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PRESS RELEASE

Onam leaves global Responsible Tourism group gung-ho

Visit part of Cultural Exchange Programme of Dept. of Tourism

Thiruvananthapuram, Sept 06: The eight-day Cultural Exchange Programme, organised by the State Responsible Tourism (RT) Mission Society of the Department of Tourism, got off to a vibrant start as an exuberant group of RT exponents from ten countries celebrated Onam with the village community in Kerala, getting a slice of the state's iconic festival.

The September 4-11 programme, an initiative suggested by Tourism Minister Shri P A Mohamed Riyas, is part of Kerala Tourism's calibrated strategy to give greater visibility to the state's harvest festival in all its grandeur.

Shri Riyas said the visiting group will be taken around various units of RT, a globally acclaimed tourism model, to get a ringside view of multiple initiatives implemented in the state, such as women-friendly and gender-inclusive tourism, village life experiences, and curated schemes like STREET, PEPPER, and model RT Villages.

RT Mission Society CEO Rupeshkumar K received the global RT group at Kochi International Airport before taking them to the countryside of Kottayam district to provide them with a first-hand experience of the vibrant and colourful Onam celebrations and the state's RT model.

A group of tourists from the UK, France, South Korea, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, Taiwan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Romania prepared *Pookkalam* and *Onam Sadya* at various homestays. The group also included RT leaders, academicians, researchers, and tour operators from other states.

Later, they visited *Thiruvonam Mattam*, a traditional street market that is believed to have existed during the barter system era, at Mattaparambu in Maravanthuruthu Panchayat.

Tourists participated with gusto in the vibrant *Thiruvonam* processions organised by local clubs. While shopping for handicrafts and souvenirs made from coconut shells and traditional straw mats, they emphasised the importance of supporting local markets and festivals.

The villagers gave a warm welcome to the contingent, accompanied by the traditional *Panchavadyam* (an orchestra of five musical instruments), as they delivered the Onam message to every household.



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The RT group enjoyed a delicious *Onam Sadya* with local representatives and community members before participating in various competitions organised by the RT Mission units.

Fam Wang Dam from Vietnam won the spoon and lemon race, while Charmary Melang of Sri Lanka and Gowri Lakshmi from Kerala shared honours in the musical chair contest. In the exciting tug-of-war competition, the local community team triumphed over the tourists. They also performed the traditional Onam dance, *Thiruvathira*.

As part of getting the slice of experiential tourism, they prepared Kerala's traditional breakfast in the Experience Ethnic Units of RT Mission.

The group will visit various destinations in the state as part of the programme and take a close look at Kerala's RT model, which has successfully leveraged the state's heritage and cultural diversity to promote sustainable tourism development and the economic empowerment of local communities.

The RT group will witness the Onam pageantry that marks the finale of the Onam Week Celebrations in the state capital on September 9.

The team will also visit the RT villages of Kumarakom, Maravanthuruthu, Aymanam, Perumbalam, Thrissur, and Thiruvananthapuram.

Ends