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**PRESS RELEASE**

**Kerala Tourism debut in Israel; participates in its Mediterranean Tourism Market**

- **Launches coffee table book on the Kochi Jews at Tel Aviv event**
- **Israel's Arkia Airlines to launch direct flight between Tel Aviv and Kochi**

**Kochi, Feb 15:** For the first time in its history, Kerala Tourism participated in the International Mediterranean Tourism Market (IMTM) in Tel Aviv, strongly foraying into the largely untapped Israeli market in a bid to substantially increase footfalls from the Middle East country and forge durable bonds with its tourism sector.

Tourism Director Shri P BalaKiran led the state delegation at the two-day IMTM 2019, the largest annual professional tourism fair of its kind in the Eastern Mediterranean and the official and only professional exhibition for the tourism trade market in Israel. The 25<sup>th</sup> edition of IMTM concluded yesterday.

On the occasion, Kerala Tourism launched a sleek and glossy coffee table book, a first-of-its-kind visual odyssey of the Jews who decided to make Kerala their home before several of the diasporic community going back to Israel, their fatherland.

The book was formally launched by Indian Ambassador to Israel Mr.PavanKapoor, who also visited the Kerala stall at the event.

Expressing happiness over Kerala Tourism's debut at the IMTM, Tourism Minister ShriKadakampallySurendran said it was an extremely successful outing for the state's tourism. "In the highly competitive global marketplace, we need to scout for new source markets abroad to attract tourists. Our participation in a prestigious event like IMTM will act as a trigger to meet that objective."

The minister said there is a direct flight from Tel Aviv, the second most populous city in Israel, to Delhi and Mumbai. "Now a new direct flight will be launched this September from Tel Aviv to Kochi by Arkia Israeli Airlines, which will be a major boost to tourism in India in general and Kerala in particular," he added.

Tourism Secretary Smt. Rani George said Kerala's participation in IMTM was part of an aggressive campaign of its tourism department to woo visitors from non-traditional markets. "We have already made strong presence in the Gulf countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia. Forging strong ties with Israel's tourism segment will open new vistas of expansion for Kerala Tourism in that region," she noted.

Kerala was visited by 15,339 Israeli tourists in 2018, a huge increase of 29% as compared to 11,892 in 2017 and 10,922 in 2016, while it registered a surge of over 15 per cent in terms of tourist arrival from that country during 2013-18.



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ShriBalaKiransaid the visit yielded extremely positive outcomes. “We held a series of discussions with various stakeholders of Israel’s tourism and hospitality industry, and it would pave the way for two-way visits from Kerala and Israel, he added.

He referred to Cochin as one of the oldest Jewish settlements on Asian soil, which had a much larger Jewish community than New York and surpassed it not only numerically, but also culturally. The Cochin Jewish community in 1792 had about 2,000 Jews and nine synagogues of considerable antiquity while New York had only 72 Jewish families and only one synagogue.

The book, aptly titled ‘**One Heart, Two Worlds – The Story of The Jews of Kochi**’, brings alive the riveting real life account of the Jewish community in Kochi, their hearts caught between a deep love for their adopted motherland, India, and a 2000-year-long yearning of the Jews across the world to return to their fatherland.

The book, published by Stark World Publishing, has been chronicled by scholar and historian Dr. K S Mathew and creative director and writer Yamini Nair. The incisively researched book dives deep into the life and times of the Jews of Cochin (Kochi), their distinctive faith, culture, history and dreams.

Featuring nearly 200 exquisitely shot and vintage images from private collections and museum archives, the book takes the reader on a visual journey of the rain-swept seashores of Kerala, past the olive-tree dotted landscapes in Israel, spanning quintessential Jewish ceremonies, vibrant celebrations, prayers, fasts, regional kosher recipes, Hebrew-Malayalam songbooks and symbolic interpretations, leading up to life during and after ‘Aliyah’ -- the immigration of diasporic Jews to Israel.

Elaborate narratives on the seven synagogues in Kochi - Paradesi, Kadavumbhagom, Paravur, Mala, Chendamangalam and the lost Thekkumbhagom synagogues in Ernakulam and Mattancherry – add layers of intricacy to the storyline.

“With less than 30 Jews remaining in Cochin today,” ShriBalaKiran said, “The need to document the Jewish diaspora, who coexisted peacefully in the socio-cultural fabric here and were welcomed by the Rajahs, acquires an immediacy and timeliness. This is what the book assures.”

**ENDS**