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Kerala Tourism is launching the pioneering Malanad-Malabar River Cruise project next week, rolling the first of the 11 types of boat-rides that provide individual thematic experiences and attracts tourists to the state's less-explored areas.

The inaugural cruise boat will enter the waters on February 15 as part of the innovative project that aims to brighten the waterways in the northern districts of Kannur and Kasaragod.

The first service will be on the route linking Parassinikkadavu and Pazhayangadi. The project will also help showcase the Malabar region's culture, rich with local legends and folk arts. The endeavour envisages 48 boat terminals and jetties along seven rivers across the districts of Kannur and Kasaragod.

The work on two terminals is over. Upholding the principles of Responsible Tourism, the project also ensures the participation of the local population. "It guarantees a better livelihood to the people around. They include the fisher folk, farmers, drivers of cabs and auto-rickshaws, handicraft workers and handloom labourers," said Tourism Minister Kadakampally Surendran.. KTDC will run the boats, six of which are being manufactured, in the first phase, by the Kerala Shipping and Inland Navigation

Corporation.

The project is being implemented by the governments Inland Navigation Department and state-owned KEL, with T V Madhukumaras the architect. Principal Secretary of Kerala Tourism, Rani George said the state-of-the-art boat terminals at Parassinikkadavu and Pazhayangadi in Kannur district have been completed at a cost of Rs 7.5 crore. "Both the government and private parties would run the cruises," she said. "As for the rest of the project, 90 per cent of the work on the terminals and jetties is complete. The cruise project had, in September 2018, been sanctioned Rs 80.37 under the Swadesh Darshan scheme that promotes rural tourism circuits." Kerala Tourism Director P Bala Kiran said the developmental work was fast progressing under the scheme.

"The Malanad-Malabar project will get world-class cruise packages once the Swadesh Darshan enters its second phase," he said. The cruise project is being carried out along the rivers of Mayyazhi, Valapatnam, Ancharakkandi, Kuppam, Perumba, Kavvayi, Thejaswini and Chandragiri rivers besides the sprawling Valiyapar-amaba backwaters. Not limiting to just trips down these waterways, the concept features cruises based on the varied themes of North Malabar culture.

For instance, the Mayyazhi river cruise will give the tourist an experience of Kalarippayattu martial art.