

DESTINATION KERALA MAGAZINE

BASKING IN POSITIVITY, KERALA TOURISM SURGES FORWARD

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all this the golden period of Kerala Tourism. Yes, the devastating floods that hit the State in 2018 lessened its charm for sometime but *God's Own Country* has bounced back in an incredible way, once again proving its unmatched resilience. The credit of leading this magnificent comeback must go to Kadakampally Surendran, the soft-spoken State Tourism Minister, and his seasoned team at the Department of Tourism, who had never let the tourism industry

down even in the face of unprecedented adversity. While the State Government had decided to limit its spending on events on account of the floods in August 2018, Kerala Tourism extended full support for conducting Kerala Travel Mart (KTM) in 2018 in September. In fact, that had helped significantly in sending a message across the globe that Kerala was safe and open for tourism.

Now, latest statistics shows Kerala Tourism has registered an impressive growth rate of 14.81 per cent in the second quarter of the current year as against the figures of the corresponding period in 2018. There was an increase of 6,39,271 tourists (both domestic and foreign) during April-June this year as compared to the corresponding period in the

previous year. In the first quarter (Jan-Mar), the total number of tourist arrivals was 46,12,937 as compared to 43,18,406 during the same period in 2018.

The number of domestic tourists during the second quarter of 2019 increased to 47,73,739 as compared to the figure of 41,49,122 during the same period a year earlier, clocking a healthy 15.05 per cent growth rate.

After a span of nearly 10 months (May 2018 - March 2019 except December 2018), Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) showed a positive growth rate. Kerala Tourism bucked the negative trend in FTAs in the aftermath of last year's calamitous floods, attracting 1,82,320 visitors from abroad in the second quarter of 2019 - a growth rate of 8.74 per cent as compared to the same period in

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Kerala was fast evolving into an all-season tourism destination of late, feverishly pushing monsoon season as an experiential product, when the same monsoon proved a party pooper with unprecedented rains causing havoc all over the State. But the vibrant tourism industry of the State, which enjoys the backing of an equally supportive and visionary government, was in no mood to throw up their hands in frustration. With unmatched synergy and verve they took measures to regain tourists' confidence. Here is the story of Kerala Tourism which not only managed to stand on its feet post floods, but gallop and reclaim its high pedestal

MINISTER KADAKAMPALLY SURENDRAN ALONG WITH KERALA TOURISM DIRECTOR P BALA KIRAN IAS RECEIVING THE PACIFIC ASIA TRAVEL ASSOCIATION (PATA) GOLD AWARDS IN KAZAKHSTAN IN THE PRESENCE OF DR. MARIO HARDY, CEO, PATA

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showed negative trends till the end of first quarter (January-March) of 2019. "This negative trend has now been reversed because of sustained efforts by Kerala Tourism to allay apprehensions of visitors from abroad about the impact of the catastrophic floods," he added.

The Minister said the State Government intends to increase the share of contribution of the tourism sector in Kerala's GDP from 12 per cent to 15 per cent. According to him, the government was making all efforts to regain the business in MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions) tourism the State has lost due to a wrong policy of the previous UDF Government.

"The flawed liquor policy of the previous government saw our neighbouring destinations, including Sri Lanka, taking away the MICE business from us. Though the present LDF Government brought about drastic changes in the State's tourism policy, we are yet to overcome completely from the considerable fall in MICE business and achieve the expected results. However, efforts are

still on to make a big leap forward in MICE tourism and the upcoming Kerala Travel Mart (KTM) 2020 will be a perfect platform to further regain the business the State has lost."

BRAND-BUILDING MISSION

Kerala Tourism is now on a brand-building mission to make the State one of the most sought-after global destinations. Though Kerala has firmly positioned itself on the world tourism map, there are still potential markets to be tapped.

"One of the biggest challenges Kerala is facing in the tourism sector is that we have to compete globally. The trade is facing tough competition from neighbouring countries such as Sri Lanka and Maldives. We need to explore new markets. As part of this, Kerala Tourism has decided to hard-sell the brand in non-English speaking countries, where people have little awareness about Kerala's unique tourism products, especially Ayurveda," he added.

On a national perspective, according to Minister Surendran, collective efforts are required to overcome the

the previous year. Overall, there was an increase of 14,654 international tourists during April-June 2019.

Speaking to *Destination Kerala*, Kadakampally Surendran said the positive growth rate in tourist arrivals from both inside the country and outside was achieved by a string of measures the State government had initiated swiftly to contain the damage caused by the floods to the tourism infrastructure of the State.

"We also launched an aggressive marketing campaign in both domestic and foreign markets to bolster our presence in the highly competitive tourism marketplace. The results are now there for everyone to see," the Minister said.

The domestic tourist footfalls in Kerala got back to the normal level by the end of 2018 itself, but FTAs



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COVER STORY / Kerala Tourism



KERALA TO ISSUE GUIDELINES, BIS CERTIFICATION FOR ADVENTURE TOURISM

P. BALA KIRAN IAS

Kerala Tourism will be laying guidelines and implementing a certification scheme from Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) to promote a more systematic approach and safety in the field of adventure tourism. According to P. Bala Kiran IAS, Director, Kerala Tourism, the procedural guidelines for registration are under consideration of the State government and would come into effect soon. This is for the first time in the country that BIS is joining hands with a State tourism board to draft guidelines to regulate adventure tourism.

"The aim is to make the adventure tourism players comply with safety and security standards. As per the new guidelines, all adventure activity providers will need to follow the guidelines and register with the Department of Tourism for running business for a period of two years. Moreover, qualified instructors and employees must be appointed at every such facility," Bala Kiran said.

KERALA TOURISM FB GETS 3.48 MN LIKES

Driven by brand new content and fascinating visuals, the user-friendly, interactive and information-laden Facebook page of Kerala Tourism has hit a new high, emerging as the most-followed tourism page in South Asia, surpassing tourism boards of Malaysia, Singapore and Thailand by a fair margin. The number of 'likes' on Kerala Tourism's Facebook page has tripled in the

past two years, touching a figure of 34,81,239, thus outdoing Tourism Malaysia (3.3 million likes), Visit Singapore (3.2 million) and Amazing Thailand (2.6 million likes). Internationally, now only three countries - Australia (8.3 million likes), Go USA (6.7 million) and Visit Dubai (6.7 million) - are ahead of Kerala. "It is to be noted that we are just a State tourism board and not a Regional or National Tourism Organisation (RTO/NTO)," he said.

When compared to the portals of other Departments of Tourism in the country, Kerala retains the number one position by a huge margin, by Gujarat (13,36,836), Madhya Pradesh (11,98,165), Rajasthan (5,88,453), Uttarakhand (4,94,992) and Odisha (2,38,143).

Bala Kiran said: "Our aim is to become the best Facebook page in the world by 2021. The burgeoning popularity of our user-friendly Facebook page has been powered by rich content and influencer programmes like Kerala Blog Express, now in its sixth edition, to tap into the power of the social media influencer."

Efforts are also being made for posting updates in seven Indian languages to cater to the domestic audience. "Social media has helped us connect with all segments of the population. Through a sound content strategy based on engagement data analysis, we have been able to fine-tune our content for better reach and create specific content for audiences with specific interests," he added.

KERALA TOURISM STATISTICS (Jan - Jun, 2019)

Domestic Tourist Arrivals: 89,64,207

Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs): 6,04,789

FTAs month wise

	2018	2019
April	85,491	86,693
May	49,952	85,427
June	45,675	36,746



Rupesh Kumar K
State Coordinator
Kerala RTI Mission

Initiative of Kerala's Responsible Tourism Mission (RTM) have never been a showcase activity. We have created our own model and always been working to ensure that tourism activities touch local people's lives meaningfully. The present distribution are the fruit of decade-long work and will impact for the changed to community-friendly tourism in Kerala. Currently, over 50,000 families enjoy the fruits of Responsible Tourism in the State as it provides livelihood to around 10,000 people (at least more than 45,000 people indirectly).

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TAPPING CHINESE MARKET IS KERALA TOURISM'S NEXT MISSION

RANI GEORGE IAS

Kerala Tourism has embarked on a new mission to attract more Chinese travellers to the State. It has joined hands with Welcome China, a government-accredited initiative that works to help travel and tourism sector engage meaningfully with China, and became the first Indian State to be partnered with the China Ready programme, which has already been conducted in 48 countries.

Efforts are on to design a marketing strategy to increase their foothold, said Rani George IAS, Secretary, Kerala Tourism. "It is important for the State to tap the strong China market which sends 150 million tourists across the world. For this, Kerala will do a sustained China Ready campaign with definite partnerships at G2G, B2B and B2C levels," she said.

Despite deep historical, cultural and continental connect, Kerala is still not a tourist destination frequented by Chinese travellers. "With the China Ready programme, we hope to get an opportunity to open avenues for not only cultural exchanges but also for tapping mutual economic benefits. Tapping the Chinese market will also boost the State's revenue from tourism substantially," she added.

Recently, Beijing-based Richard Matuzevich of the World Tourism Cities Federation, while in Kochi, commented that China's emerging class of young, educated and resource-rich travellers are passionate about

visiting countries, especially in East and South Asia, but India is yet to figure in their list of top eight destinations.

Making an overview of the current scenario, Rani George said though Kerala is firmly positioned on the world tourism map it is also faced with stiff competition from other States. "It is true that other States are emulating Kerala. We are facing aggressive competition from them," she said, exhorting industry to live up to the challenges. Noting that tourist preferences are shifting and people are increasingly looking forward to travelling as an experience, she said Kerala has proved to be a trendsetter in experiential tourism by promoting Responsible and Sustainable Tourism models.

Earlier this year, Rani George led a Kerala Tourism delegation to the United States and showcased the State's signature products before leading stakeholders of travel and tourism industry in four major cities – New Jersey, Chicago, Houston and Los Angeles. "Kerala might be a long-haul destination but its touristic charm has remained undiminished for travellers from America. The US was second among the top 10 source markets for foreign arrivals to the State in 2018," she said.

There has been a consistent increase in the number of US travellers visiting Kerala. In 2018, the number of tourists from the US was pegged at 96,522 compared to 75,773 in 2015.