Responsible Tourism keeps date with the new normal

More than 1,000 storytelling videos of skills and village life will go online soon

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Faced with a loss of ₹8.5 crore from tourism and massive cancellation of tour packages for the impending tourist season owing to COVID-19, stakeholders in the State’s much acclaimed Responsible Tourism (RT) sector are adapting in different ways to cater to the new normal.

Over 1,000 of the 38,000 direct beneficiaries from the sector, most of them handicraft artisans and artists, have recorded work-from-home storytelling videos of their skills and village-life experience and are in the process of posting them online. They are available in different languages, including Malayalam, Hindi, English, and French, says K. Rupesh Kumar, Coordinator of Kerala’s RT Mission.

Longer stay

“The videos bring to life activities such as carving of handicraft items, pottery making, old art forms, farming, cooking, folklore, and regional festivals. These village-life experiences are slowly finding resonance across the globe and was noted in the World Travel Mart (WTM). Simultaneously, the mission is working alongside other tourism stakeholders to increase the length of stay of guests visiting Kerala for rural and experiential tourism, which is part and parcel of RT initiatives,” he added. Mr. Rupesh Kumar speaks of how emphasis has been laid on five factors — nature learning, handicrafts, art and martial art forms, ethnic cuisine, and cultural discovery — to realise this.

“Packages ranging from a fortnight to a year are in the process of being rolled out. Research-minded guests can thus stay put for an extended duration. Many of them have been showcased for foreign and domestic tour operators who have participated in webinars. There have been over 180 enquiries in the aftermath. We are also frequently hosting intra-group webinars to keep alive stakeholder interest in RT initiatives and to boost their confidence during these testing times,” he says. An example of the crisis faced by grassroots players is the slump in demand for braided coconut leaves for use as roof of resorts and other properties. The proceeds from its sale plummeted from ₹1.25 crore in 2019 to ₹6 lakh this year, it is learnt.

Global acclaim

The mission has won numerous global awards for the grass-roots level initiatives to improve the lot of the beneficiaries. There are about 58,000 indirect beneficiaries too. Kerala has a total of 18,000 RT units, which comprise mainly women members who are engaged in cultivating vegetables and rearing poultry.

Their income by selling these produce to star hotels in tourism locales is hit by almost nil arrival of tourists following the pandemic. The worldwide RT movement aims at minimising negative economic, environmental, and social impacts of tourism while enabling greater economic benefit and well-being of local communities.