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**Press Release**

**Kerala Tourism receives PATA award for Thekkady**

*The eco location wins top emerging destination*

**Thiruvananthapuram, Nov3:** Kerala Tourism was conferred the inaugural Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) CEO Challenge 2015 award for the top emerging destination in the world.

Kerala Tourism Secretary Shri G Kamala Vardhana Rao received the award at a gala ceremony held at the World Travel Mart (WTM), London on November 2.

United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) Secretary General Mr Taleb Rifai was among those present at the award ceremony held on the opening day of the WTM, London.

The award is in recognition of the pioneering Responsible Tourism undertaken in Thekkady by Kerala Tourism. Thekkady won the Top Emerging Destination award in the category for two-tier/three-tier cities while Albay in the Philippines received the award for regions/states/provinces.

Kerala Tourism had earlier won the National Tourism Award for 2015 for its innovative Responsible Tourism project in Thekkady.

"The award has given us the opportunity to showcase the new tourism products and packages developed in Thekkady under the Responsible Tourism project to a global audience," said Shri Rao, who received the prize from PATA CEO Mario Hardy and TripAdvisor vice-president Martin Verdon-Roe.

"The Responsible Tourism Initiative of Kerala Tourism in Thekkady, implemented through Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies (KITTS), has developed new tourism products and packages in partnership with the local community and tourism industry," he added.

The awards were presented on the occasion of the PATA Aligned Advocacy dinner at the WTM, London, an event organised to focus on the importance of public-private partnership in the sustainable development of emerging destinations in the world.

Philippines Tourism Minister Mr Ramon Jimenez Jr. delivered the keynote address at the event. A host of global travel and tourism industry leaders were present on the occasion.

Under the PATA CEO Challenge 2015, global travel site TripAdvisor will work with Kerala Tourism to develop and create a 500,000-dollar digital marketing campaign to showcase Thekkady to a global audience. Kerala Tourism will also receive free stand space at the PATA Travel Mart 2016 in Jakarta during September 7-9 next year and invitation to the PATA Annual Summit in Guam, United States in May 2016.

Dr. Rajashree Ajith, Director, KITTS and Vice President of the Affiliate Members of United Nations World Tourism Organisation in Asia Pacific Region was also present during the award ceremony.