

# THE HINDU

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Tourists taking a look at toddy-tapping at Aymanam in Kottayam.

IBHAN UNNIKRISHNAN  
KOTTAYAM

As Kerala prepares to unlock its tourism sector next month, the backwater landscape of Kottayam will have a lot more to offer than the Vembanad lake and boat rides.

Having been declared as the first model Responsible Tourism (RT) village in Kerala, Aymanam, a hamlet near Kamarakom, will be rolling out welcome mats to the guests from the coming season onwards. From boat rides through its canals to walking tracks and village life to cultural experience, the local body is now ready with a host of tourism products that are locally owned.

As many as 118 RT units have been established in the panchayat. Training has been imparted to 617 persons in different tourism-related activities, besides in-

itiated waste management projects in association with the local body and the Harikha Keralam Mission.

The project envisages a structured development of village's interiors to maintain a balance between the guests and the local community, says K. Rupesh Kumar, Coordinator, RT Mission Kerala. "The packages have been developed in way to ensure the local development of the panchayat, while also generating employment and staying carbon neutral to the maximum possible extent. As part of it, special tourism gramasabhas were held and to encourage visitors to participate in the community, a directory of the local tourism and cultural resources was prepared," he said. Based on the outcome of these special gramasabhas, the State has now accorded administra-

tive sanction to the boat terminal project at Cheepungal and renovation of the Valiyamadakkuzhy—a water body spread over 5.5 acres of land—for water-tourism.

### Second phase

The second phase of the RT project, which is soon set to take off, envisages imparting training to 400 more persons, besides evaluating aspects of tourism here. Meanwhile, stakeholders of the State's village tourism sector including the house boat operators and the hospitality industry, are keenly watching elevation of Aymanam as an RT destination.

"This definitely presents an advantage, as development of tourism in Aymanam can bring in more clients here," says K. Arun Kumar, secretary, Chamber of Vembanad Hotels and Resorts.