

THE HINDU

Concern over protocol violations in tourism sector

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'Most tourism players have not registered ventures, thus escaping inspections'

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Even as tourism locales begin reopening in a phased manner from Monday, stakeholders have expressed concern at a section of tourism entrepreneurs being slack in adhering to the special operation procedures (SOPs) announced by the government to prevent the spread of the pandemic.

The concern is valid, especially since a sizeable share of tourism players have not registered their ventures, thus escaping the ambit of routine inspections by tourism and other agencies, said George Scaria, president, Tourism Professionals Club, a body that has been furthering the cause of accountability in the sector.

"This was especially true of many hotels and other properties, who, in their eagerness to earn revenue, overlooked violation of safety norms, ever since they reopened in June following lockdown relaxations. There were also reports of many



The Kuzhupilly beach in the suburbs of Kochi is among the ill-maintained waterfront locales that ought to be tidied up when beaches are reopened on November 1. ■ H. VIBHU

domestic tourists, mostly from other States, flouting the COVID-19 protocol and not reporting if they tested positive after staying in hotels," he added.

Under this circumstance, a group of tourism enthusiasts recently demanded that the Kerala Tourism constitute a monitoring committee to oversee the functioning of tourism enterprises.

District Tourism Promotion Councils (DTPCs) and tourism officials who were entrusted with ensuring adherence to the protocol must begin screening tourism ventures and guests who arrive, so that the renewed tourism activities do not in any way contribute to rise in COVID-19 cases. All this is a must to usher in confidence among well-meaning guests,

Mr. Scaria observed. He further demanded that the government roll out a long-term plan to retain the interest of foreign tourists in Kerala.

The Responsible Tourism Mission has, in the meantime, issued directions to rural tourism stakeholders to adhere to the physical distancing protocol, mandatory wearing of face masks, transparent face shields, and frequent sanitising, to ensure responsible travel during the pandemic. "For instance, we have told organisers of experiential tourism packages to dissuade tourists from partaking in manufacture of pottery and coir. But they can witness from close quarters artists and workers engaged in such activities. Online meetings were held with operators of homestays and other enterprises to apprise them of the need to ensure hygiene and sanitised environs," said K. Rupesh Kumar, State coordinator of the mission.

Hospitality and other tou-

rism ventures in locales like Kumarakom have begun getting enquiries, especially from tourists from north India who want to visit Kerala for a week and leave, to avoid quarantine, he added.

The Kerala Tourism has issued sector-specific norms, said sources in the Ernakulam DTPC. In this, officials ought to be deployed at entry points of tourism locales, equipped with thermal scanners and sanitisers. Details of visitors must be entered in a register.

In addition, the do's and don'ts of the COVID-19 protocol must be prominently displayed, while physical distancing must be ensured. Toilets and rest rooms ought to be fumigated and cleaned frequently, they said. DTPC-managed destinations are reopening in a phased manner.

A senior Kerala Tourism official said it would be tough to keep tabs on all private ventures with the existing manpower. "At best, we can report violations to the District Collector," he added.