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**Press Release**

**Backwaters Theme for Spanish Tourism Fair**

*FITUR 2015 in Madrid takes place days after US President Barack Obama's reference to Kerala's backwaters*

**Thiruvananthapuram, Feb 1:** The jaw-dropping beauty of the backwaters of Kerala became a major attraction at the FITUR 2015, one of the leading tourism trade fairs in Europe.

The sprawling stall of Kerala Tourism at the travel industry fair in the Spanish capital of Madrid had recreated the Great Backwaters of Kerala, only days after US President Barack Obama showered praise on the beauty of the natural phenomenon of 'God's Own Country' during his keenly followed visit to India this week.

"The huge response from the travel industry and the general public to our backwaters-themed pavilion at the international tourism trade fair in Madrid shows how much popular and well known our backwaters is around the world," Kerala Tourism Minister Shri A P Anil Kumar said.

"The Great Backwaters of Kerala is a must-see single destination in the world like the Great Barrier Reef and the Grand Canyon," Shri Anil Kumar added.

Kerala Tourism Secretary Shri G Kamala Vardhana Rao said: "The backwaters of Kerala offer a window to our state's cultural and social heritage besides being a natural abundance of the waters."

The five-day FITUR 2015, which began on Wednesday, was attended by a well-represented state delegation led by Kerala Tourism Director Shri P I Sheik Pareeth.

"We are honoured by the tremendous response to our pavilion in Madrid," said Shri Pareeth.

"We are confident of attracting more and more travellers from Europe and the rest of the world to our state in the year 2015. As part of the 'Visit Kerala' year, we have also held meetings with key airlines like the Emirates and Etihad-Jet Airways to increase connectivity and offer some promotional packages to tourists from Spain for travelling to Kerala," he added.

The theme of the Kerala pavilion at the FITUR in 2012 was the 'Home of Ayurveda'. This year, the stand of Kerala Tourism at the Madrid fair was spread over 57 square metres.

The stand itself was a miniature depiction of the state's unique attractions. This included an image of a 'chundanvallom' or snake boat, which is a common sight in the backwaters of Kerala. There was also the replica of an eye-catching wooden bridge with a water body below it, representing the scenic beauty of Kerala's backwaters. A manual water wheel, which is used to draw water from the fields, was also set up in the stand. The traditional lanterns hung in the stand were reminiscence of the state's links with farming where workers went to paddy fields in the night to keep an uninterrupted day.

The trade partners of Kerala Tourism attending the FITUR 2015 were Ananthara Hotels & Resort,



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Carnoustie Beach Resort, CGH Earth, Intersight Tours & Travels, Kumarakom Lake Resort and Pioneer Personalized Holidays.

The tens of thousands of visitors streaming to the Kerala pavilion were also treated to Mohiniyattom performance, the classical dance of Kerala, on all days of the tourism trade fair.

Kerala Tourism, which is aiming to attract travellers from many new and emerging markets this year, had received 10,200 tourists from Spain in 2013.

FITUR 2015, which concluded on February 1 had a participation of nearly 10,000 travel industry entities from as many as 165 countries and drew about 200,000 visitors.

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