

INTERVIEW | P.A. MOHAMED RIYAS

# Kerala to be made a dream destination in four years

The pandemic-ravaged tourism sector has managed a turnaround with 5 districts recording highest ever footfalls

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*Kerala, a tropical paradise, consistently inspired both domestic and international travel buffs to explore its serene emerald-hued backwaters, exotic hill stations, sun-kissed beaches, exotic wildlife etc. But the pandemic, like everywhere, has dashed its efforts to bridge the gap between tourism and sustainability. Now the focus is back on Kerala, which was listed among the world's top 50 destinations to explore in 2022 by TIME magazine. In a freewheeling chat to The Hindu, Tourism Minister P.A. Mohamed Riyas spoke about the efforts by Kerala Tourism to be one of the segment leaders in South Asia. Excerpts:-*

**How arduous is the road to recovery for Kerala Tourism?**

Most of the popular destinations, including Kerala, have been fighting it hard to stage a full-scale comeback after COVID-19. The road to recovery was more challenging for Kerala as the pandemic hit the hopes of the State hardly a year after the State was ravaged by two back-to-back floods. However, it staged a strong comeback. In the first quarter of 2022, five districts in Kerala- Ernakulam, Thiru-

Thrissur and Wayanad- recorded the highest ever footfall in the history of these districts, mostly aided by domestic travellers. But it's true that we still have miles to go to be a segment leader in the country as well as South Asia.

**What are the main stumbling blocks faced by Kerala? Second, what are the new initiatives launched by the State to catapult Kerala to the global tourism limelight?**

track now. We hope we can achieve the target of two crore domestic tourists by next year. In terms of foreign travellers, although the skies opened up for cross-border travel, the international tourist inflow is yet to pick up. We have been holding a slew of campaigns on various international platforms to woo the foreigners back to Kerala, apart from launching a slew of new initiatives to attract tourists. The experiential tourism launched by the Responsible Tourism Mission could accost 1.15 lakhs travellers. It provides travel buffs a new experience by being a part of the rural and urban life of Kerala. It is a win-win concept for both tourists and the local community as it creates a symbiotic relationship between them.

**What about other initiatives like Caravan tourism**



**Domestic tourism is back on track now. We hope we can achieve the target of two crore domestic tourists by next year.**

State received wholehearted support from the industry. In less than a year, the State has received registration to operate 1,468 caravans and 151 caravan parks inside the State. This is expected to re-define the travel concept after the post-pandemic world where the appetite for safe holidaying is growing day by day. Al-

mote conscious travel, which encourages tourists to go relatively long trips, mingling with the local community and being a part of their daily life. This is also expected to reduce the pressure on the climate, ecology and culture of a region.

**What about cinema tourism, destination wedding and other initiatives launched by the Kerala Tourism**

Though the picturesque places in the State were depicted in a lot of movies, including Bollywood, an itinerary based on these locations has not been effectively tapped.

For instance, the 17th century historical Bekal Fort, located next to a beach and shaped like a giant keyhole, has played a pivotal role in portraying the emotions of Mani Ratnam's hit movie Bombay through the song

locations based on their appearance on the silver screen will offer a new avenue for the State. Further, the destination wedding campaign aimed at inspiring the travellers to choose the picture-perfect dreamy locales in Kerala to tie the knot peppered by heart-warming moments has yielded results in a short span of time. There are a lot of such initiatives for branding Kerala as a must-see dream destination.

**Road ahead?**

In just four years, Kerala will have evolved as a tourist locale which cannot be ignored by a budget traveller in South Asia. If there are no global happenings such as a pandemic, it is possible to make it a dream destination for travellers.

Over a dozen projects such as destination challenge, adventure tourism, water sports etc are on the