



Department of Tourism

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Press release

Kerala aims to extend experiential tourism to all: Tourism Director

Ms Sikha Surendran speaks at The Hindu Group-Kerala Tourism conclave

Kochi, Feb 01: Kerala has been pursuing an inclusive and gender-friendly tourism model that seeks to extend the state's experiential destinations and products to all without being hassled by barriers, said Kerala Tourism Director Ms Sikha Surendran today.

Ms Surendran was speaking at a panel session on 'Gender Inclusivity at the Heart of tourism,' at the two-day conclave on inclusive and accessible tourism jointly organised by Kerala Tourism and The Hindu Group. The theme of the event was 'Kerala for All: Tourism Without Barriers.'

"In the barrier-free policies, we should include people with neurological disorders, physically challenged or any other disabilities in the ecosystem for helping them enjoy a slice of experiential tourism despite their limitations," Ms Surendran said.

The January 31-February 1 conclave brought together global insights, lived experiences and sector expertise to shape the future of Kerala's tourism landscape.

On the activities of Kerala Tourism five years from now, Ms Surendran noted that people with neurological disorders, hearing impaired, blind and physically disabled will be made part of the ecosystem as they can experience tourism activities with the aid of enabling infrastructure and assistive devices.

Commenting on professionalism and ensuring safety of women while travelling, Ms Surendran said Kerala Tourism has started imparting training to improve the quality of service rendered by drivers of tourist cabs with greater warmth and professionalism in guest relations.

"Besides, we have started an initiative for women entrepreneurs to set up restrooms at their houses that are situated en route to tourism destinations. The first of such toilet complexes has been set up in Kanthalloor near Munnar taking a cue from State RT Mission's concept and it will start functioning soon. This can be replicated across Kerala. Women are getting incentives for the initiative and it empowers them," she said.

The Director said Kerala Tourism has initiated a loan scheme for providing loans at four percent interest to women entrepreneurs in collaboration with Women Development Corporation.





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She informed that Kerala Tourism is in the final stages of releasing the Gender Inclusive Tourism Policy after conducting gender and safety audits.

Calling for thinking beyond gender, Dr Peeja Rajan, State Coordinator, Kerala, UN Women, said when women-friendly tourism also means children, disabled and elderly people also need to be considered. She also emphasized on the need for community participation, awareness, training and capacity building in the sector. Presence of women in tourism centres enhances safety, she added.

Ms Monolita Chatterjee, Architect, Partner at Design Combine, since simple aspects can change the experience a domain expert should be included while designing infrastructure facilities of tourism centres.

“Since women are the principal users of cities, urban design is pivotal and simple aspects of design can change the experience. Factors like height of the pavement, surface treatment, visibility and toilet facilities will make the difference,” she said.

Ms Soity Banerjee, Travel & Food Journalist, Responsible Tourism Strategist, and Co-Founder, KINDOW, said all states can come together and set up a helpline to ensure safety of women. Also, making elderly people part of the tourism ecosystem is vital, she added.

Ms Saraswathy Nagarajan, Former Senior Deputy Editor, *The Hindu*, was the moderator.

Ends