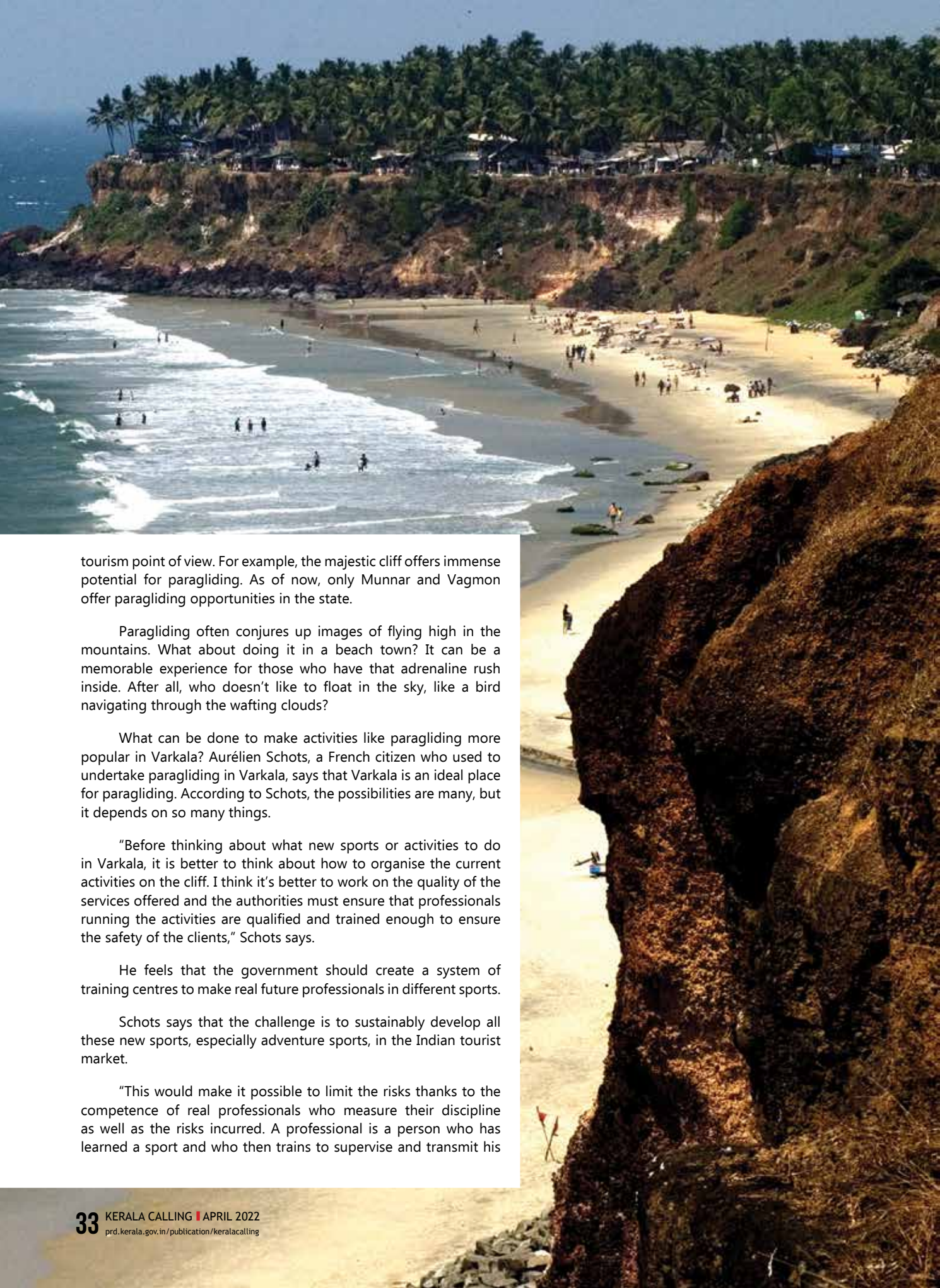
Varkala is also home to Sivagiri Mutt,

and the two-thousand-year-old Janardana Swami Temple, a significant Vaishnavite shrine in South India, which is located next to the Papanasham beach. One of the highlights of the temple is an ancient bell from a shipwreck. Legend has it that it was gifted to the temple by the captain of a Dutch ship that sank in the waters near Varkala.

Tourists from far and wide keep flocking to this laid-back coastal town to relish the serenity of the sandy beach; and of course, the bird's eye view of the sprawling ocean is a special memory they go back with. It indeed is a visual treat to savour the panoramic beauty of the sea standing atop the majestic cliff, especially when the sky is azure by the sun on a bright-lit day. This idyllic piece of land, nestled among the greenery-covered red cliffs and blue-hued seas, beckons tourists from everywhere with its unspoiled charm, salubrious weather, and a friendly and hospitable people.

Paragliding and other activities

What is noteworthy about Papanasam is that the destination still holds great potential for further development from a



tourism point of view. For example, the majestic cliff offers immense potential for paragliding. As of now, only Munnar and Vagmon offer paragliding opportunities in the state.

Paragliding often conjures up images of flying high in the mountains. What about doing it in a beach town? It can be a memorable experience for those who have that adrenaline rush inside. After all, who doesn't like to float in the sky, like a bird navigating through the wafting clouds?

What can be done to make activities like paragliding more popular in Varkala? Aurélien Schots, a French citizen who used to undertake paragliding in Varkala, says that Varkala is an ideal place for paragliding. According to Schots, the possibilities are many, but it depends on so many things.

"Before thinking about what new sports or activities to do in Varkala, it is better to think about how to organise the current activities on the cliff. I think it's better to work on the quality of the services offered and the authorities must ensure that professionals running the activities are qualified and trained enough to ensure the safety of the clients," Schots says.

He feels that the government should create a system of training centres to make real future professionals in different sports.

Schots says that the challenge is to sustainably develop all these new sports, especially adventure sports, in the Indian tourist market.

"This would make it possible to limit the risks thanks to the competence of real professionals who measure their discipline as well as the risks incurred. A professional is a person who has learned a sport and who then trains to supervise and transmit his



MISTAKES BY AMATEURS SHOULD NOT AFFECT THE COURSE OF PROFESSIONAL ADVENTURE TOURISM ACTIVITIES. CURRENTLY, THE EXAMPLE OF PARAGLIDING IN KERALA HAS PROPELLED LOCAL PILOTS INTO A PROFESSIONAL POSITION.



knowledge. An amateur is a person who has learned a sport and practices it as a hobby. Mistakes by amateurs should not affect the course of professional adventure tourism activities. Currently, the example of paragliding in Kerala has propelled local pilots into a professional position. It took more than 10 years and it is with these few people that the government can consider developing this sport in a sustainable way," says Aurélien Schots.

A lot more can be done

"Varkala receives all kinds of tourists from within



PROPOSING A NOVEL TOURISM IDEA, RIZA SAYS: "THE JATAYU EARTH CENTRE AT CHADAYAMANGALAM HAS GOT A HELIPAD. VARKALA PAPANASAM ALSO GOT ONE. WHY NOT A HELICOPTER SERVICE CONNECTING THE TWO PLACES? THERE IS GREAT POTENTIAL HERE. THIS CAN ATTRACT DOMESTIC TOURISTS IN LARGE NUMBERS WHO WILL BE THRILLED TO TAKE A HELICOPTER RIDE."

Jatayu Earth Centre at Chadayamangalam has got a helipad. Varkala Papanasam also got one. Why not a helicopter service connecting the two places? There is great potential here. This can attract domestic tourists in large numbers who will be thrilled to take a helicopter ride."

Tourists also feel the same about the unexplored tourism potential of Varkala. They feel that the Papanasham beach offers the potential for more activity-based tourism.

Aman Dubey, a tourist from Delhi who was in Varkala for a weeklong holiday with his friend, also feels that Varkala beach is ideal for water-based activities. He is greatly enamoured by the sedate pace of this coastal region.

"I am visiting this part of Kerala for the first time. Papanasham is wonderful. This is one of the best beaches I have seen," says Dubey

The newly established Centre for Performing Arts is the latest addition to the tourist attractions of Varkala. It is an abode of artists and art buffs from all over the world to converge.

"The Centre is situated at a sprawling two-acre land. It can be developed further. The authorities can think of setting up a gymnasium, swimming pool, and badminton or tennis court here. It can further give a boost to the tourism prospects of Varkala," says Riza.

and outside India. Hence, the possibilities are unlimited. The authorities should think of introducing paragliding as a permanent tourist attraction in Varkala. There is also potential for introducing Jet Ski or water scooters like we find in Goa," says Riza, who has been in the tourism industry for a long time, says Mohamed Riza, a member of the Varkala Tourism Development Association.

According to him, the peculiar geography of Varkala Papanasam makes it the ideal destination for conducting paragliding activities.

Proposing a novel tourism idea, Riza says: "The

The adjoining areas

The adjoining coastal regions of Varkala, such as Edava and Kappil, also beckon tourists and travellers with their bucolic beauty. These sleepy hamlets with their rustic charm attract tourists and travellers, both domestic and foreign. Kappil, with its turquoise backwaters that lay parallel to the sea, is already popular with domestic travellers who head to the beach during weekend evenings to unwind with families and relish the spectacle of the sun sinking in the sea. ■



DR. VINOD K. JOSE
Editor, The Caravan Magazine

WHY A TRIP TO WAYANAD IS NOT JUST A TRIP FOR THE MIND AND BODY, BUT FOR THE SOUL AND INTELLECT AS WELL.

AS THE FOLKLORE GOES, A VISITING EUROPEAN FRIEND OF ONE OF THE BRITISH OFFICERS WHO SERVED IN MALABAR IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY ASKED HIM IF HE DID NOT MISS HIS SUMMER BREAKS AND A PEACEFUL GETAWAY BACK HOME. THE OFFICER ANSWERED HE INDEED HAD A SWITZERLAND IN MALABAR, AND THAT WAS WAYANAD.



If that story was true or not, or if Wayanad was a Switzerland or not, its dense evergreen topography, deep woods, vast paddy fields, pristine skylines and pebble-filled streams always offered the best of the nature to anyone in need of a break. Of course, the nineteenth century Wayanad that the British officer encountered must have given way to a much-compromised experience today, but when that's the same all over the world, Wayanad still beckons visitors for the ancient era cave drawings in Edakkal, the Kuruva Island, the big mud dam in Padinjaraithara, the safari in the forest, and the many old religious shrines. Besides the checklist of places to visit, Wayanad also offers its visitors a much different, and wholistic experience, if you are looking out for something deeper, and meaningful.

As a Wayanadan, who grew up there for the first twenty years of my life, and moved out to be a journalist first in New Delhi, later in New York, and now back in New Delhi again, I know when it comes to that time of the year for a break from work, the first place that comes to my mind still is Wayanad. It is not just what the climate and the scenic beauties of the place offers. But it is also the culture, content and the character of the place--



the long histories of the place and its people, and what they offer with their rich inheritance, the way of living, and the philosophy of the people with the nature. As the genetics and the peopling history experts say, Wayanad has one of the first out-of-Africa migrated Homo sapiens, Haplogroup C and Haplogroup F, who walked their way to India between 60,000 years ago to 45,000 years ago. Several haplogroups moved to the subcontinent over the millennia, but when you look for the oldest movers, you see the descendants of the first human occupants in the subcontinent are in central India to the Western Ghats. One way we recognise the earliest movers in our parlance today is that they are the indigenous people. They are actually the oldest possessors of our land, and if at all it is a just society, there's so much to exchange between different people, and so much to fix to have an equitable relationship.

In this short note, I do not want to labour over the established tourist sites, which I'm sure a number of literature and YouTube videos can guide the visitors. But I want to stress a new venture that has come up, EnOoru, which offers the potential for the visitors to get exposed to some of the first inheritors of Wayanad, their customs, and histories, but also help them financially by accessing their produces directly, without middle men.



EnOoru, roughly translated, My Home, in south Wayanad is a tribal heritage village that is spread across 25 acres of land, gifted by the government of Kerala, to a society comprising of the chieftains of the community. What has struck me was the vision of EnOoru did not present itself as the exhibition of the tribal people for visiting tourists, but a platform that could game the business potential that the tourists are bringing, and then convert it into a permanent, exclusive marketplace for the tribal people to sell their produces, food, and artefacts. Of course, there are a number of government and non-governmental agencies who take the tribal artisans to bigger cities to showcase their products, but the problem with them was that they were highly erratic, worked always on the calendar of a random exhibition or on funding uncertainties, and never a permanent source of revenue they could rely on for livelihood. EnOoru promises to offer a 365-day market place exclusively for the Adivasi products, and the visiting tourists, in return gets an opportunity to get exposed to the art, culture, food and the rich heritage of the first movers to our land. EnOoru tries to position the tribals as teachers, if all the visitors have the humility to learn from, and as marketers, if the visitor cares for sourcing something directly from the makers. EnOoru sounds like a knowledge project--tourism can certainly be a byproduct.

A trip to Wayanad will be wasted if it is just for the body and mind, because the place offers so much more and has the potential to be therapeutic and can touch your soul and intellect. I have had friends coming over saying the visit to Wayanad gave them so much to think deeper, or helped them lift the spirit up to a newer level with life, work, and relationships. This is possible, with every unguided tour you take, the walking through the village roads, the unscripted stroll through the paddy fields, or on the side of a village stream, or sitting a little longer at one of the rocks where our great ancestors chose to make some drawings. Nature, histories, and heritage will speak to the visitor, if they are willing to listen to them. The tourist operator driven tours, how much so ever good it must be to save time and to hand over the labour of researching the place for oneself, the advice is to stay central, and carve out your own journeys to explore in all directions the full potential of the near circular Wayanad, talking to people, embracing heritage and histories. ■

(Dr. Vinod K Jose is a journalist & editor of The Caravan magazine, and Radcliffe Fellow at Harvard University. Jose grew up in Wayanad.)



■ **Dr. DILEEP M.R.**
Associate Professor-Travel and Tourism
Pazhassiraja College, Pulpally.

CRUISING THROUGH STILLNESS

FOR THE VISITORS FROM THE
NOOK AND CORNER OF THE
WORLD, THE NIGHT CRUISE FROM
ALAPPUZHA TO KUMARAKOM
OFFERS A MAGICAL NIGHT.

To remain competitive in the realm of international tourism, a destination needs world-class tourist attractions. Kerala, popularly known as God's Own Country, is bestowed with Backwaters, which is certainly one of the topmost tourism products that are present before the 'wanderlust' category of the population from all over the world.

As the growing number of tourists seek experiences from the visit, the tourists increasingly adore the backwaters of Kerala for incredible experiential tourism. Certainly, backwaters itself is promoted as a destination of its right as all the essential elements of a destination are there within it.

Kerala, since the mid-1990s, has been

promoting backwater tourism as the USP which has the lure to "pull" tourists from all over the world. Backwater represents the intricate network of lakes, canals, estuaries, and deltas of several rivers that flows westwards. A long stretch of it extends from Kollam to Kottappuram, which is often highlighted as a National Waterway and offers an incredible ride on boats and other inland navigation vessels of varied kinds. The flora and fauna, people and their lifestyles along with distinctive customs and traditions make backwaters increasingly attractive.

In addition to Alappuzha and Kumarakom, there are several other sites where backwater tourism activities are there, like Thiruvallam Backwaters located near Thiruvananthapuram, Alumkadavu in

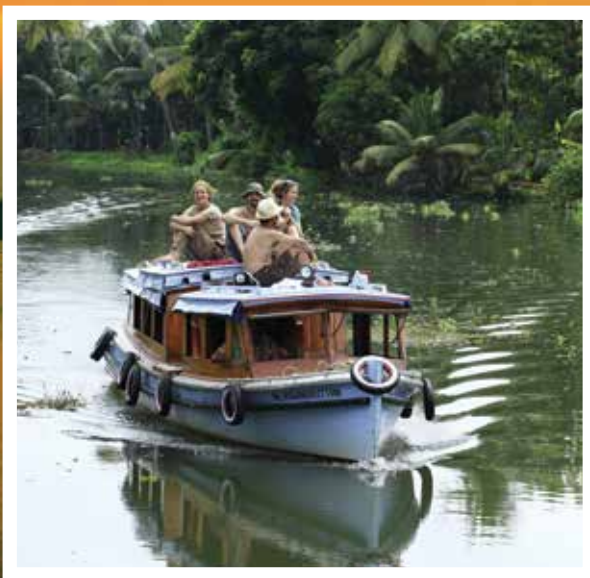
Kollam, Mannanam in Kottayam, Valiyaparamba (Kasaragod district), Munroe Island in Kollam, Valapattanam in Kannur, etc. Alappuzha, one of the most popular backwater tourism destinations, is an ideal location for a stay in the tranquillity of the Backwaters. The Vembanad Lake, which spans several districts in the state, is fed by quite a few rivers, including the famous Achenkovil, Manimala, Meenachil, Muvattupuzha, Pamba, and Periyar. The clear waters of the prominent Punnamada Lake, the venue of the legendary Nehru Trophy Snake Boat Race is a luring location where several historically significant attractions are there for visits. The Snake Boat race is held on the second Saturday of August every year, demonstrating a fiercely fought boat race on the tranquil lakefront, making the location into a sea of humanity with several thousand people, including tourists from far and wide reach, to watch it.

For the visitors from the nook and corner of the world, the night cruise from Alappuzha to Kumarakom offers a magical night. Kumarakom is another spectacular backwater tourist destination situated in the Kottayam district. The slow movement on the peaceful waves of the

backwaters along the lullaby of the mesmerizing cool breeze and the magical view of water lilies seen in the night sparkle like the twinkling stars in a dark sky is good enough to provide once in a lifetime experience. The day trips can offer you glimpses of migratory birds, traditional fishing activities, traditional farming practices, and the breathtaking toddy tapping practices on the coconut trees by the experienced tappers.

Houseboats are the modern forms of traditional Kettuvallams, which were used to carry tons of rice and spices in the annals of history. Currently, the houseboats boast of the same comforts of a small classified resort, having furnished bedrooms, cosy living rooms, a kitchen, and even a balcony for angling. Authentic food is also supplied along the journey.

Backwaters are ideal for promoting Slow Tourism in the state. As the term indicates, it intends to have slow movement and stay longer, and the tourist who takes part in it can experience the travel close to heart by indulging much in the nuances and features of the destination. Once at the



**THE FLORA AND FAUNA,
PEOPLE AND THEIR
LIFESTYLES ALONG WITH
DISTINCTIVE CUSTOMS
AND TRADITIONS
MAKE BACKWATERS
INCREASINGLY
ATTRACTIVE.**

destination, tourists can engage with local transport options and 'slow food and beverage' and take time to explore local history and culture, along with the efforts to contribute a share towards environmental conservation activities. A longer stay provides greater socio-economic benefits and a lower rate of cultural and ecological consequences. Therefore, responsible tourism intends to have increased the equitable distribution of social and economic benefits of tourism to the people of the land.

The backwaters are yet to be tapped fully. Therefore, the scope for further promotion of responsible and experiential tourism is high. The efforts are already there. Activity-based tourism is getting more attention internationally. Throughout the backwater stretches, we have to ensure that tourists can engage in sufficient activities as part of their trip to the destinations. ■



BABY MATHEW

Chairman and Managing Director
Somatheeram Ayurveda Group

**A HOLISTIC
APPROACH WITH
NO SIDE EFFECTS ADDS
MORE COLOUR TO
THIS UNIQUE CLINICAL
WISDOM.**

Ayurveda

COME & CLEANSE YOUR MIND AND BODY

Happiness and health always share a common road. Ayurveda is considered as a comfortable and safe road to reach the destination of health. Why? Yes - The question has multiple domains of answers. Ayurvedic medical wisdom is so closely associated with mother nature.

Having its deep roots in Indian philosophy, Ayurveda considers man and nature as inseparable entities. A holistic approach with no side effects adds more colour to this unique clinical wisdom. Ayurveda is not a mere medical science, but a life science. That is why today Ayurveda has become the apt solution for the alarming cases of lifestyle diseases. Kerala, the homeland of classical Ayurveda, has significantly contributed to the propagation of Ayurveda across the globe. Ayurveda and tourism are mutually related in Kerala, playing an important role in the health and economic sector of God's own country.

Kerala has got a rich past and tradition in Ayurvedic clinical practice. Ancient Ayurvedic scholars developed special Ayurvedic therapeutic procedures and formulations for a wide range of diseases that are still significantly relevant. The biodiversity of Kerala with a wide species of local medicinal plants has a tremendous impact on Ayurvedic patient care. Since Ayurveda is a nature nourished medical system,

the green beauty of Kerala is an added advantage for tourism. Moreover, the well affordable healthy climate, the rich biodiversity and the refreshing natural sources make Kerala Ayurveda a different experience.

In the present crisis of COVID scenario, the entire world is in search of comprehensive medical care which boosts the natural immunity and disease-fighting mechanism of the human body. Ayurveda is rich with time tested scientific preventive protocols against most communicable and non-communicable ailments. The classical Panchakarma therapy (Bio purification treatments) and Rasayana therapy (Rejuvenation therapy) are effectively delivered to the global tourists who visit Kerala. Wellness through Ayurveda is the current trend and Kerala leads the run from the front.

Ayurvedic dietetics is yet another good segment that provides safe and healthy food culture. Medicated food is the unique concept and practice of Ayurveda, in which the daily food articles are enriched by medicinal plants and spices. The role of Kerala spices in empowering the immune system is very well accepted by the world. Seasonal food and regiments are scientifically practised in Kerala thereby reducing the risks of climate-related health issues.

Using the boundless opportunities of Kerala

tourism, the glory of Ayurveda can be effectively spread to all corners of the continent. Kerala tourism has effectively showcased the standards of Ayurveda before the global customers. Employment opportunities in the tourism field have increased to a good level due to the developmental activities in Ayurvedic resorts and hospital sectors. The ayurvedic cosmetic industry flourished with good momentum when it was combined with tourism. When people across the world start denying artificial chemicals in beauty care, the demand for Ayurvedic natural beauty care products in the industry shows a straight growth.

Medical tourism is another sector where the sub-specialities and super specialities of Ayurvedic science are effectively utilized in addressing a good number of chronic diseases. Neurodegenerative diseases, lifestyle diseases and even communicable diseases are getting stable cures using Ayurvedic medicines. Women and child care through Ayurveda is getting good acceptance owing to the combination of research and updated practice of Ayurveda. Ayurvedic eye care, Ayurvedic psychiatry and similar subspecialties are attracting global patients.

The mechanical way of living with multidimensional physical, mental and emotional factors resulted in a huge amount of stress for employees across the world. Ayurvedic stress management packages have become an integral component of Kerala tourism. Medication on the head along with classical Panchakarma procedures have shown promising results in reducing stress and stress-related psychosomatic diseases. Delaying age-related diseases with the scientific brain boosters of Ayurveda are highly useful in geriatric issues.

Sports Ayurveda is another area where the tourism sector in Kerala is combined with Ayurveda. Ayurveda offers a long-lasting cure for different types of sports-related trauma and injuries. Enhancement of physical stamina and strength using natural remedies of Ayurveda is getting much more importance compared to artificial stamina boosters. Kerala special martial arts and Yoga are also effectively used in traditional sports care in Kerala.

To conclude, it is so clear that the growth and propagation of Ayurveda and Kerala tourism are so closely associated. It is the need of the post-COVID world to utilize the magical health benefits of Ayurveda by judicious exploration and uplift Kerala tourism. ■

USING THE BOUNDLESS OPPORTUNITIES OF KERALA TOURISM, THE GLORY OF AYURVEDA CAN BE EFFECTIVELY SPREAD TO ALL CORNERS OF THE CONTINENT.



Dr. HARI KRISHNAN P.K.
Assistant Professor,
Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies,
Thiruvananthapuram

GETTING TRANSFORMED INTO WORLD'S HEALTH CARE HUB



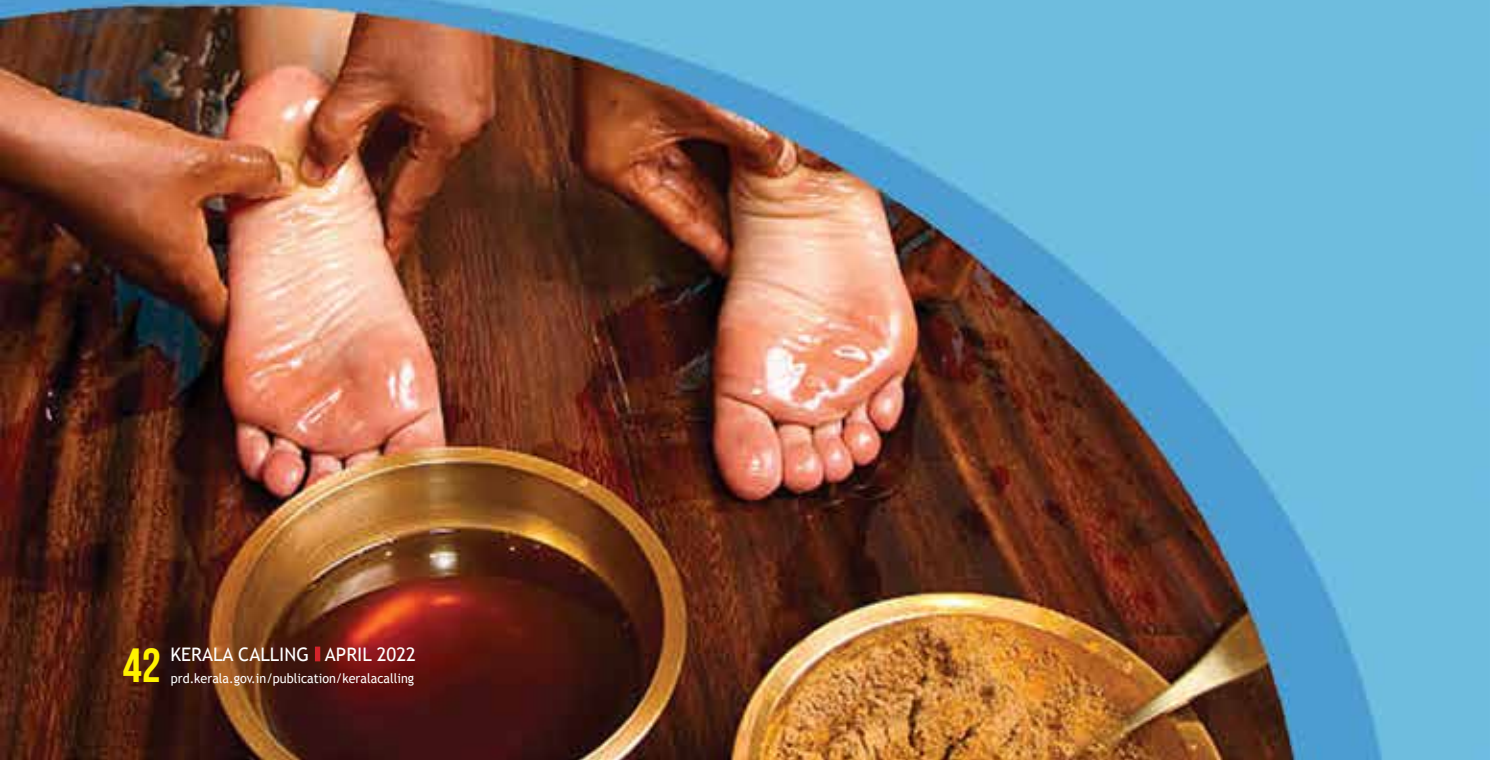
OVER THE PAST DECADES, THERE HAS BEEN A SURGE IN PEOPLE TRAVELLING TO ANOTHER COUNTRY TO ACCESS MEDICAL TREATMENT ALONG WITH THEIR HOLIDAYS, ESPECIALLY TO TREATMENT DESTINATIONS, WHICH IS REFERRED TO AS MEDICAL TOURISM. KERALA, IN RECENT YEARS, HAS EMERGED AS A MAJOR HUB FOR MEDICAL TOURISM.



Being a land blessed with plenteous natural attractions, tourism in Kerala has profoundly been reliant on nature-based tourism; so thrust was given to nature-based tourism attractions like beaches, backwaters, hill stations and waterfalls. However, to entice new source markets and demographic segments, Kerala needs to diversify and broaden its tourist appeal beyond nature-based tourism activities. This pursuit for new products and services has led to the development and promotion of new segments of tourism products/services like wellness tourism, caravan tourism, adventure tourism, MICE, medical tourism and cruise tourism adhering to

responsible tourism practices.

What makes Kerala a compelling destination for medical tourism are the availability of reputed health care professionals, internationally/nationally accredited hospitals, English speaking health care workers, cutting edge global health technology, personalized service, lower cost, lesser waiting time and rich natural, cultural and leisure destinations and the vivid tourist experiences it offers. Kerala is an outlier among Indian states with the developing world's income and infrastructure and developed world's human development indices. On the human





development indices, Kerala has near full literacy, highest life expectancy, lowest maternal and infant mortality rates, low fertility rates, reduced level of poverty, low death rate, and healthy male to female ratio and is considered a model for other Indian states for its humanistic, inclusive development, especially in health and education sectors.

Medical tourism is bringing a paradigm shift in Kerala's tourism sector where hospitals provide high-quality care at top-notch facilities for a fraction of the cost they would find in their bank-breaking expensive home countries. In their home countries, the public healthcare system is known for long waiting lists for procedures if a patient's condition is not life-threatening. In these instances, persons who prefer immediate treatment prefer transborder travel for quick access to treatment.

Kerala has 31 medical colleges, 3 Joint Commission International (JCI) accredited hospitals, and 48 hospitals accredited by the International Society for Quality in Healthcare (ISQua)/ National Accreditation Board for Hospital and Healthcare providers (NABH) and many medical institutions which are centres of excellence. Kerala, with 2.76 per cent of India's population, has 38.4 per cent of the country's qualified nurses. This shows that almost two-fifths of India's qualified nurses are from Kerala. Moreover, the four international airports in Kerala have eased the air journeys to Kerala through direct, indirect and connecting flights from major medical tourism source markets.

Kerala, through its relentless marketing and branding, has positioned the state on the global tourism map, especially in Wellness and Ayurveda niche markets. Moreover, Kerala has been synonymous with Ayurveda and wellness and has been branded as the 'World's Wellness Hub'. It will be ideal for Kerala to venture into the medical tourism market to augment foreign tourist arrivals and foreign exchange earnings considerably. With nearly half the global medical tourists preferring Asia as their treatment destination, Kerala should leverage its already established wellness tourism brand and position itself on the

MEDICAL TOURISM IS BRINGING A PARADIGM SHIFT IN KERALA'S TOURISM SECTOR WHERE HOSPITALS PROVIDE HIGH-QUALITY CARE AT TOP-NOTCH FACILITIES FOR A FRACTION OF THE COST THEY WOULD FIND IN THEIR BANK-BREAKINGLY EXPENSIVE HOME COUNTRIES.

global medical tourism map too. Thailand, a global leader in inbound medical tourist arrivals, was earlier branded only as a wellness destination. They have successfully leveraged this brand image and forayed into the advanced modern medical treatments and are currently the most sought after global medical tourism destination.

Maldives, Oman, United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia constitute the major inbound medical tourism source markets for Kerala and Neurology/ Neurosurgery, Cardiology/Cardiac Surgery, Orthopaedics, General Surgery and Joint replacement are the treatments preferred by inbound medical tourists. The share of inbound medical tourists from the major inbound tourism markets like the United Kingdom, United States of America, France and Germany can be enhanced through augmented marketing in these countries.

The government of Kerala in the roadmap for the state's development has envisaged Kerala as a hub of medical treatment. Medical tourism can transform Kerala into an all-season tourist destination irrespective of the season-offseason divide, enhance the Average Length of Stay (ALS) of medical tourists and insulate the tourism industry from the cataclysm of economic meltdown and recession. Moreover, the growth of medical tourism will also reflect in the generation of employment, enhance foreign exchange earnings, augment infrastructural investment in the healthcare sector and also pave the way for the reverse brain drain of medical professionals and nurses to Kerala. Investments in the brownfield or greenfield hospital projects will also facilitate the delivery of quality healthcare not only to medical tourists but also to the Keralites and the residents of other Indian states. Thoughtful and planned strategies introduced by the Government of Kerala would position Kerala as the 'Health Care Hub' of the world, a destination that redefines longevity and quality of life for medical tourists and the most preferred medical tourism destination in the global medical tourism landscape. ■



VASISHT M.C.

Associate Professor,
Department of History,
Malabar Christian College, Calicut



THE MAGIC OF Malabar

Malabar is the term used to refer to the northern part of the current Kerala state. The term 'Malabar' was popularised by the Arabs for referring the entire Kerala coast. From 1792 to 1947, this territory was directly governed by the British. Throughout history, travellers and sailors from all over the world have been captivated by this region because of its wonderful landscapes and rich natural resources.

From the time of Cosmas Indicopleustes (522-547 CE) down to the eleventh or twelfth century A.D, the word 'Male' was applied to the coast by Arab navigators and the seafaring population, who flocked thither subsequently for pepper and other spices, called it Malibar, Manibar, Mulibar, Munibar, Malibar. The early European travellers followed suit and hence came to the added forms in which the name was written as Melibar (Marco Polo), Minibar, Milibar, Minubar, Melibaria, Malabria, etc. Malabar may therefore be taken to mean the hilly or mountainous country, a name well suited to its physical characteristics. Malayalam is not, however, the only native name for the district. The indigenous people love to call it

Keralam, and these other names will be found treated in the historical chapter.

The boundaries of Malabar proper are- North South Canara district: East Coorg, Mysore, Nilgiris, Coimbatore: south, the Native state of Cochin: west, the Arabian sea. The coast runs diagonally in a South-East direction, and forms a few head-lands and small bays. It is bounded on the North by the Province of Canara, on the East by those of Coorg and Mysore, to the South-East by Coimbatore and to the South by the small province of Cochin. It is divided into 18 Taluks or Districts, containing 2,222 Deshams or Villages, the houses being scattered on the skirts of the cultivation. Malabar once remained

**MALABAR ONCE REMAINED
THE EMPORIA OF WORLD
TRADE AND COMMERCE.**

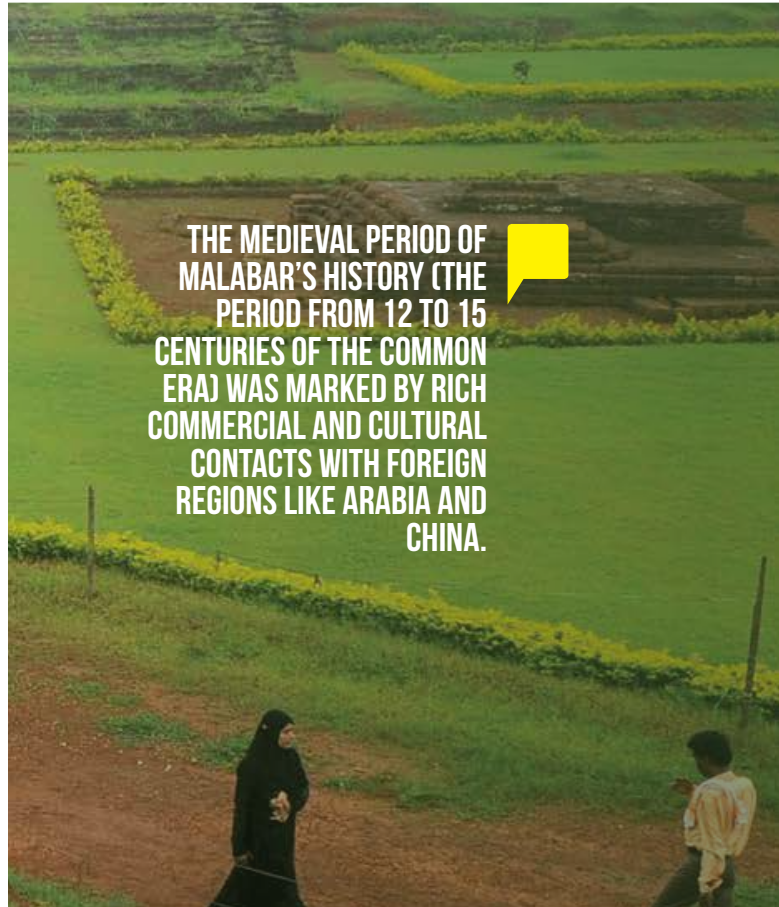
the emporia of world trade and commerce. As a centre of world trade and commerce, Malabar enjoyed a preeminent position among the territories of the Indian subcontinent as the international centre of commercial transactions.

Malabar continued to play a very decisive role in the history of India from very early days. The foreign merchants including the Romans, Greeks, Arabs, Portuguese, Dutch, French and the British had left their legacy in the land of Malabar. Among the foreigners the British emerged themselves as the most powerful colonial power and thereafter became the biggest imperial power.

A museum focused on the pre-history of Kerala should find its place in Wayanad, marked by the presence of world famous Edakkal cave carvings. The pre-historic museum should focus on the megalithic monuments of Kerala, the most important archaeological remains related to the pre-history of Kerala. This museum will certainly generate tourists' interest in the pre-history of Kerala.

The medieval period of Malabar's history (the period from 12 to 15 centuries of the common era) was marked by rich commercial and cultural contacts with foreign regions like Arabia and China. During this period many Arab and Chinese traders, sailors and ships visited the shores of Malabar. They came mainly in search of pepper, spices and other natural products. The local rulers, like the Zamorin, the ruler of little kingdom called Kozhikode gave protection and encouragement to them. As a result Kozhikode/Calicut transformed into an international port city and in course of time Ponnani developed into a major destination of Arab and local Muslim traders. Medieval Arab writers like Ibn Batuta (1342 CE), Abdur Razak (1442 CE), Italian writer Niccolo Conti (1421 CE), Russian traveller Afansay Niktin (1466-1472), Chinese travellers like Cho -Ju-Kua (1225 CE), Wang Ta Yuwan (1349 Ce), Ma-Huvan(105-1433 Ce) etc have left us plenty of information on Malabar's international trade contacts. But there is nothing in Malabar to showcase its rich international commercial history.

A museum exclusively focused on Malabar's trade contacts with China should be established in Calicut and another museum showcasing Malabar's contacts with Arabia should come up at Ponnani. A construction should also come up in Calicut in honour of Zamorin, who actually patronised these foreign traders. Apart from history the rich cultural legacy of the region should also be highlighted by setting up of specific centres for the promotion of Kalari, Kathkali, Ayurveda. By combining the concepts of historical tourism with commercial tourism the government can utilize the region's rich potential in tourism. ■



THE MEDIEVAL PERIOD OF MALABAR'S HISTORY (THE PERIOD FROM 12 TO 15 CENTURIES OF THE COMMON ERA) WAS MARKED BY RICH COMMERCIAL AND CULTURAL CONTACTS WITH FOREIGN REGIONS LIKE ARABIA AND CHINA.





AJAI KUMAR K S Travel Writer
SRIDEVI NARAYANAN Media Analyst
 Photography - **MANOJ VASUDEVAN**

MUZIRIS

UNEXPLORED

TOURISM POSSIBILITY

A fascinating place that still cradles the splendid stories of the past and offers the sublime feel of a Time-Travel- that is the saga of Muziris, a vanished harbour of Kerala in South India. Muziris is presently nothing more than a ghost of its glorious past but still possesses the potential to thrill.

In a place like Muziris, nothing else is instrumental due to the absence of major tangible edifices or historical remnants in the vicinity. The great flood of AD 1341 had wiped out the then Muziris legacy, leaving behind only a handful of visible traces for the posterity like the tip of an iceberg. Its treasures are patiently waiting to be unearthed.

Muziris is situated on the banks of River Periyar near Kodungallore Town, roughly forty kilometres northwest of Cochin. In the present scenario, Muziris Tour Circuit is scattered at a radius of approximately 25 square kilometres, which is sincerely promoted by some tour operators. The circuit consists of well maintained Paravoor and Chennamangalam Synagogues, Paliyam Palace, Museum, Excavation sites, tourist boat rides, traditional hand-made workshops of mastered artisans etc. In addition to that, the Kodungallor region is noted for its age-old Syrian Catholic church, towering on the banks of the beautiful Backwater even though it has diverse customs which has references to the Sangham Literature.

Despite having a variety of monuments in the Circuit, which offers a vast cultural kaleidoscope, Muziris, as a tourist destination



DESPITE HAVING A VARIETY OF MONUMENTS IN THE CIRCUIT, WHICH OFFERS A VAST CULTURAL KALEIDOSCOPE, MUZIRIS, AS A TOURIST DESTINATION ATTRACTS CONSIDERABLY A VERY LESS NUMBER OF CONVENTIONAL TOURISTS NOW.

attracts considerably a very less number of conventional tourists now. The State Government of Kerala has commenced a Muziris Heritage Project in 2006 with honest enthusiasm by involving the departments of Culture, Tourism and other



FROM THE TOURISM POINT OF VIEW, DELIVERING HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL TOURISM ONLY CAN ATTRACT HIGH SPENDING AND RESEARCH-ORIENTED DISCERNED INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS TO THE COUNTRY.



tourists to promote the Muziris Tour Circuit.

Aneesh Mon, Operations Head (South) of Dravidian Trails Holidays Pvt Ltd, based in Cochin share the same feeling “Our main clientele is from the European countries. We find practical difficulty in selling the Muziris packages among the usual European leisure seeking tourists. But as a mission, we assist foreign academicians and bring foreign journalists and international tour operators in view of popularizing Muziris into a Future Destination. We believe that we must accelerate the emergence of destinations like Muziris”.

Yet the possibilities of Muziris tour circuits are coveting. Once the Muziris Heritage Project is completed as envisaged, with all its historical and cultural eligibilities, the possibilities are high for Muziris to be declared by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site in Kerala. All kinds of tourists flock here if high-end leisure-based infrastructure, utilizing the backwaters and the adjoining localities are developed. However, uncertainty looms over the tiring process of the completion of the project in near future.

A major clientele visit here is the Jewish Religious Groups as Muziris retains a “Jewish Aura”. Nandini Joshi, a Mumbai based Spanish Speaking Western Regional Level Professional Guide specializes presently in handling the high profile Jewish religious groups from Israel and the United States. She points out that even in the present context, Muziris is an integral part of Jewish Religious Tours to Kerala. “An effective presentation skill of a Guide is required in Muziris who re-enact a zestfully furious football match on an empty eventless football stadium” adds Nandini, who is also a Faculty of Tourism Studies in Mumbai University, besides being an Ornithologist and a keen Naturalist.

From the Tourism point of view, delivering high-quality professional tourism only can attract high spending and research-oriented discerned International Tourists to the country. Tourism is an economic activity and a viable source of Foreign Exchange for a nation like India. In addition to that promoting a destination will also be an inspiration for preserving its rich heritage. ■



related government departments, to re-discovering the glory and grandeur of Muziris and showcasing it before the world.

“The ground reality is that Muziris can be promoted mainly to the culture and pilgrim tourists visiting holy places pertaining to their faith. But the arrivals of such specialized high spending tourist groups are very less in number” says Arun Kumar K.S. with his two-decades-long Industry Experience, who is a Cochin based Southern Regional Level Spanish speaking

“Lately, Muziris did little to buoy up tourists, though a “wow feeling” is still afar” opines Lijo Jose, the Director of Muziris Heritage Day-Tours, who is also a resident of Muziris. He adds that he doesn’t find it a cakewalk to convince the



Dr. RAJASHREE AJITH
Director KITTS, Tourism Department



HR-AN INSEPARABLE CONSTITUENT

**KERALA IS PROPOSED
TO EMERGE AS THE EPIC
CENTER OF WORLD TRADE
WHEN THE VIZHINJAM
PROJECT COMES UP.**

Being a service industry, tourism requires skilled manpower to serve tourists better. Realising the need of the skilled manpower, various educational and skill development programmes have been initiated across the State. The Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies (KITTS), under Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala, impart quality education and training in the field of Tourism, travel and hospitality. For the past three and half decades, the Institute has dedicated itself to catering to the human resource requirements of the industry as well as offering orientation/refresher programmes for the professionals of the industry and capacity building programme for various stakeholders.



Opportunities and Challenges in Human Resource Management in Tourism in Kerala

Almost half of India's current populations are under 25 years of age. While this fact is a demographic dividend for the economy, it is also a danger sign for the country's ability to create new jobs at an unprecedented rate. The most alarming issue of Kerala in the HR context in the tourism field is the lack of adequate job opportunities. While our University graduates line up for the job that can propel them into the vibrant middle class, change has been interminably delayed. Till today our educated lots have been forced to migrate to other states of India and even abroad in search of

HRM EMPHASIZES ON A HARMONIOUS BALANCE BETWEEN EMPLOYEE DEMANDS AND ORGANIZATIONAL REQUIREMENTS. A FOCUS ON REAL TIME PERFORMANCE REVIEWS AND PURPOSEFUL CREATIONS OF A DIVERSE WORKFORCE WILL SHAPE BEST PRACTICES.

job as the job opportunities were not available at their doorstep. This situation has to change and hopefully the upcoming multiple projects which are likely to come in the coming years in Kerala would tap the potential and provide employment to skilled persons.

Kerala is proposed to emerge as the epic center of world trade when the Vizhinjam project comes up. This would provide ample job opportunities provided we equip our younger generation to learn the subject knowledge related to import and export procedures, customs clearance procedures and other areas such as warehouse management etc. Ship broker is another area which can be chosen as a career providing tugs, crew repatriation and other requirements entrusted by the master of the ship would fetch monetary benefits for those who take up this as a career. Cruise Tourism is another area where job opportunities can be provided in the travel and hospitality sector.

HRM emphasizes on a harmonious balance between employee demands and organizational requirements. A focus on real time performance reviews and purposeful creations of a diverse workforce will shape best practices. Our state Kerala titled as "God's Own Country" is likely to bounce back in the tourism sector, though there was a slumber during the pandemic. Training those who have direct contact with the domestic and international tourists would scale up activities of tourism sector. These work forces include cab operators, house boat staffs and various other stack holders involved in the hospitality sector.

Realizing the present scenario of tourism development and to address the emerging areas of tourism, KITTS, in association with Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala and various organizations, have been taking various initiatives to supply and strengthen skilled manpower for the sustainable development of tourism in the State. ■





MOHAN SIVANAND

Former Editor-in-Chief, Reader's Digest India



A JOURNEY INTO THE SECULAR SPIRIT OF KERALA

Mohan Sivanand, former Editor-in-Chief of Reader's Digest, is an avid traveller as well. He has travelled a lot around the globe and has come across many cultures. Here, he describes his tryst with one of the defining attributes of Kerala, its invincible secular spirit.

In March 2019, driving down from northern Kerala to Kochi with a friend, we stopped at Kodungallur town, known to my family for its famed Bhagavathi temple. But my friend, a Catholic Christian, and I visited instead the Cheraman Perumal Juma Masjid, which is India's oldest mosque, built by the year 629 AD, when Prophet Muhammed was still alive.

I live in Mumbai but grew up mostly in Kerala. My best friend in school was a Muslim, and we're still the best of friends. My high school was Catholic. My Hindu family respected all religions. "God is one," my mother used to say.

At the Juma Masjid's office next to the entrance gate, I first met the smiling Faizal Edavanakad, who is the manager, and asked him if my friend and I may be allowed inside the Masjid. "Of course," said Faizal in English, "you are welcome." After we washed our feet and hands, and

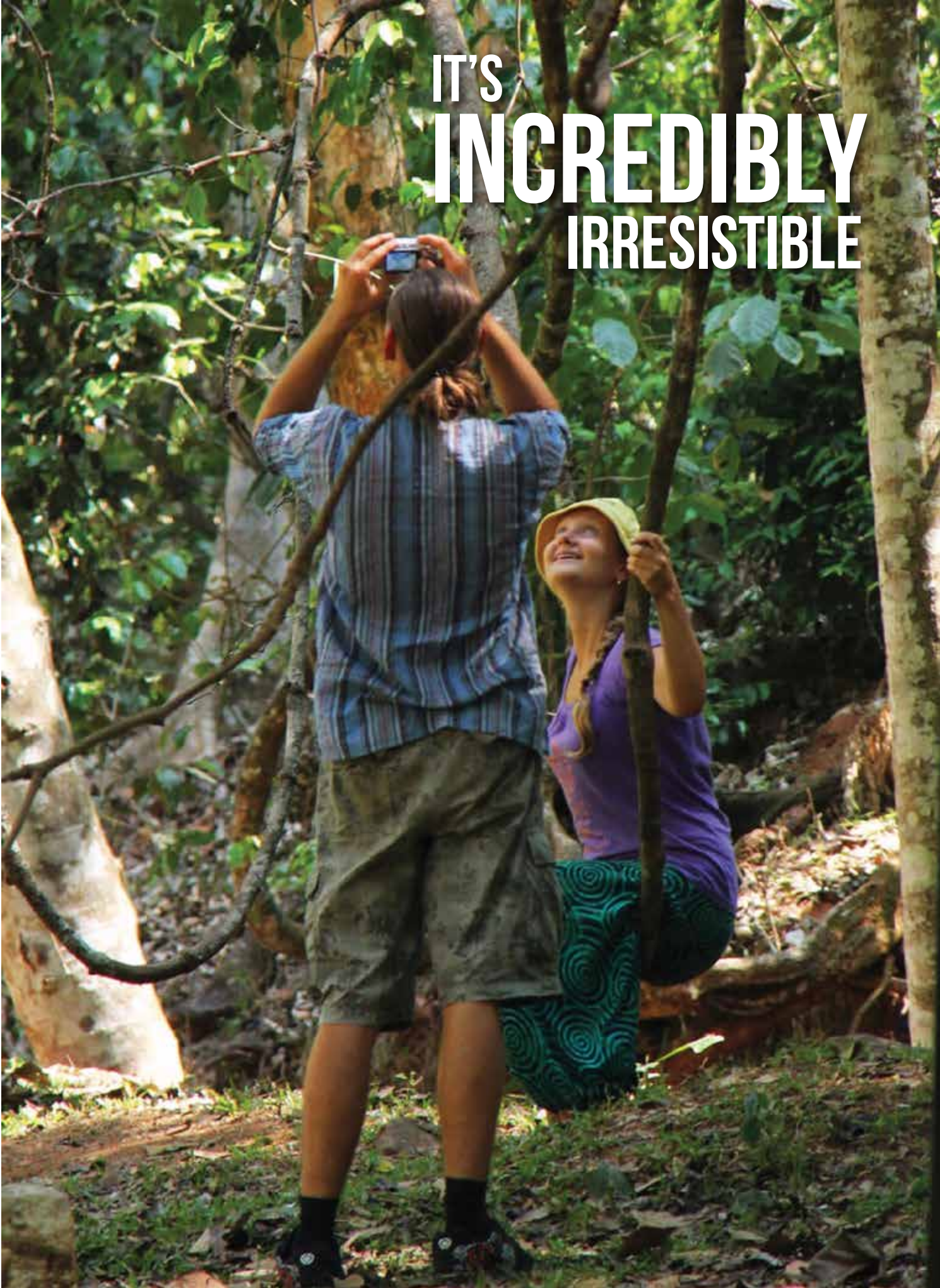
feeling blessed for a while inside the ancient mosque, the Chief Imam met us. He invited us to his office, where we spoke for a while. He gave us a brief about the mosque's past, and suggested we visit its history museum next door. Having done that, we later walked back to meet Faizal and to thank him.

I had realized by then that I'd asked Faizal if we would be allowed inside the mosque only because of my own lack of unawareness. Before we parted, Faizal smiled and told me in Malayalam, half in jest, "I was a bit offended when you asked me if the two of you would be allowed inside. This place is a national treasure. It's for everyone."

"Thank you so much," I said.

"Won't you come back later this week?" Faizal responded. "It's the big festival time in this town." He meant the festival at the Bhagavathi temple nearby. ■

IT'S
INCREDIBLY
IRRESISTIBLE



To believe in fearless minds
and tireless feet,
to brave the raging seas every day
and walk side by side
with hearts that beat in time
with the waves.

HUMAN *by* NATURE




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