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Kerala Tourism's Barrier-Free Tourism Project recently won global recognition with the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) making a special mention of the south Indian State as an 'Emerging Global Destination' in the Accessible Destination Awards 2019.

At the awards ceremony in Madrid, P Bala Kiran IAS, Director, Kerala Tourism received the conferment from Zurab Pololikashvili, Secretary-General, UNWTO. The recognition was for the implementation of the project in the central Kerala district of Thrissur, which thus became India's only destination to win the honour.

The award is instituted by World Tourism Organization and ONCE Foundation that works for people with disabilities. The awards at the Spanish capital were given away as part of FITUR Trade Fair, which is a meeting point of tourism professionals the world over and the second-biggest global gathering of travel and tourism professionals.

It was in March last year that Kerala Tourism launched the Barrier-Free Project with the view of making 120 destinations across the State 'disabled-friendly'.

Thrissur, also known as the cultural capital of Kerala, is one of the first few destinations in the State to have created necessary infrastructure for the purpose in all major destinations. This project, a role model for the entire State, was conceptualized by using funds under 'Barrier-free Tourism' and the 'Green Carpet' Scheme.



Kadakampally Surendran, Kerala Tourism Minister, hailing the achievement, noted that the State has so far implemented the disabled-friendly project in 80 travel destinations, of which eight are in Thrissur. "We deserve this honour. It will enhance Kerala's reputation as a global tourist destination," he added.

Rani George IAS, Secretary, Kerala Tourism said the UNWTO recognition is a result of Kerala's keenness to meet the new-age international requirements. "For this, we receive immense support from private players as well," she noted. Kerala has been the first State to work as per the UNWTO guidelines on making tourist destinations disabled-friendly.

Bala Kiran said Kerala Tourism is working towards making all its travel destinations disabled-friendly. "The UNWTO award is an incentive for us to meet the target," he added.

The work in Thrissur district has been completed on the beaches of Azhikkode and Snehatheeram, the hill destination of Vilangankunnu and the scenic dams at Poomala and

Vazhani. Under the ongoing major development projects, the work is being implemented at Chavakkad Beach, Peechi and Thumboormoozhi.

The facilities include ramps, accessible toilets, lactation rooms, Braille pamphlets, signage, touch-screen kiosks, audio and sign aids, wheelchairs and walking aids. They have been made available in major tourist destinations in the district.

Tactile path for the visually-challenged were created for the first time in Kerala at Azhikkode and Snehatheeram, while a wheelchair-accessible sunset viewpoint is the highlight of Vilangankunnu. There is ramp access to the boating area at Poomala, while Vazhani also became access-friendly. As part of the ongoing project, the famous Thumboormoozhi hanging bridge and viewpoints will soon be made disabled-friendly.

Allotted Rs. 73.5 lakh by the Department of Tourism, the work for the project was executed by District Tourism Promotion Council through Kerala State Nirmithi Kendra. **DK**

