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Press Release

Thekkady Wins World's Top Emerging Destination Award

Kerala's kaleidoscopic destination awarded PATA CEO Challenge 2015

Thiruvananthapuram, Oct 21: Thekkady, Kerala's iconic attraction known for its jaw dropping landscape splattered with rolling hills, dense forests and spice plantations, has been named the world's top emerging destination.

Thekkady won the inaugural Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) CEO Challenge 2015 along with Albay in the Philippines. The destination in 'God's Own Country', which is home to the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary, bagged the Top Destination award in the second and third-tier cities category, the only category for cities.

Albay received the honour in the category for regions, states and provinces. The award, instituted by PATA, was announced in Bangkok today. Thekkady and Albay beat a large number of destinations from around the world to win the award.

The PATA CEO Challenge is aimed at utilising the 500,000-dollar award purse to develop and create a digital marketing campaign to showcase the destination to a global audience. Leading global travel site TripAdvisor, the PATA CEO Challenge 2015 partner, will provide its expertise to developing the campaign.

"It is a huge honour to be named world's top destination. It is a proud moment for our state," said Kerala Tourism Minister Shri A P Anilkumar.

"The award will only increase our commitment to work further towards the growth of tourism in Kerala and development of our communities and the livelihoods of our people while preserving our environment," Shri Anilkumar said.

The award will be presented at a gala ceremony on the occasion of the PATA Aligned Advocacy dinner in London on November 2, the opening day of the World Travel Mart in the British capital. A host of travel and tourism industry leaders will be present at the event where United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) Secretary General Mr Taleb Rifai is scheduled to be the guest of honour.

"The top global tourism award is recognition of our pioneering efforts in creating a harmony between our distinguished visitors and our nature-endowed destinations," said Kerala Tourism Secretary Shri G Kamala Vardhana Rao.

"While we develop our destinations like Thekkady with new tourism products to present a once-in-lifetime experience to the discerning global travellers, we also have to create a viable technological model for disseminating information worldwide," Shri Rao added.



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Kerala Tourism Director Shri P I Sheik Pareeth said the award was the result of a fruitful partnership public-private partnership, involving the local communities. "Our new products like Village Life Experience will firmly establish our state as a global tourism leader," Shri Pareeth added.

Thekkady, one of the few places in the world to easily spot a wild elephant, is one of the destinations in the state developed by Kerala Tourism as a model of Responsible Tourism. Situated on the banks of the Periyar lake, Thekkady is one of the leading wildlife destinations in the country. Besides the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary, famous for its dense evergreen tropical forests and savannah grasslands, the destination is home to tiger, sambar, lion-tailed macaque and nilgiri langurs. The Department of Tourism-run Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies (KITTS) is the nodal agency for Responsible Tourism drive in Thekkady.

PATA CEO Mario Hardy praised the winners as "most authentic, culturally diverse and innovative". "It was difficult to choose only two winners, as we received some excellent submissions from destinations both near and far," he said.

A dedicated team at TripAdvisor will work with Thekkady to create marketing campaigns designed to ensure effective utilisation of the digital environment for encouraging travellers to visit the destination.

"We are very pleased to be supporting the two winning destinations, which both have fantastic tourism offerings that we will now work together on to showcase their story to the world," said TripAdvisor vice president, Global Display Sales, Mr Martin Verdon-Roe.

PATA CEO Challenge 2015 aims to promote and enhance the number of visitors to emerging destinations and enhance tourism development in a sustainable manner.

Kerala Tourism will receive free stand space at the PATA Travel Mart 2016 in Jakarta during September 7-9 next year and invitation to the PATA Annual Summit in Guam, United States in May 2016.

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