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**PRESS RELEASE**

**CM opens Onam celebrations; says Kerala Tourism on path of revival**

**Thiruvananthapuram, Aug. 14:** Chief Minister Shri Pinarayi Vijayan today inaugurated the week-long virtual Onam celebrations organized by the state Tourism Department, noting that the government has initiated effective measures to resume the pandemic-hit tourism activities in a safe and risk-free manner.

Stating that the tourism sector of Kerala has showed tremendous resilience by outliving back-to-back crises since 2016, the Chief Minister said “as long as the Covid-19 pandemic prevails we have to live with that situation and develop tourism along with it.”

“We have put in place arrangements for revival of tourism in a safe and risk-free manner, where vaccinated people will receive vaccinated tourists. We have also made serious efforts to keep tourism destinations pollution-free, which have yielded good results”, he said.

“Apart from the alluring natural beauty, Kerala enjoys a reputation as a safe and strife-free place to visit. The hospitality of the people is also globally appreciated. All these will help the state regain its position as a prime tourism destination”, the Chief Minister said.

Since 2016, the state’s tourism sector had been repeatedly struck by disasters such as cyclone Okhi, Nipah virus, the deluge of 2018 and floods in 2019. Still the state recorded increase in arrival of both foreign and domestic tourists in 2018 and 2019, he said.

Saying that the ideals of unity and humanity that Onam brings home is of increased relevance now, the Chief Minister lauded the Tourism Department for choosing “Universal Humanity” as the theme for the “Global Pookalam” competition being held as part of the festival, providing an online platform for Keralites from around the world to join the event.

Considering the constraints imposed by the pandemic, the festival that showcases the best of Kerala’s culture and performing traditions is organized on virtual mode, using audio-visual and social media to instill a spirit of celebration aimed at offsetting the general slowdown amid Covid-19. The entire festival will be live streamed on various online platforms.

Tourism Minister Shri. P. A. Mohamed Riyas, who presided over the online function, said that Kerala Tourism has been conducting Onam celebrations for more than three decades.

“In 1982, 1988, 2018 and 2020, we had to call off Onam celebrations due to various crises that affected the state. Onam celebrations are being conducted not only to generate festive



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mood among the public and make the commercial business active but also to provide a source of income for thousands of artistes,” he noted.

“In the pandemic scenario, the virtual Onam celebrations will be a new experience for all. The “Global Pookkalam” competition is the main attraction, which will spread the message of unity among the Malayalis living in various parts of the world. We are trying to unite all Malayalis by harnessing the possibilities of the new-age media. Since Onam celebrations are the prelude to the impending tourism season, we are considering it as an effective campaign strategy. The decision to conduct the event virtually was taken as part of this,” Shri Riyas said.

“The event is also aimed at providing a source of income for thousands of local artistes, who are struggling during the Covid-19 period. Their performances and programmes will be telecast/broadcast through major visual media and FM Radio channels. Moreover, the videos will be streamed through Kerala Tourism’s YouTube channel and other social media pages,” the Minister added.

Additional Chief Secretary (Tourism) Dr. V. Venu delivered the welcome address and Kerala Tourism Director Shri. V. R. Krishna Teja proposed a vote of thanks.

The participants for the “Pookalam” competition can register at <https://www.keralatourism.org/>. Individuals, organisations/associations from any part of the world can vie for honours by arranging the flower carpet and uploading its image on to the website. The participants can also share the pictures over social media.

The contestants will be awarded first, second and third prizes in two categories: individual and organization/association. There will be separate judging panels for these segments. The winners will earn attractive prizes. Besides, there will be consolation prizes (20 in each category) and certificates of participation. Also, all participants (except those who win the 52 prizes mentioned above) will be given a special ‘Onam Gift’.

Notwithstanding Covid-19, Kerala Tourism’s website continues to be a big hit by clocking more than 7.5 million visitors last year. The portal’s high popularity is the chief reason to host the Pookalam competition, allowing the participation of Malayalis across the world.

As for performing arts, 65 video clips of performances of local artistes in different art forms, each with 15-minute duration, will be streamed through the state’s audio-visual media channels and social-media platforms. The initiative seeks to rejuvenate artists sitting largely idle in Covid-19 times.

**Ends**