

# Tourism sector upbeat about resuming services

To ensure adherence to COVID-19 protocol

JOHN L. PAUL  
KOCHI

Tourism and related stakeholders in central Kerala have wholeheartedly welcomed the State government's decision to reopen tourism locales in a phased manner from Monday, especially since guests from north India are expected to turn up in good numbers during the Pooja holidays.

Operators of homestays and houseboats were particularly delighted at the decision permitting resumption of tourism activities from the day, while others are willing to wait a fortnight more, till November 1, when beaches will be opened to tourists.

The government has entrusted deputy directors of Kerala Tourism in each district and District Tourism Promotion Council (DTPC) secretaries with ensuring that all stakeholders, including guests, adhere to the COVID-19 protocol.

## Right time

"The government's decision to reopen the sector has come at the right time, since small and medium players in the sector were severely hit by the pandemic-induced stalemate. On their part, tourism entrepreneurs must ready their infrastructure and manpower to receive guests," said S. Vijayakumar, Secretary of Ernakulam DTPC.

The permission to oper-



The COVID-19 crisis has left the tourist boat sector in the lurch. Around 100 such boats that operated from the Marine Drive in Kochi, including KSINC's Nefertiti (seen in the picture), have been idling since March. • H. VIBHU

ate backwater cruises will help tourist boat operators, especially at Marine Drive here. They are permitted to carry guests numbering half the seating capacity of each boat. All boats must be disinfected and frequently sanitised. The DTPC's tour packages too will resume in tandem with the tourism relaxations. Bookings can be made online or at the tourism counter at Durbar Hall Ground. Tour desks would shortly be opened at Kochi metro's Aluva, Edappally and Ernakulam Junction stations, he added.

The operators of 1,200 houseboats, of which around 800 have licence issued by the Ports Department, are eagerly awaiting the resumption of operations. "A bulk of houseboats

operate in Alappuzha, followed by around 200 in Kumarakom. We have communicated to all industry stakeholders to strictly adhere to COVID-19 protocol, especially in ensuring hygiene of vessels and landing points. The health of guests and also of the local community with whom the houseboat sector is closely linked, will be accorded priority. Common check-in spots have been planned to enable proper screening of guests," said Jobin G. Akkarakalam, vice president of Kerala Houseboat Owners Federation.

He welcomed the government's decision to extend loan at discounted interest and grant-in-aid in the ₹80,000 to ₹1.20 lakh range to houseboats.