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POST COVID, KERALA TOURISM IS ALL SET TO GO LOCAL

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POST COVID, KERALA TOURISM IS ALL SET TO GO LOCAL

Initiatives like 'Keralam Kaanam' solely focus on local travel buffs in the state

● Deena Theresa

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 in 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 Kaanam' is one such initiative by the Association of Tourism and Trade Organisation of India (ATTOI). It solely focuses on Malayalis in the state to restart tourism.

"There are luxury hotels, houseboats and destinations that Malayalis are unaware. Under this scheme, hotels offer competitive and considerably lower rates. These uncharted gems will be marketed via local people. The website malayaliyathra.com in itself is in Malayalam. We have around 80 hotels and 23 agents to choose from. Earlier, several of these resorts fell under the expensive leisure travel and primarily catered to foreign tourists. With 'Keralam Kaanam', 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 strapped in their houses, yearning to travel. The scheme also 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 dampener. Regardless, we prefer commencing 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 coordinator, Responsible Tourism Mission, stressed the importance of regional tourism. "Once the pandemic and the number of cases have subsided, we will commence projects such as 'Experience Kerala 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, imbibing art and culture forms, martial arts and handicrafts and souvenir making. These experiences will be offered for a duration of from 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 ₹6.15 crore across around 18,000 registered RT units. This is after the RT units saw a revenue of ₹28 crore in

the 2019-20 financial year.

But, 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 creatives for the marketing campaigns, so when the tourism season is officially open, we can begin campaigning," he said.



LOCKDOWN BLUES

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