

# TIMES OF INDIA

Can 'vims slayer' win tourists back? ...

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## Can 'virus slayer' win tourists back?

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**Kochi:** With the sordid realization that there would only be ciphers in their profit columns for an entire fiscal year, tourism industry has come up with a Kerala Unlocked campaign banking on the many positives of Kerala, including the widely-acclaimed Covid management strategies that hit global headlines.

Tourism Professionals Club, a non-profit organisation based in Kochi has launched a dedicated website called keralaunlocked.com to market the state to global tourism players in the post-lockdown period. The campaign would be unravelled in a phased manner with emphasis on confidence building measures and industry preparedness. In its initial phase, the campaign would be promoting inter-district travel in Kerala.

### ACCOUNTS FOR 12% OF GDP

Key numbers	2019	2018
Total visitors	1,95,74,004	1,67,01,068
Domestic	1,83,84,233	1,56,04,661
Foreign	11,89,771	10,96,407
Foreign exchange earnings	₹10,271Cr	₹8,764.46Cr
Total earnings	₹45,010.69Cr	₹36,258.01Cr



The decimation of the state's tourism industry on account of the lockdown necessitated by pandemic has thrown the future of around 12 lakh workers (2 lakh indirect) into deep uncertainties, with many untold stories of lost jobs, forced unpaid leave and businesses being wound up.

"We just want to be prepared when the industry opens up and at this stage we are not telling people to travel to Kerala. Our aim is to gain the confidence of the people and attention of the government to help

out an industry in the pits," said Ashok Swaroop, secretary, Tourism Professional's Club and coordinator of Kerala Unlocked campaign. The club has engaged the services of a professional agency and a PR firm to highlight the positive stories about Kerala.

"The acceptance Kerala gained as world leader in state response to the pandemic would definitely help us to have an edge. When everything opens up, we can encash it. Now, we want our hotels to be prepared for receiving guests,"

said Swaroop. The club estimates that between March and September the industry would have lost Rs 7,500 crore.

"This scenario was totally unexpected. We waited a lot, sent a lot of representations but nothing happened. We thought if we do not do any kind of promotion now, even after three months people will not prefer Kerala," says George Scaria, president of Tourism Professionals Club.

"When the government okays regular inbound travel, it will be searching for a destination and I am sure because of our campaign and the steps taken by the state, the first choice would be Kerala," said Swaroop. Scaria said in the months of June and July they would not asking any outsider to visit Kerala because it isn't safe. "When the situation improves, the brand Destination Kerala should be on the minds of people," he said.