

# NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

Dept trains eyes on local tourists for revival, set to release SOP

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## Dept trains eyes on local tourists for revival, set to release SOP

Adequate safety measures will be in place | Short vacations are expected to be new norm

TOBY ANTONY @Kochi

KEEN to make up for lost business, the Kerala Tourism is preparing a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to open tourism activities with adequate safety measures in place.

The hospitality sector is looking to attract tourists from within the state to the key destinations in the coming months with lockdown restrictions being eased in phases.

As the peak tourism season falls between September and March, Kerala has been a bit fortunate that the Covid pandemic hit the state during the lean season. A top official with Kerala Tourism told TNE that, given the existing travel restrictions, promotion activities targeting tourists from other states and overseas may not yield any result now.

"Immediately after the regulations on tourism activities are lifted, promotions will focus on attracting tourists within the state to a particular destination. We have a large crowd who prefer to travel to destinations in other states and abroad

every year. We can attract them to our destinations with adequate safety measures. The tourism department will soon come out with the SOP for the same," the official said.

Hotels and tourism event organisers are busy drawing up plans to turn the easing of restrictions to their advantage. Shrikant Wakharkar, general manager, Grand Hyatt, Kochi, said packages are being readied to ensure guests enjoy vacations with adequate safety.

"The trend we see for the immediate future is that guests would be travelling in their personal vehicles to nearby cities and opting for short vacations. To complement the stay, we have a host of in-house recreational activities, destination experiences and the popular Sunset Cruise on the Vembanad Lake. Another aspect in focus is Nattika, the luxury two-bedroom houseboat that guests can use during their stay," Wakharkar said.

Shruti Shibulal, CEO and director, Tamara Leisure Experiences Pvt Ltd, said all tourist locations, restaurants, hotels,

houseboats and transportation vendors should implement new health and hygiene protocols for the revival of tourism. Social distancing must continue as a norm and safety needs to be given due importance.

"The Kerala government can continue to support the tourism industry with strong marketing efforts to attract domestic travellers who will be pivotal in ensuring the survival of the tourism industry," she said.

The MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences and Exhibitions) tourism -- which was witnessing a steady growth until the lockdown -- will also be looking for a revival, with events like the Kerala Travel Mart (KTM) and the Kochi Muziris Biennale slated to be held in the latter part of the year.

Shruti said her company has events scheduled for late December and early January.

"One particularly large corporate event with 1,000 attend-

ees for two days, currently scheduled for September and one destination wedding with 700 persons in October remain in the pipeline," she added.

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