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The exponentially increasing COVID-19 cases continue to badly affect the tourism and hospitality industry. The first to be comprehensively affected, the sector is also expected to be the last to revive, owing to the nature of the pandemic.

With no hope of international tourists arriving anytime soon, travel and tourism bodies on the state have leaned towards domestic and local tourism—identifying unexplored places in the state, encouraging and generating interest in the same among Malayalis and offering the same experiences at lower rates—thereby sustaining the distressed sector.

‘Keralam Kaanal’ is one such initiative by the Association of Tourism and Trade Organisation of India (ATTOI), solely focused on Malayalis in the state to restart tourism.

“There are luxury hotels, houseboats and destinations that Malayalis are unaware of. Under this scheme, hotels offer competitive and considerably lower rates. These uncharted gems will be marketed via local people. The website malayalamaalappuram.com in itself is in Malayalam. We have around 80 hotels and 20 agents to choose from. Earlier, several of these resorts fell under the expensive leisure travel and primarily catered to foreign tourists. With ‘Keralam Kaanal’, we intend to change it and provide a tailor-made experience and affordable price to our people,” said P V Manu, secretary, ATTOI.

Manu highlighted that the demand for the initiative will be high owing to the considerable number of people who’re stranded in their houses, yearning to travel. The scheme aims to lure newly-married couples, he added.

While the scheme is readied and everything is in place, ATTOI awaits the government’s nod to kickstart the same.

“Initially, the plan was to open these tourist destinations by July. However, the increasing number of Covid cases is a damper. Regardless, we prefer commissioning marketing only if the state has arrived at a stable situation to handle cases. else the chances of an uncontrollable community spread are high,” he said.

Rupesh Kumar, state co-ordinator, Responsible Tourism Mission, stressed the importance of global tourism. “Once the pandemic and the number of cases have subsided, we will commence projects such as ‘Responsibility Keral with Your Family’ for Keralites and Learning Experiences as part of responsible tourism at discounted rates. We require tourism programmes that allow an extended period of stay unlike mass tourism destinations like beaches. Learning Experiences will include culinary adventures, inhibiting art and culture forms, martial arts and handicrafts and souvenir making. These experiences will be offered for a duration of three months to one year. Simultaneously, unique unexplored destinations will be in the spotlight,” he explained.

The state coordinator acknowledged that the pandemic and subsequent lockdown saw a loss of Rs 65.15 crore across around 10,000 registered RT units. This is after the RT units saw a revenue of Rs 26 crore in the 2019-20 financial year.

Bala Kiran, director of Kerala Tourism, said that the state now has adopted a wait and watch policy on opening tourist destinations or marketing new schemes for domestic tourists. “Currently, we’re getting ready with creative for the marketing campaigns, so when the tourism season is officially open, we can begin campaigning,” he said.

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