Tourist arrivals: Malabar’s contribution yet to catch up

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Thiruvananthapuram: Though Kerala Tourism under the LDF government had vowed to shift its focus to Malabar region and chalked out numerous projects ‘to tap the huge potential’, the 2019 statistics on tourism arrival has revealed that six districts in the region contributed a meagre 6.45% of total foreign tourist arrival and 26.74% in case of domestic footfall.

However, the industry in the region can still have hopes as all these districts – Kasargod, Kannur, Wayanad, Kozhikode, Malappuram and Palakkad – have shown steady growth, though the number is comparatively small. Besides, out of the increase of 27.8 lakh domestic tourists compared to 2018, Wayanad (2.55 lakh) and Kozhikode (2.52 lakh) districts are the gainers behind Ernakulam (6.13 lakh), Idukki (5.62 lakh) and Thiruvananthapuram (3.25 lakh).

The department was aware of the Herculean task to lure tourists, especially foreigners, to Malabar; where six districts together had contributed just 4.71% of the total foreign tourist arrival and 25.5% of domestic arrival in 2016. The statistics were also showing a decrease in foreign tourist arrivals in all northern districts except in Kozhikode and Palakkad, when the LDF took over.

As per the new tourism policy of the state formulated under the government, the stress was on taking away the increasing pressure on natural resources at destinations in central and southern Kerala and to increase tourist arrivals by shifting focus to Malabar region. The government even decided to prepare an investment plan centered on Kannur International Airport which provided the region the much-required air connectivity and high hopes.

Among the projects launched over the last four years included the ambitious Malanad Malabar Cruise Tourism Project, the largest tourism project ever in northern Kerala with a total estimate of Rs325 crore, ropeway connecting Muzhappilangadu and Dharmadam Thiruthu and Thalassery Heritage Project.

But a significant leap in tourism is still eluding Malabar, due to lack of adequate accommodation facilities including five-star hotels, opine the stakeholders in the industry. Several major destinations in the state like Kovalam, Kumarakom and Thekkady were developed after five-star hotel groups came there and did marketing through global chains, they point out.

As per the 2019 statistics released by the department recently, Malappuram remained top in the region by receiving 25,687 foreign tourists against 17,810 in 2018, thus registering 45.92% growth. In terms of growth Kasaragod was even better with 76.35% increase (from 4,122 to 7,289) and overtook Kannur which received 6,852 foreigners in 2019 against 5,763 in 2018.