

THE HINDU

Now, take a virtual tour of water lily fields in Kottayam

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Tourism authorities filming pink blooms in backwater villages to ensure people around the world connect to the destinations

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The pink vista that covers the backwater villages of Kottayam every monsoon is now going online. With just a few weeks left for the water lily blooms to fade, tourism authorities are now capturing the flowers in peak season for online tours. The initiative is part of the efforts by the authorities to make sure that people around the world are connected to these destinations despite the existing travel restrictions.

As part of it, agencies including the India Tourism, Kerala Tourism and the Malarikkal Tourism Society have filmed guided tours of

the flowering locations and other activities in the region. These videos will be streamed online through official websites of these agencies over the coming days.

e-festival

Plans are also afoot to host an e-festival of water lily along the lines of the online Onam celebrations organised by the Kerala Tourism last month.

"At this moment, the mode is plain survival. But, in the longer run, a better framework is needed to ensure local cooperation to draw more visitors to these destinations," said an official associated with the project.



Pink carpet: Kottayam's water lily fields became a famous attraction during the previous monsoon. ■ VISHNU PRATHAP

Besides the flowers, the tourism departments are shooting videos on the village life experience and backwater tourism potentials of the region covering Kumarakom, Vaikom, Muringapuzha and

Amballur.

The water lily fields of Kottayam, especially Malarikkal, became one of the most-photographed tourist attractions of Kerala during the previous monsoon.

These locations were expecting a jump in tourist arrivals when the raging COVID-19 made the destination out of bounds for visitors.

Still hopeful

Only a couple of weeks are left for these flowers to be replaced with paddy saplings. "Depending on the government plans to lift the restrictions from September 21, we are looking to bring in a limited number of tourists through the Pazhukkanla water route," said K. Anil Kumar, convener, Meenachil-Meenanthara-Kodoor river re-linking programme. As long as there were flowers in bloom, the

Malarikkal tourism society planned to keep making videos to share through its social media page, he added.

Earnings of ₹12 lakh

As per estimates, around 80,000 people visited Malarikkal during the flowering season last year and the 120 boat rowers, who ferried these visitors, together earned ₹12 lakh. The State government too announced plans to organise a pink water lily festival on the lines of the Tulip Festival in Amsterdam and identified 15 locations for tourism promotion. However, tourists have not arrived since then.