

KERALA TOURISM TRENDS



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GENERAL

Tourist arrival register 16 percent hike

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

The period January to February of this year showed excellent growth rate in tourist arrival compared to the same period last year. According to statistics available with the tourism officials of the state, Kerala witnessed a growth of 16.3% in tourist arrivals, during the first five months of the current year. This growth is much above the all India growth of 9 percent.

According to the Secretary for Tourism, Mr. T. Balakrishnan, about 40,000 foreign travellers started visiting the state, starting in January this year, as compared to 29,000 last year. A marginal increase was also registered in the arrival of domestic tourists during the same period. This trend, despite the fallouts like war in Iraq and the outbreak of SARS, is really a morale booster for Kerala Tourism, and the trend is expected to continue during the lean season also.

Dutch and the Russians to kick-off new season.

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

The chartered flights bringing foreign nationals to Kerala will have up market tourists from Russia and Netherlands to mark the opening of this year's tourist season. The news has already buoyed up the mood of tourist facilitators in the prime tourist locations of Kerala, especially the arrival news of Russian tourists, who spend more. Tour operators from Russia and Netherlands have already visited various tourist attractions and hotels, and had asked the local tour operators to be equipped with essential language skills to interact, especially with Russian tourists.

Around 230 Russian tourists in the age group of 35 to 40 years will touch down in the first week of October, while the Dutch are expected to arrive in the first week of November. Putevie Sovety and SITA Travels will take care of the Russian tourists, and the Dutch will be looked after by Thomas Cook and TUI, one of the biggest tour operators in Europe. Both groups will stay in Kerala for two weeks and the chartered flights will be in operation till the end of May.

Renovation of roads in tourist centres

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

A high level committee meeting chaired by the Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas and the Minister for Public Works, Dr. M. K. Muneer gave the go ahead for renovation of roads in various tourism centres of Kerala. The project will be carried out with the financial assistance of National Bank for Agriculture And Rural Development (NABARD).

The Department of Tourism has given Rs. 4.5 million to the Department of Public Works, towards the construction of Adoor- Sabarimala by-pass road, which is to be completed at an expense of Rs. 14.9 million. Other works to follow include, the construction of model roads in the cities of Kochi, Kozhikode and Thiruvananthapuram. Draft of model roads for the towns of Kollam and Thrissur are getting ready.

The renovation work of the 34 km Chalakudy-Vazhachal road is progressing. Besides the Nerumara-Nelliyampathy road, being constructed at an expense of Rs. 250 million, the renovation work of Nenmara-Pothundy road will be completed by the Tourism Department.

The Rs. 59 million Moolamattom-Ulupunni-Kottamala road will be linked to the upcoming hill station at Vagamon. The Government recently gave sanction to the Kuttikanam-Vagamon and Upputhara-Vagamon

road projects, which would incur an expense of Rs. 50 million and Rs. 30 million respectively.

Luxury yacht from Oberoi Group

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

A luxury yacht is getting ready to grace the backwaters of Kerala called M. V. Vrinda, the yacht is being introduced by Oberoi Hotels and Resorts and will become operational in November, this year. As claimed by the Oberoi officials, the luxury yacht is the first of its kind to be introduced in India, with eight air-conditioned cabins, with accommodation for two in each cabin. This effort is just one among the many by the Oberoi Group in order to tap the maximum tourism potential existing in Kerala.

Five Thousand tourism clubs in three years

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

Inaugurating a seminar held in Thrissur recently on 'Tourism development and job sector' the Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas said that about 5000 tourism clubs will be launched in Plus Two schools and colleges in the state in three year's time. Around 1400 clubs have already been started with the remaining to come up in the next three years.

Invitation for Qualification for Management of Six Tourist Facilities

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

The Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala has invited applications from reputed hotels / resort operators and other interested parties, in accordance with the Request for Qualification (RFQ) Document, in order to shortlist competent parties who could subsequently bid for the Department of Tourism Tourist Facilities, which would be given on long term concession on Develop, Operate, and Transfer (DOT) basis. The Department of Tourism Tourist Facilities being offered are Yatri Nivas at Kondotty, Thirunelly and Mannarkkad, Tourist Complexes at Guruvayoor and Kalady and Wayside Amenity at Adoor. The RFQ Document containing the project profile, instructions to applicants and criteria for evaluation may be obtained from the office of Director, Department of Tourism, Park View, Thiruvananthapuram 695 033, and Kerala. Cost of RFQ Document is Rs.2200/- and the last date of submission is 17th August 2003.

Meanwhile the Tourism Minister, Prof. K.V. Thomas has announced in the Assembly that preference will be given to local self government organizations and co-operatives if they come forward to take up the management of tourism facilities.

Users fee at Karipur Airport withdrawn

(Kerala Kaumudi, Thiruvananthapuram 08.08.2003)

The Civil Aviation Ministry has withdrawn completely the Users fee imposed on foreign travellers at the Karipur Airport, Kozhikode. The notification has come into effect from 7-08-2003. The users fee was collected in the name of development of the airport. Initially Rs.500 was collected as Users Development additional fee from each foreign traveller. This was later reduced to Rs.375 owing to pressures from Gulf Malayalees and local MPs.

Development Plan for Backwater Tourism to be prepared

(Southern Star Morning Daily, Thiruvananthapuram 09.08.2003)

A Development Plan for Backwater Tourism will be prepared by the State Tourism Department says Tourism Minister Prof. K. V. Thomas. The Plan will be discussed with the Peoples Representatives in October said the minister while inaugurating the Cultural meet organised as part of the Nehru Boat Race at Alappuzha.

Angamali - Sabari Railway

(Southern Star Morning Daily, Thiruvananthapuram 12.08.2003)

The Railway Board has accepted the Angamali Sabari Railway and the final location survey has completed

till Azhutha. The Railways has intimated the State Transport Minister Mr. R. Balakrishna Pillai that detailed estimate is being prepared for the project till Erumely. He added that he couldn't say when this 145 km project would be over.

Functional Committees formed for Pilgrim Health - Ecotourism

(Madhyamam, Thiruvananthapuram 28.08.2003)

The State Government has formed functional committees for giving appropriate directions for developing projects in Pilgrim, Health and Ecotourism sectors. The Committee has been formed based on the recommendations by Prof. M.S. Swaminathan Commission (WTO) that income for the State from global tourism should reach 5 million US dollars by 2010.

The Pilgrim Tourism Committee chaired by Dr. D. Babu Paul has J. Lalithambika (Thiruvananthapuram), Thomas Jacob (Ernakulam), M.G. Sasibhooshan (Thiruvananthapuram), Kalpatta Balakrishnan (Cheruthuruthy), Dr. K.S. Radhakrishnan (Ernakulam), T.A. Ahmed Kabeer (Kalamasserry), Fr. C. Joseph (Thiruvananthapuram), Syamala Sugendran (Ernakulam) as members. KITTS Director will be the Member Secretary.

The Kerala Agricultural University Vice Chancellor K.V. Peter will chair the Ecotourism Committee. Paul Zacharia (Thiruvananthapuram), K. M. Roy (Ernakulam), K.C. Joseph (Ernakulam), Sabu Varghese (Thiruvananthapuram), T. Damu (Kochi), Sreemathy Jayakumar (Thiruvananthapuram), Babu Mather (Kochi), T. Kaladharan (Ernakulam), T. K. Rajasekhara Kurup (Chengannur) are the other members. The Ecotourism Director will be the Member Secretary.

Dr. P. K. Warriar, Managing Trustee of the Kottakkal Arya Vaidyasala chairs the Health Tourism Committee and the Tourism Additional Director (General) will be the Member Secretary. The other members are Dr. C. K. Ramachandran (Kozhikode), Dr. S. M. Nair (Ernakulam), Jose Dominic (Kochi), Mohammed (Kozhikode), Leela Menon (Ernakulam) and Fr. Mathew Muttam Thodiyil.

Vagamon Project: K.V. Thomas discussed with Jagmohan

(Deshabhimani, Thiruvananthapuram 28.08.2003)

The State Tourism minister Prof. K. V. Thomas had discussion with the Central Tourism minister Jagmohan on the sanction of the Vagamon project. The discussion was for sanction of 9 tourism projects including Vagamon and the Central Minister has agreed to take decision on this .

For the Kumbalangi Model Gramam Project, the centre has allotted 50 lakhs. Kalady- Guruvayoor combined development project, Backwater Tourism Project at Malabar, the Tourism Circuit Development Project by the centre etc. are the other projects submitted.

Impressive growth in tourist inflow to Kerala

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 121, September 2003)

Going by the half-yearly statistics released by Kerala Tourism, tourism inflow to the state, both domestic and foreign have shown remarkable increase, which is a clear indication of the growing popularity of Kerala as the favourite destination among all type of tourists.

There has been a credible increase in the arrival of both foreign and domestic tourists to Kerala during the first half (Jan - Jun) of the current year, when compared to the same period in 2002. The figures for the first half of 2003 showed foreign tourists arrival at 1,44,482 as compared to 1,13,223, last year. In the case of domestic tourists, half yearly figures stand at 28,58,769 in 2003 as against 26,84,756, last year. The half yearly stats given above clearly show an increase of 27.61% in 2003 as compared to 2002, while the domestic tourist arrival registered an increase of 6.48% when compared to the same period in 2002.

Among the districts, which received the maximum number of foreign tourists, both during the season and off-season, the districts of Thiruvananthapuram and Ernakulam leads the table, followed by Idukki and Kottayam. This situation with regards to domestic tourist arrival has the district of Thrissur in the lead, followed by Ernakulam and Thiruvananthapuram.

Majority of the foreign tourists arrived from countries like United Kingdom, France, USA, Maldives and Germany.

Efforts on to brand Kerala Tourism

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 121, September 2003)

According to the Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas, the department would take efforts to brand Kerala Tourism, through maximum possible means. As a first step, the department is contemplating on the idea of having products exported from Kerala stamped 'Made in Kerala- God's Own Country.'

The minister mooted the idea of branding Kerala Tourism, while inaugurating the sales of lucky draw coupon in connection with the upcoming gold festival, to be held in five corporations. Prof. Thomas handed the inaugural lucky draw coupon to Mr. Babu Alappat.

Hassle-free way to enjoy food and drink

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 121, September 2003)

Kerala Tourism would soon embark on a programme that would ensure the 'safety' and 'quality' of food and drink that is being served to visitors from outside and also to the local population. According to the Director of Kerala Tourism, a State-level certification scheme similar to Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) system used in the food industry will be implemented, to ensure clean and healthy practices among the eateries in Kerala.

The proposed certification programme will be applicable to all eating-places, including wayside eateries to large restaurants, across the State. The objective behind this ambitious scheme is to convey the message that any time, anywhere in Kerala, the visitors are assured of quality food and drink, which can be consumed without any unwarranted apprehensions, the Tourism Director said. The new certification programme was conceived, as the HACCP system used in the food industry is quite expensive for small eatery establishments to afford, the Tourism Director added.

The scheme will provide a certificate, declaring that the food and drinks served by a particular eatery is 'safe.' The certification scheme will also ensure that the employees working in the eateries are trained properly on aspects of preparation and handling of food and drink. The eateries interested to join participation programme can do so by paying a nominal fee.

The State Government has constituted a technical committee to oversee the implementation of the scheme. The committee with members from the hotel industry and Tourism Department would soon submit its recommendation in a week's time.

With the hotel industry reacting positively to the proposal, the tourism officials are hopeful of realizing this scheme by the year 2006.

Air Deccan to connect tourist destinations in Kerala

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 121, September 2003)

Air Deccan would soon hold discussions with the Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr. A. K. Antony and the Minister for Tourism about their proposal to start air service, connecting the tourist destinations of Kerala. This was stated in a press briefing in Bangalore by the Deccan Aviation Managing Director, Captain G. R. Gopinath.

The flight network will be given final shape after taking into account the favourable aspects of different tourist destinations in Kerala. To kick-start the process Deccan Aviation will start Bangalore-Kozhikode flight service in two month's time.

Karnataka and Kerala to form tourism circuit

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 121, September 2003)

Karnataka and Kerala, popular tourism destinations in the south will team up to promote the tourism interests of respective states, through the formation of a tourism circuit. The proposed circuit will link destinations in the Malabar region of north Kerala to the southern regions of Karnataka like Mangalore, Mysore, Coorg etc.

Kerala dangles brands to lure quality tourists

(By Lola Nayar, Indo-Asian News Service 02.09.2003)

Picturesque Kerala is trying to lure the high-spending globetrotter with brand names for its tourist destinations and trade events.

"We are no longer seeking the average \$25 spending tourists but high-spending quality visitors through branding exercises," Kerala Tourism Minister K.V. Thomas told IANS in an interview. Such exercises would include brands like "Mystiques of Malabar" for north Kerala, "Evergreen Land of Gold" for a month-long gold festival from October 10, a three-day "International Boat Show" from September 26, and the annual "Ornamental Fisheries Exhibition" in December.

Kerala will participate in the Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) exhibition as well as Russian, Chinese, Malaysian, London and Berlin tourism trade events to target mainly high-class tourists, Thomas said. It is also trying to attract domestic visitors, who have been flocking to Kerala in increasing numbers, through road shows.

Coinciding with celebrations marking Onam, the harvest festival, Kerala will host a weeklong event in New Delhi from September 8 to give a taste and glimpse of its varied cuisines and cultural hues. "This year, we have done extremely well even during the off-season summer months from May. The Nehru Trophy boat race this year witnessed a record turnout," the minister said.

"With the tourist season ready to start in earnest from September, we are gearing up to host a number of events that will help promote Kerala." The international boat show will see the depiction of the traditional spice route, linking Kerala with countries in Europe, the Middle East and Asia. "Around 70 participants from 12 countries, including Britain, France, U A E (United Arab Emirates), Malaysia and Singapore have confirmed their booking for the boat show, which will also have leading international boat magazines participating," said Thomas.

The boat show will be followed by the Kerala gold festival from October 10 to November 9. This is a unique branding exercise focusing on the traditional art of handcrafted jewellery in the state. The event is being jointly organised by the Kerala Tourism Department, the All-Kerala Gold and Silver Merchants' Association (AKGSM) and the World Gold Council. Pitched to be on par with the Dubai Gold Festival, five major cities-Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Kochi, Thrissur and Kozhikode-will be holding exhibitions to create awareness and promote quality gold.

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), which tracks tourism growth in the state on a quarterly basis, Kerala last year registered the highest growth in the tourism sector in India in the last 10 years. "Kerala registered a growth of 23.5 percent in terms of earnings from travel and tourism in the past 10 years. India's estimates for this entire period were 14.3 percent," said Thomas. "This year we expect another 12.5 percent growth. Tourism in Kerala is also expected to generate over \$1.7 billion in terms of economic activity during the current fiscal year, and is expected to grow to \$6.6 billion by 2012," he added.

The hotels in the state are enjoying the benefit of the market promotions, with many reporting 80- 90 percent occupancy. "While we are keen to promote tourism, we are taking steps to ensure that there is no unbridled growth that will damage the environment and civic structure," Thomas said.

Kerala sets national record in off-season tourist arrivals

(By Shafi Rahman, The New Indian Express, Thiruvananthapuram, 03.09.2003)

God's Own Country is fast emerging as destination of all seasons. Heavy rains no more dampen the

spectacular tourism show. With the off-season coming to a close, the state has witnessed the highest ever time in lean-season tourism arrivals in the country.

The state has set a national record with the achievement. The number of foreign tourist arrival in the off-season has catapulted up by 27.6%. The number of foreign tourists raised from 1.13 lakhs last off-season to 1.44 lakhs this off-season and the number of domestic tourists increased from 26 lakhs last off season to 28 lakhs this of season, says Tourism Director Alkesh Kumar Sharma. This growth is much above the all India growth of 9%.

The figure is 2% higher than the forecast of the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) made in last December. In 2001, WTTC and Kerala had initiated a dialogue to conduct a Tourism Satellite Account Research (TSA) in the state, said Sharma. The Tourism Satellite Account Research is now the accepted measure of the economic impact of tourism in a defined area. Following on the footsteps of two US states, Hawaii and South Carolina, Kerala had joined the exclusive club of sub national economies that have influenced TSA.

The Tourism Department traces the growth to a slew of monsoon-tourism campaigns and road shows organised at various foreign countries. The countries, which have vacation during our off-season, like Mediterranean, the Middle East and France are targeted. We conducted road shows in Madrid, Milan and Lyons and put up stalls in international marts like Berlin, Dubai and London. We even grabbed best international exhibitor award in Sri Lanka Travel Mart said Sharma.

Tourism growth has brought cheers to the sub sectors. We had steady arrival of both domestic and foreign tourists during the off-season. The group arrivals are mostly from Spain, France and Japan, points out S. Ajith Kumar, Manager (Corporate Affairs, Kerala) of Taj Residency.

Le Meridian Hotel Kerala witnessed a spurt of 12% in room occupancy during the lean season. Realms of the business have also been extended to tourists from countries like Spain and Russia. I hope the trend will eventually diminish the season off-season gap, said Sanjay Sharma, General Manager of the hotel.

Tomy Pulickattil, President of the Houseboat Owner's Association, said that houseboats, which were used to send for rehailing during the off-season, were forced to stay afloat due to heavy arrivals. "We are finding it difficult to meet maintenance schedules," he added.

According to WTTC forecast, the tourism demand is expected to grow by 11.6% per annum in the coming decade. This is the highest recorded growth rate in the world eclipsing WTTC's fastest growing country (Turkey 10.2%).

Significantly in 2001, while India's visit exports suffered a decline of 4.8% as a result of 9/11 events, Kerala visitor exports actually increased by 11% over the 2000 results say WTTC secretary Yogesh Chandra. This shows that the visitors are feeling more secure in Kerala than in other parts of the country. Even the mishaps like SARS helped to boost the tourism prospects of the state said Sharma.

Church to play a proactive role in tourism

(By Shafi Rahman, The New Indian Express, Thiruvananthapuram 07.09.2003)

Taking a break from the beaten track replete with homilies on abortion and monogamy, The Catholic Church is sermonising on issues held close to the heart of the social activities water conservation and responsible tourism.

The Church is embarking on two ambitious projects. The first one aimed at foreign tourists to make them realise that people must resist the temptation to retreat into sorts of happy cocoon, distancing themselves from the social context. "The tourist journey is always an encounter with different pawns and cultures. In

every country especially, the developing countries, the tourists can hardly avoid coming into contact with painful reality of poverty and hunger. Their visit is an opportunity to initiate meaningful dialogue”, says Philip Nelpuraparambil, Director of Department of Pastoral Care for Tourists, recently instituted by the Church.

“To kick off the campaign, we will hold an orientation course in Alappuzha at the end of the month for people working in Tourism sector and educate them more about our culture and custom. Tourism segments like home stays, which will experience tourists to the realities down here will be promoted. It will also help the tourists to get a feel of our strong family value”, he said.

The intellectual impetus for the drive is the direction from Pope John Paul II to treat tourism as a driving force for poverty alleviation, job creation and social harmony. “Tourist activity can play an important role in the fight against poverty, from the financial as well as the social and cultural viewpoints. Travelling provides one an opportunity to become acquainted with different places and situations and to realise what a great gap exists between the rich and poor countries. It is also possible to make better use of social resources and activities forcing the involvement of the poor classes of the population,” says Pope in a message to be read out in churches on the 24th World Tourism Day on September 27.

Meanwhile the Changanacherry Social Service Society, the social service wing of the Changanacherry diocese has launched a water conservation project Jananidhi, aiming to reach one lakh house holds in the diocese.

Taiwanese aiming Kerala as tourist destination

(By K. Sabarinath, The New Indian Express, Thiruvananthapuram 07.09.2003)

Taiwan Tourism's discovery of India trapped in the triangle of Delhi-Agra-Jaipur is now eyeing the less explored south India as potential destination.

Recently a group of ten major tour operators from Taipei arrived with the inaugural flight of Singapore Airlines to Bangalore visiting the neighbouring states of Kerala and Tamilnadu for a first hand experience of hot spots from Mysore and Mahabalipuram to Thekkady, Kochi and Kumarakom.

With a \$50,000 promotion planned for south India destination, the operators are planning packages expected to double inbound tourist traffic from Taiwan.

Currently around 10000 tourists visit the country every year from Taiwan bringing in about Rs.20 crores. The country, which experienced an explosion in tourism when travel restrictions were removed 15 years back, has about 7.2 million people travelling annually for tourism purpose. “Since travel restrictions came off, tourists from Taiwan have mostly ventured into Europe and America, which they have exhausted by now. Even in India, they are mostly stuck in the Delhi circuit and south is virgin territory. The potential here is high and a quantum jump can be expected in arrivals once the destinations are properly promoted. More over the weather down south, ad Kerala in particular, is similar to that of Taiwan's said Scott S Pao, Chief Executive Officer, Travel Land Express Co. Ltd., Taipei, after a visit to Thekkady and Kumarakom. With hardly any presence of Indian machinery in Taipei, lack of information is the key factor that is hampering the flow of tourists into the country, according to him. While a Taiwanese spends an average of two weeks in Europe, in India, it is only one week. “There are no official agencies from India even in the capital promoting these destinations. This is a major handicap and creating awareness is our first priority,” he says.

The group, which is accompanied by media persons, has filmed the destination extensively with details of infrastructure available.

“Taiwanese are very organised, punctual and very particular about details. While places like Bangalore, Chennai and Kochi has also potential for business other than tourism, Kumarakom and Thekkady are prime locations for ecotourism,” says Shin-Han Yang of The Liberty Times, Taipei.

Other than information, absence of good roads and leisure time activities was something the group found hard to chew.

“Traffic is slow and in Kerala there are hardly any highways. There is no nightlife or cultural activities and programmes. On the brighter side, the food and facilities provided by the hospitality industry are good,” said Eunice Lur of Singapore Airlines, who organised the tour along with Kuno/ Sita World Travel.

Houseboats industry comes off age

(By A. Harikumar, The Hindu, Thiruvananthapuram 10.09.2003)

A decade after an innovative entrepreneur at Alumkadavu in Kollam district converted a traditional boat used for transporting goods (kettuvallom) to houseboat with facilities for the stay of tourists, the industry has come of age.

From two boats in the early ninety's, the number of houseboats has gone up to about 200. Meanwhile the small single room houseboat has been replaced by large houseboats with several rooms. Many of the present houseboats are air-conditioned. In no time, Alappuzha has emerged as hub of the houseboat industry with a majority of them operating from here.

Recounting the growth of industry, the Houseboat Owner's Association Secretary, Tomy Pulikkattil, says it is only natural that Alappuzha has become the nerve centre of the industry because of the potential of Vembanad Lake and canals of Kuttanad as venues for boating.

“At first traditional boats used to be converted into houseboats, but now very big ones are specifically built as houseboats,” Mr. Tomy says. While most of the houseboats of initial days used to be poled, the present one are fitted with engines. The earlier outboard engines have been replaced with inboard engines, which use diesel as fuel.

Mr. Tomy says that the concept of room of houseboats has undergone a revolutionary change over the last few years. The small dingy rooms have been replaced by spacious air-conditioned rooms, which could match the comforts of a hotel room. Some of the houseboats operating from Alappuzha have even five rooms.

The latest innovation in the industry is a very big houseboat with a conference hall having a capacity of 150 and several bedrooms. The boat will be launched soon.

According to Mr. Tony, the industry provides direct employment to around 500 persons now. **“The number of persons being provided indirect employment is more than 2000.”**

Earlier a majority of the people who hired boats were foreign tourists, but now tourists from North India exceed them. The number of Keralites who hire houseboats has increased steeply of late.

The Tourism Department has introduced ratings for houseboats last year based on the facilities offered. According to association, around 25 houseboats have been awarded 'golden star', the highest grading. And efforts are on to raise the standards of more houseboats.

Tourism also considered industry, recognition for new policy

(Kerala Kaumudi, Thiruvananthapuram 24.09.2003)

The Cabinet has accepted the Industrial policy that has given recognition to all the Tourism Projects in the State, an industrial status.

Warning against tourism promotion through sex

(The New Indian Express, Thiruvananthapuram, 30.09.03)

National Women's Commission Chairperson Poornima Advani has called for an end to the tendency of tourism promotion through sex. She was inaugurating the women's convention held as part of the 25th State Conference of the All Kerala Bank Employees Federation here. She said that many have a notion that tourism will flourish if it takes a cue from places like Colombo, where sex has been a main attraction.

Best debut destination award for Kerala Tourism

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 123, November 2003)

Kerala Tourism won the Best Debut Destination award at the International Travel Trade Fair 'Otdykh-Leisure 2003' held from October 15-18 at the Olympic Sports Complex, Moscow, Russia. Otdykh-Leisure is the main international autumn fair in Russia and is supported by the Tourism Department of the Russian Ministry for Economic Development and the Moscow City Government.

The award was given on the basis of the number of enquiries received by Kerala Tourism and the interest generated by it among trade participants. Kerala grabbed the attention of participants to the fair, which included decision makers of the international travel industry.

The Director of Kerala Tourism, Mr. Alkesh Kumar Sharma received the award from the Russian Deputy Minister for Economic Development and Trade, Mr. Vldimar I Strjalkovky. According to the Director of Kerala Tourism "The fair provided the right platform for us to access the Russian market, establish new business contacts and meet the general public. The large number of enquiries we have received is extremely encouraging."

Kerala beckons more Russians to visit India

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 123, November 2003)

The recent spectacular debut in the just concluded Otdykh-Leisure festival in Moscow Russia generated tremendous amount of curiosity among the participants to the fair. This successful foray into the Russian market by Kerala Tourism made the Indian Ambassador to Russia, Mr. K. Reghunath to acknowledge the efforts of Kerala Tourism. He said that, Kerala's impressive performance at the fair has now become a factor for more Russians to visit India.

Creation of special tourism zones on the anvil

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 123, November 2003)

In its effort to identify and make use of the existing tourism potential of the state, the Kerala Government is getting ready to identify areas of high tourism potential and notify them as special tourism zones.

As a prelude to this, within next six months, the government would give shape to an ordinance called 'Kerala Tourism Conservation, Preservation and Trade Ordinance. Already a study report is available with the Department of Tourism, which reveals details pertaining to the carrying capacity of tourist destinations like Fort Kochi, Munnar, Kumarakom and Kovalam. The study was done by the Town Planning Department and the Centre for Earth Science Studies (CESS).

According to the Director of Tourism, Mr. Alkesh Kumar Sharma, the whole exercise is aimed at dividing a destination into 3 zones viz. prohibitive, restrictive and facilitative. This will have an automatic check and control measure in a particular region and would result in optimum utilization of its resources, he said.

A monitoring authority by the name of Tourism Conservation and Preservation Committee (TCPC) will be in place to check unauthorized ventures and violations of rules in destinations notified as special tourism zones. TCPC will have extensive powers, which would benefit the special tourism zones in the long run.

Kalaripayattu to become integral part of tourism programmes

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 123, November 2003)

Inaugurating the seminar titled 'Kalarivilakku' organized recently by the leading daily Malayala Manorama, the Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas said that from now onwards Kalaripayattu, the renowned martial art form of Kerala will become an integral part, in all the tourism related programmes held in the State.

For the tourism development of the Malabar region an exclusive fair titled 'Vismayangalude Nadu' meaning land of wonders will be organized this year itself. The fair too will have Kalaripayattu occupying a prominent place. The minister also said that CDs made on Kalaripayattu and on the Northern Ballads popularly known as 'Vadakkan Pattukal' will be distributed on a wide scale, including various tourism and travel fairs held abroad. Like the Kalaripayattu, the Kalari treatment also holds immense significance in today's world, Prof. Thomas added.

The Minister for Sports and Youth Welfare, Mr. K. Sudhakaran, who inaugurated the concluding session of the seminar, said that an academy for Kalaripayattu would soon be set up in Vadagara. The seminar also had papers presented on topics like 'Kalaripayattu for tourism development and vice-versa' and 'Northern Ballads & Kalaripayattu- challenges and conservation of ethnic culture' presented by Additional Director, Kerala Tourism, Mr. K. S. Premachandra Kurup and the Head of Calicut University's, Folklore Study Centre, Dr. Raghavan Payyandu respectively.

Rs. 14.6 million aquatic entertainment project sanctioned

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 123, November 2003)

Aimed to encourage water-based entertainment activities in the State, the Kerala Government recently sanctioned a Rs. 14.6 million project that would see the introduction of activities like air-filled speed boats, pedal boats etc in the backwater stretches of Kerala. This decision by the government was recently announced by the Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas. Of the 14.6 million, the Union Government will contribute Rs. 7.1 million. The whole exercise is being done to boost backwater tourism in Kerala.

A 12-member tour operator's delegation from Russia that called up on the tourism minister, expressed their desire to bring in more tourists from Russia to savour the unparalleled and breathtaking beauty of Kerala's backwaters.

Foreign tourist's arrival heralds yet another season

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 124, December 2003)

The chartered flight from Gatwick in England took off with 230 passengers onboard; all headed for a destination, they had only heard or read about. But they were well briefed and assured of a memorable holiday experience by their tour operators, 'Czech-It-Out' and 'Manos', with bulk of the passengers being brought here by 'Manos.'

On arrival, all the tourists were given warm, traditional Kerala style welcome. The tourist contingent would spend one to three weeks in Kerala before they bid adieu to Kerala.

Gross tourism revenue to increase by 20%

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 124, December 2003)

A jubilant Kerala Tourism is eagerly looking forward to this year's tourist season due to a couple of encouraging signs, which are already palpable. The tourism season is all set to cash in on a combination of favourable aspects like an additional revenue generation of Rs. 10000 million and a 30 per cent increase in international arrivals.

According to the Director of Tourism, Mr. Alkesh Kumar Sharma, this is indeed a big season, and the gross revenue from tourism will cross the Rs. 65000 million mark and the international tourist arrival has registered a growth of 30% in Kerala.

The domestic tourism has also registered a credible increase in Kerala, where as of now the registered visits has gone up by 6.1 million domestic tourists. This is an increase of about 0.5 million from the last season.

Already the season is vibrant with chartered flights from Europe touching down at Thiruvananthapuram and a cruise liner berthing at Kochi. The leading hospitality names in Kerala like the Taj, Le Meridien, Casino, and the Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC) have responded to the international tourist arrival with no advanced booking now available for the months of December and January.

Tourist centres declared

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 124, December 2003)

For issuing license to beer/wine parlours in Kerala, according to rules and regulations as prescribed in the foreign liquor act, Kerala Government has identified and declared specific areas in Kovalam, Varkala, Munnar, Thekkady, Kumarakom, Bakel, Peerumedu and the international airports in Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi, and Kozhikode as tourist centres.

Organizing Committee of KTM retained

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 124, December 2003)

A decision was made recently to retain the office bearers of the Kerala Travel Mart (KTM) organizing committee. The organizing committee will have the Tourism Secretary, Mr. T. Balakrishnan continuing as its Chairman and the KTM Society President, Mr. E. M. Najeeb as its General Convener.

Inspired by the HC verdict against Coke Unit Local bodies waking up to legal rights

(By Shafi Rahman, The New Indian Express, Thiruvananthapuram 28.12.2003)

Taking inspiration from the Perumatty Grama panchayat, which won a High Court verdict against the Hindustan Coca-Cola Beverages Ltd. Unit in Plachimada, a slew of local bodies in the State are waking up to their rights and going up in arms against various tourism projects in the State over issues ranging from tax collection to protection of natural resources.

"The Panchayat's effort to regulate tourism projects and engage in tax collection are often hindered by various government orders and interferences. It's time for the local bodies to be aware of their legal rights and seek intervention of courts," says advocate Raju Joseph, member of the Kunnathunadu Panchayat in Ernakulam, which has approached the Supreme Court for right to collect entertainment tax from a private water theme park.

"There are resorts in Kumarakom, which are functioning without proper license. Our effort to impose adequate regulatory mechanism, by taking into consideration the fact that that tourism in Kumarakom is nature based and protection of nature and biodiversity is fundamental to sustainable tourism development, has hit snags due lack of government support. Even Panchayat officials who took a stand against the erring resorts are being transferred to distant towns," says P G Padmanabhan, member of Kumarakom Panchayat, which has approached the High Court for permission to collect building tax from a private resort.

"The Bekal Resorts Development Corporation, which has acquired over 200 acres in the coastal region, is breaking all the promises on water management and other facilities they offered during acquisition of the land. If the Corporation goes ahead with its proposed plan to sell off the coastline to the Star Hotel Groups, the Panchayat will definitely approach the Court for justice," Ajannnore Panchayat President said.

"The Government has done little for implementing a sustainable tourism plan. The Forest Department, which collects entrance fee fro tourists to Athirapally Waterfalls, is refusing to pay entertainment tax," says P M Puspangadhan, President of Athirapilly Panchayat, which has approached the High Court over the issue of collection of entertainment tax from a private water theme park.

"An effective utilisation of powers devolved on Panchayat for tourism development can put an end to these unhealthy trends," says Saroop Roy of Equitable Tourism Options, a Bangalore based NGO focussing on tourism concerns in India and the developing countries.

"As per the Kerala Decentralisation of Powers Act, and improvement, regulation of land use and acquisition of any land within the territory of a local body needs the Panchayat's permission. According to the Kerala Panchayat Raj Act, consumption of natural resources requires the permit of Panchayats. The local bodies should realise the relevance of these Acts," Saroop said.

The International Alps Convention draft protocol on tourism also stresses on the participation of regional bodies. According to the protocol: "The directly affected regional bodies shall be involved in the various stages of preparation and implementation of these policies and measures while preserving their responsibility within the existing government structures."

Tourism projects may get more Plan funds from Centre

(The New Indian Express, Thiruvananthapuram 28.12.2003)

Planning Commission member Sompal has said that the achievements of Kerala in the tourism sector would be advantageous for the state while negotiating for the Plan fund from the Centre. Sompal told reporters after launching a houseboat having facility to hold conference of 250 people at Alappuzha on 27.12.2003 that the tourism would give a boost to the economy of Kerala. He said the Planning Commission would try its best to make available the funds for Kerala Tourism projects from the special schemes of the Prime Minister.

Kerala Tourism bags Galileo-Express Travel and Tourism Award

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 125, January 2004)

There is good news for the Kerala Tourism yet again. Close on the heels of the prestigious FICCI award, Kerala has bagged the first ever Galileo-Express Travel and Tourism Award for the Best State Tourism Board. This grand award comes as a wonderful token of appreciation for the unending efforts of Kerala Tourism to promote Kerala as one of the best tourist destinations in the world. Kerala has been recognised for its policy formulation, master plan development, heritage conservation efforts and the various initiatives to improve inbound tourism.

The Galileo-Express awards seek to promote professionalism and facilitate benchmarking of higher levels of performances with in the travel and tourism industry. The awards were given on the basis of revenue generated operational efficiency, reach of service, perceived service levels and the ability to increase market share.

Kerala Tourism bags FICCI awards for "Best Marketing" and "Best Use of IT in Tourism"

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 125, January 2004)

Constituted by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) the prestigious awards came as a grand recognition to Kerala Tourism for its outstanding contributions in the field of tourism promotion. The awards were presented at FICCI's International Tourism Conference held in Chennai from December 10 to 12.

The award for the best promotional material in health tourism was won by the Great India Tour Company (GITC), part of the Kerala Tourism team at the conference, for its fascinating brochure "Healing Holidays".

The FICCI Conference, 'South India- A Global Destination', was presided by Prof. K. V. Thomas, the Minister for Kerala Tourism. The conference focused on the intra-regional and inter-regional marketing of the South. Malaysia was the partner country of the conference. Tourism professionals from across India as well as from the ASEAN countries, The Middle East and South Africa attended the conference.

Tourism Project proposals worth Rs. 9,500 million on the cards

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 125, January 2004)

As the New Year is stealthily peeping through the corners with a bundle of new joys and wonderful aspirations, the Travel and Tourism sector in Kerala too seems all set to celebrate the coming year with a handful of exciting tourism project proposals. With the State Government having submitted tourism project proposals worth Rs.9,500 million to the Central Government for the next Union Budget, it seems that the Year 2004 would, indeed, witness a splurge of domestic as well as foreign tourists in God's Own Country.

The projects include an International Convention Centre at Akkulam in Thiruvananthapuram, an Edutainment Centre at the Hill Palace at Tripunithura, integrated development of Kalady, Guruvayur and the Central Tourism Circuit in the State, Backwater Tourism in Malabar and Rural Tourism in Vizhinjam and the use of Information Technology for the promotion of tourism in the State.

The proposal for the development of the existing Convention Centre at Akkulam was laid in accordance with the Central Government's plan to develop two international standard convention centres in the country this year. This project would make use of the 56 acres of land belonging to Kerala Tourism.

A proposal of Rs.600 million for the Edutainment Complex at Tripunithura is under the consideration of the central government. The project focuses on combining entertainment and education with all kinds of state-of-the-art facilities such as planetarium, theatres, shopping malls, food courts, entertainment zones and a science pavilion. This project has been proposed in the Union Government's Large Revenue Generating Projects.

The development of Kalady at a cost of Rs. 192 million aims to develop the township in a holistic way so as to sustain it as the hub of the State's cultural and spiritual tourism.

The Central Tourism Circuit Project will be for an amount of Rs.215 million. The backwater tourism project for Malabar involves infrastructure development worth Rs. 110 million. The rural tourism project for Vizhinjam envisages the development of an arts and crafts village at an amount of Rs. 180 million in the 11.25 hectares of land owned by Kerala Tourism.

Another project aims to develop the Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies (KITTS) in order to provide education and training to various facilitators of the tourism industry with the aid of Geographical Information System (GIS) applications. A proposed project of IT solutions hopes to produce CD-ROMS and VCD's on the tourist hotspots in the State, a virtual walkthrough interactive CD-ROM, 'A Day with the Masters' at the Kerala Kalamandalam, purchase of plasma screens and projection systems for Kerala Tourism and sponsorship of different VCD titles on the State. A good sum has been set aside for organising the Onam Festival and elephant pageantry.

Set up support infrastructure for medical tourism, says Minister Prof. K. V. Thomas

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 125, January 2004)

Addressing the conference of Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in Chennai, Prof. Thomas stressed on the need to create an adequate support infrastructure such as better air connectivity and insurance for developing medical tourism in the country. The minister added that the demand for medical tourism was on the rise owing to the comparatively low cost of treatment in India. To enhance the promising prospects of medical tourism, the airline companies need to offer special in-flight facilities for patients and insurance companies should make their systems and procedures simpler.

Tourism Department to introduce "Pleasure craft" in the Kerala Backwaters

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 125, January 2004)

With an eye on promoting water sports and better facilities for the domestic as well as the foreign tourists, the Kerala Tourism has decided to introduce two luxury pontoon boats and 13 inflated speedboats in the beautiful backwaters of Kerala.

The 'Pleasure craft' will be introduced in the backwaters of Kochi which has become a major berthing point

for luxury cruise liners arriving especially during the tourist season. The pontoons and inflated speedboats would be launched in the backwaters of the State before the end of the financial year.

The pontoon boat, which is the first of its kind to be introduced in the country for tourism activities, has an aluminium body with the capacity to accommodate 15 to 17 persons. These double-hull boats with a front open deck will have deluxe forward lounge seat with pullout beds on either side or two tables with fixing pedestals.

The suite of the double-hull boats will be equipped with two lounge seats having pullout beds. Some of the other unique features of the pontoon boats are that they are furnished with all kinds of state-of-the-art facilities one could find at a modern home such as bathrooms with shower and toilet, galley with sink, wall shelves, sliding doors, rooftop sundeck and a stereo sound system. The main advantage of the pontoon boats is that they can be used even during the most unfriendly and harsh climates.

The self-driven inflated speedboats will have an outboard engine with a very strong base and an inflated buoyancy tube. These two-seater or four-seater inflated speed boats which are going to be introduced for the first time in the backwaters of the State, can also be operated in any climate.

The Kerala Tourism has also planned to introduce the four-seater inflated speedboat to accommodate the maximum number of tourists as only one tourist can travel in a two-seater boat. At present, the inflated speedboats each weighing 200 to 250 kg are being used only by the Indian Navy and Coastguard. The main advantages of the inflated speedboats are that they are light in weight and can be easily transported from one location to another.

Central team arrives in Kerala to prepare a report on the major tourist hotspots

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 125, January 2004)

A central team under the leadership of Central Tourism Joint Secretary, Mr. Amita Khan Tilak recently visited Kerala to prepare a report on the major tourism hubs in Kerala.

The team has been sent to Kerala by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) as the organisation aims to start a few tourism projects here. After visiting the various tourist centres in Kerala, the team would prepare a report based on the tourism potentiality of these centres for the purpose of including them in their new projects.

KTDC introduces manuals to standardise services

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 125, January 2004)

As part of its ongoing efforts to improve the service standards in its chain of properties, the Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC) has introduced manuals that have codified and documented the various procedures in crucial operations, recipe, procurement, accounting and administrative wings. KTDC is the first government-owned tourism corporation in India to introduce manuals for standardising its services.

The Operations manual was drafted by five sub-committees established for reservation and front office, housekeeping, food production and food and beverage, restaurant and bar and intra-hotel communications. These procedures were earlier left to decisions of individuals managing the different positions. This manual lays down procedures to the front office staff on handling a reservation enquiry that deals with difficult customers and other emergency situations.

The manuals were presented in the "Best Practices of Tourism" meet organised by the Union Ministry of Tourism in New Delhi.

Traveller facilitation Centre set up in KSRTC bus stands

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 125, January 2004)

Aiming at the effective promotion of Travel and Tourism within the state, Kerala Tourism in association with

the Kerala State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC), has established a traveller's facilitation centre at the KSRTC bus stand in Kochi. The centre was inaugurated by the State Transport Minister, Mr. R. Balakrishna Pillai.

Speaking on the occasion, Prof. K. V. Thomas, the Minister of Tourism and Fisheries said that such facilitation centres would be set up in all the 62 bus stands and that work on eight of them were progressing. He added that the infrastructure available in pilgrimage centres like Sabarimala and Kalady needed to be developed for tourism promotion.

The Kerala Tourism has also decided to construct an international standard boat jetty in an attempt to enhance backwater transport at Kochi. The Minister, Mr. R. Balakrishna Pillai, at an earlier function, laid the foundation stone for the construction of a new boat jetty near Marine Drive. The Minister also declared that a new boat service between Emakulam and Fort Kochi, with a capacity of 100 passengers, would start functioning soon. The new boat service would be meant exclusively for tourists. He also said that the existing walkway at Marine Drive would also be extended to the new boat jetty for the convenience of the passengers.

It is Central Asia's turn to admire God's Own Country

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 125, January 2004)

It was a momentous occasion as far as Kerala Tourism is concerned, when it received the first ever tourist contingent from Kazakhstan, couple of days prior to the New Year. An enthusiastic group of 169 tourists alighted from the TU 154, the international air carrier of Kazakhstan to a traditional welcome at the Thiruvananthapuram International Airport.

The tourists have been given accommodation in five different hotels in Thiruvananthapuram viz. Isola di Cocco, Nikki's Nest, Kovalam Hotel, Uday Samudra and KTDC Samudra. The chartered flight was arranged by SITA World Travel who has a tie-up with two Kazakhstan based tour operators viz. Turan Asia and Sayatt.

The holiday itinerary for the Kazakh tourists include a sightseeing trip of the capital city, excursions to adjoining places in the city like Neyyar, where wildlife trekking and elephant safari have been arranged. The contingent will also move out to distant destinations like Kochi, Periyar and Kumarakom and will also hit the backwaters of Kollam for their maiden backwater cruise.

The Kazakhstan tourist contingent will spend 10 nights before they depart for Kazakhstan on the 8th of January.

Kerala records 30% growth in tourism

(Press Trust of India, Thiruvananthapuram, 26.01.2004)

Tourism in Kerala is poised to scale new heights with tourist flows into the state this year marking a 30 per cent increase. While there was a steady growth in arrivals to the state since 2002, the increase in tourist inflows is expected to be nearly 30 per cent this year, according to the state economic review. It was more heartening that there was a boom in 'quality tourism' during the period, it said. The earning from the sector increased from Rs 535 crore in 2001 to Rs 705.67 crore in 2002, which accounted for 6.29 per cent of the gross domestic product.

Apart from the state's inherent attractions like long beaches, backwaters and hill stations and ayurveda, village tourism has been identified as a new product to be developed. Another new concept would be mice - meetings, incentives, conventions and events, exhibitions and trade shows. The state government had recently asked the centre that one of the two international convention centres being planned should be located in Kerala. According to state tourism minister K V Thomas, if the Centre rejects the proposal, the state would develop the facility in joint venture at Akkulam near the state capital. Events like Kerala Travel Mart, national boat show, mystiques of Malabar and Kerala gold fest have helped Kerala to emerge as an attractive destination, the review said.

Road shows conducted within and outside the country and showcasing of the state in major world tourism

fairs also contributed to its emergence as a sought-after destination. Besides traditional markets like Europe and America, the state was now looking into emerging markets like China. Being a service industry, travel and tourism was expected to create direct 7,57,100 jobs over the next 10 years, it said.

Earnings from tourism up

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 125, January 2004)

The earnings from tourism increased from Rs. 535 crores in 2001 to Rs. 705.67 crores in 2002. Kerala witnessed a spurt in the tourist inflow by 30 percent in 2003. There are 5583 classified rooms in the State with three- star facilities.

National Tourism Awards Kerala bags eight

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

Kerala Tourism once again reaffirmed its No. 1 position by making a clean sweep of a host of awards instituted by the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. Kerala clinched seven awards including those for the best tourism performing State, best practices by State Government, best eco-tourism products, best wildlife sanctuary and most innovative use of IT.

Marari Beach Resort, Kerala picked up the best hotel award in the three-star category while Malabar House, Fort Kochi bagged the award for the best heritage classic resort. Mr. Jose Dominic, Managing Director Casino Group of Hotels was selected for a Special Award for his pioneering efforts in resort development.

The best tourism performing State award was given to Kerala on the basis of several factors including the State's promotional and marketing efforts, infrastructure and human resources development and development of sustainable tourism. Kerala had earlier won this award three times in a row.

It was the stress on quality and eco-friendly tourism, carefully planned moves, and adoption of sustainable methods of development that won Kerala the best practices award. Periyar Sanctuary won the best wildlife sanctuary award, while Thenmala, India's first eco-tourism project and the innovative Zero Waste project launched to make Kovalam waste-free brought home the best eco-tourism products award.

The awards were received by Prof. K V Thomas, Minister for Tourism, Kerala along with Mr. T Balakrishnan, Secretary, Kerala Tourism and Mr. Alkesh Kumar Sharma, Director, Kerala Tourism at a function held on January 23rd, 2004 at Humayun's Tomb, the famous historical monument in New Delhi.

Tourism is increasingly becoming the mainstay industry of Kerala, offering several lakh job opportunities to Keralites, besides bringing in big investments, contributing much to the State's annual revenue and attracting valuable foreign exchange earnings.

Kerala tourism awards 2002-03 given away

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

In a glittering function held at the Mascot Hotel in Thiruvananthapuram, the Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas who presided over the function gave away the awards.

Padmashree Thangam. E. Philip has bagged the Colonel G. V. Raja Award for Lifetime Achievement in tourism for the year 2002 - 03. The award has been conferred on Ms. Thangam E. Philip for her pioneering contributions to the Tourism and Hospitality industry by enhancing the standards of the hotel management sector and raising Indian catering to international levels of excellence. She is also credited for the task of introducing professionalism in hotel management and in lending respectability to the catering profession. Ms. Thangam Philip, the proud recipient of the prestigious Padmashree national award in 1961, is one of the 38 distinguished women in the world and also one among the three women from India invited to be portrayed on the Food and Agricultural Organisation's (FAO) esteemed CERES medal. The other two being Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Mother Teresa.

Mr. K. K. Mohandas of Kumar Taxies has been selected for the 'Special Award.' Kumar Taxies has a history of over 75 years in tourism transport sector. The prominent personalities who have enjoyed their service include eight presidents and four prime ministers of India. Mahatma Gandhi and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

were among those who used the service of Kumar Taxis. This dependable and service - oriented tourist taxi operator today has a fleet of imported vehicles, catering to people from various walks of life.

Mr. T. Balakrishnan, Secretary, Kerala Tourism welcomed the gathering, with Mr. Alkesh Kumar Sharma, Tourism Director delivering the vote of thanks.

The other awards are:

Tour operator/Travel Agent who handled the maximum number of tourists in Kerala	Travel Corporation of India, Ravipuram, Kochi
Tour Operator/ Travel agent who earned the maximum amount of foreign exchange in Kerala	Travel Corporation of India, Ravipuram, Kochi
Best Tour Operator from Kerala	Great India Tour Company, Thiruvananthapuram
Best One - Star Hotel	Manaltheeram Ayurveda Beach Village, Chowara, South Kovalam, Thiruvananthapuram
Best Two - Star Hotel	Hotel Samudra, Kovalam, Thiruvananthapuram
Best Three - Star Hotel	The Travancore Heritage, Chowara, Thiruvananthapuram
Best Four - Star Hotel	Taj Garden Retreat, Janardhanapuram, Varkala
Best Five - Star Hotel	The Muthoot Plaza, Thiruvananthapuram
Best Five - Star Deluxe Hotel	Le Meridien, Kochi
Best Heritage Hotel	The Malabar House, Fort Kochi
Best Ayurvedic Centre	Nagarjuna Ayurvedic Centre, Kalady
Best Home Stay Facility	GK's River View, Kumarakom
Best House Boat Operator	Lakes and Lagoons Tour Company, Alappuzha
Best Wayside Amenity Centre	Motel Araam, Kannur
Individual/Agency who has introduced the most innovative project in the field of tourism in the State	Far Horizon Tours, New Delhi
Individual/Agency who has implemented the most eco - friendly tourism project in the State	Coconut Lagoon, Heritage Resort, Kottayam
Best Performing District Tourism Promotion Council	DTPC, Wayanad
Most Kerala - friendly overseas individual	Mr. Hans Jorg Husong, Com Tour Communication and Tourism, Germany
Best Tourism related article	Mr. Joby Cherian, Freelance writer
Best Performing Arts Centre	Cochin Cultural Centre (Academy of Arts and performing Theatre), Kochi.
Tourist - friendly Taxi/Auto driver	Mr. N. R. Anil Kumar, Kottayam
Best Tourist Guide	Mr. V. Balam, Thiruvananthapuram
Best Tourist Police	Mr. Mannuel Immanuel, Tourist Police, Kumali Police Station, Idukki
Best Tourist Club	Darul Uloom VHSS, Ernakulam
Best Student Co-ordinator of Tourism Club	Mr. V. Prasanth , NSS College, Cherthala
Best Teacher Co-ordinator of Tourism Club	Mrs. C. Pushpalatha, SSHSS, Kattukukke, Kasargod

Gross tourism revenue to touch Rs. 12000 million

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

Addressing the distribution ceremony of State Tourism Awards for the year 2002 - 03, the Minister for Kerala Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas said that the Tourism sector in the State is expected to earn a gross revenue worth Rs. 12000 million in the coming year when compared with the gross revenue of Rs. 9500 million earned

last year. He also added that the tourism sector would lay more emphasis on the development of infrastructure facilities and preservation of the rich heritage of Kerala with a view to promote the travel and tourism industry in the State. The Minister remarked that with in a span of two years, the travel and tourism sector would become the largest employment - generating sector in the state.

'God's Own Country' elated over 'Quality tourism boom'

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

With the arrival of the New Year, Kerala has once more reaffirmed its status as the chosen destination of the delighted globetrotter. The fact that the hotels and resorts are selling rooms at a premium rate is enough evidence of this 'quality tourism boom' in the State.

The tourist hotspots in the State are simmering not only with the foreign tourists but the non - resident Indians as well. The State has also witnessed a sudden rush in the chartered flights from Europe, and for the first time from Russia.

According to Tourism Secretary, Mr. T. Balakrishnan, Kochi is the most preferred destination because it is the entry point for backwaters. An amazing 30% increase in the inflow of tourists has been registered this year. Interestingly, this sudden and unexpected increase has come when there is a dip in the inflow of tourists in the rest of the world. This new trend is seen not just in Kerala but also all over India. India has recorded an astonishing 15% growth when compared to other countries.

Mr. T. Balakrishnan is of the opinion that the inflow in the tourists is mainly due to the political stability and the feel - good factor in the sub- continent. He added that while SARS scare is holding back the prospects of tourism in South - East Asia and Hong Kong, the war has been keeping away the tourists from the Middle East and even Europe. On the contrary, the Indian economy is witnessing a spectacular growth and Kerala is being aggressively promoted as the ideal tourist destination.

The statistics reveal that 25.3 million tourists visited the State last year and if this trend continues unhindered, it will reach 30 million this year. More over, this improvement is seen not just in the quantity of tourists but in the quality as well.

Karnataka Tourism Minister proposes joint ventures with Kerala

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

The Karnataka Government has proposed to examine the possibility of starting joint tourism ventures with the Kerala Government. The proposal was put forward by the Minister for Karnataka Tourism, Mr. J. Alexander.

Mr. Alexander was speaking at a reception accorded to him at the Alappuzha beach festival. "Kerala has an important position in the national tourism map because of its vast potential." said the Minister.

Kochi to be the berthing point of luxury cruise liners

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

The recent 'quality tourism boom' witnessed by the State has made the Tourist Resorts Kerala Limited (TRKL), a subsidiary of the Kerala Tourism Development Corporation, to decide on launching three unique projects that hopes to expand the horizons of the tourism sector in Kerala. A berthing facility for luxury cruise liners at the Bolghatty Island called Marina International, a Golf course at Vallarpadam and a Dream City in Kozhikode are the three major projects which would be soon launched by TRKL.

According to the Secretary of Tourism, TRKL has conceptualised these projects with the aim of promoting Kerala as a premium destination among the international tourists.

The Rs. 350 million Marina International project, the first of its kind in the country, would be a joint venture of the TRKL and the Malaysia based Trans Resource Corporation. The Marina International will offer berthing facility to luxury cruisers from Europe enroute to the Far East. In addition, Marina International will be fully equipped with lodging and entertainment facilities on par with the international standards. It would also have shopping complexes catering to the needs of international tourists.

The second project of TRKL envisages a Golf Course on the 200 acres of land near the container transshipment terminal at Vallarpadom. The Golf Course, which is to be built on a proposed investment of Rs.400 million, would be of international standards. The Golf Course is primarily targeted at the big budget Japanese tourists who are great lovers of the sport.

The proposed Rs.250 million Dream City Entertainment Park at Kozhikode would also be a joint venture. The Government has assigned the responsibility of structuring the project to Industrial Credit and Investment Corporation of India (ICICI) and Kerala Industrial Infrastructure Development Corporation (KINFRA). Thirteen acres of land has been earmarked for the project and the partner for this joint venture will be finalised by the end of this month.

The total investment required for these three projects is worth Rs.1000 million.

State Government gives nod for motels enroute to major tourist centres

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

The State Government has granted permission to set up motels enroute to the major tourist centres in the State. This facility would be made available in National Highways, M. C. Road, K. K. Road and the various other roads leading from Kollam - Poovar, Thiruvananthapuram - Ponmudi, Kallambalam - Varkala, Kottayam - Kumarakom, Kottayam - Vagamon - Kuttikanam, Thekkady - Munnar, Paravoor - Cherayitheerom, Chalakudi - Athirapalli, Vadakkanchery - Nenmara - Nelliampathy, Palakkad - Malampuzha, Kalpetta - Mananthavadi - Thirunelli, Kottakkal - Nilambur and Kozhikode - Palakkad.

Changes in Portfolio of State Ministers

(Kerala Kaumudi, Thiruvananthapuram, 12.02.2004)

Adv. P. Sankaran	Tourism
Prof. K V Thomas	Excise, Fisheries
Kadavoor Sivadasan	Health
K Muraleedharan	Electricity

Kerala Budget Proposals in Tourism and related sectors

(The Hindu, Thiruvananthapuram 24.01.2004, The New Indian Express, Thiruvananthapuram 24.01.2004, Kerala Calling, February 2004)

The Finance Minister for Kerala, Mr. K. Sankaranarayanan has presented the Kerala Budget for the financial year 2004-05 on 23.01.2004, which goes for an additional revenue mobilisation of Rs.495.05 crores. The budget envisages revenue receipts of Rs.14,263.96 crores and revenue expenditure of Rs. 18,971.09 crores leading to revenue deficit of Rs. 4,707.13 crores. The revised overall deficit is Rs. 257.48 crores. But when the carry over deficit of Rs. 493.86 crores of the current year is taken into consideration, 2004-05 is expected to end with a cumulative deficit of Rs. 751.34 crores.

The highlight of the Budget proposals in tourism and related sectors are given below:

- Rs.74.25 crores towards achieving Tourism Vision 2025
- Rs. 10 crores for the promotion of Kerala as a tourist destination
- Rs. 1 crore for creating a Varkala Development Authority for developing the region taking into consideration its importance as pilgrimage and tourist destination
- Rs. 61.5 crores to Thiruvananthapuram Development Authority (TRIDA) for the overall development of the capital
- Rs. 10 lakhs for Pythal Mala in Kannur
- The Sreepadam Palace at Thiruvananthapuram will be taken over for setting up a numismatics museum for Rs. 1.25 crores

- Rs. 1.25 crores for the Pokkali fields of Ernakulam
- Rs 200 crores for the World Bank aided Kerala State Transport
- Rs. 39.8 crores for major District Roads and State Highways
- Rs. 2 crores for extending the Pulleppady Thammanam Road to connect to the Airport- Seaport link near to the Special Economic Zone
- New Ports policy this year
- Rs. 1.56 crores for Vizhinjam and Rs. 1.50 crores for Thankasserry ports.
- Rs. 10 crores for land acquisition for Thiruvananthapuram International Airport
- Rs. 5 crores for initial expenditure for restoration of Alappuzha canal system and town development
- Catamaran services connecting Thiruvananthapuram, Kochi and Kozhikode will be started
- Rs 1 crore for facilities to Haj Pilgrims

Tax Proposals

- 8.4% luxury tax on house boats
- 4% luxury tax on luxurious and expensive accommodation and other amenities
- Expects 2 crores from sale of cooked food in aircraft, ships and steamers
- Fee on exhibitions, prize schemes and exchange melas

Tax Concessions

- Reduction of luxury tax on non AC rooms with a rent of over Rs.500 per day from 15% to 10%

Tourism Development/ Issues District wise

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Vision document for Thiruvananthapuram

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

The Vision document attempts to boost the tourism potential of Thiruvananthapuram. The Draft Vision Document for Thiruvananthapuram Capital Region has identified certain thrust areas for creating world-class tourist infrastructure. These include, promotion of monsoon tourism, Ayurvedic villages at Kovalam and Varkala, lakefront development at Veli, development of theme parks in four municipal towns, paying guest accommodation, package tours and improvement of transport linkages.

The Draft Vision Document sees tourism as a major revenue earner, capable of bringing more foreign exchange to the exchequer. The document provides a perspective plan for the capital region up to the year 2033, with focus on high potential areas as engines of growth, creation of employment opportunities and enhanced private sector participation.

Tourist village proposed at Poovar

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

A massive tourism project by tapping the tourism resources of Poovar, a major fishing village near the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram is on the anvil.

The project proposed would incur an expense of Rs. 50 million and is to be implemented by the District Tourism Promotion Council (DTPC). According to the DTPC Secretary, Mr. G. Santha Mohan, the project would come up at an eighteen-acre revenue land in the Kulathur Panchayat.

Some of the project highlights include, handicrafts village, open-air restaurant, swimming pool, seaside garden etc. A boat service is also part of the project, via the sea stretch connecting the internationally renowned beach at Kovalam and Poovar. DTPC also has plans to develop the rock cluster between the

'Light House Beach' and the 'Hawa Beach' into a 'Rock Garden.'

Attractions galore at Aakkulam tourist village

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

Aakkulam tourist village is emerging as a tourist centre with a variety of attractions. The musical fountain and the artificial waterfall with a theatre to accommodate 300 people seem to be just the beginning for the Aakkulam tourist village in Thiruvananthapuram. The tourist village is getting ready to add one more attraction to its repertoire, with the District Tourism Promotion Council (DTPC) planning to develop the marshy area in front of the Centre for Earth Science Studies (CESS) at Aakkulam to start a boat service between Aakkulam and Veli, another renowned tourist village. The work will be undertaken by the State Irrigation Department, which is slated for August 17. On completion, the project will launch the boat service in the 3-km waterway between Veli and Aakkulam.

According to the Secretary of DTPC, Mr. G. Santha Mohan, the musical fountain will be opened to the public by the end of August. The waterfall by the side of the indoor theatre would become functional in three months, he added. The village, which is a main attraction for children, would soon be equipped with an entertainment park replete with cafeteria, toyshops, ready-made garment shops etc. A restaurant facing the swimming pool is also getting ready in the village.

DTPC facilitation centre coming up at Kallar

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

A new District Tourism Promotion Council (DTPC) facilitation centre at Kallar is getting ready for commissioning. Kallar is a favourite tourist attraction on the way to Ponmudi hill resort in Thiruvananthapuram. The new DTPC centre has a resting area, restaurant, toilets, changing rooms, shops to sell forest produce, STD and ISD booths, Internet café, beer parlour and car parking area. The centre would be of immense help to tourists, who arrive at the Golden Valley for a cool dip in the Kallar River and visit the eco-tourism project, before proceeding to Ponmudi hill resort.

Initiatives taken for Tourism Development in Varkala

(Deshabhimani, Thiruvananthapuram 13.08.2003)

The Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas has stated in the assembly that steps have been initiated to develop tourism in Varkala according to the master plan prepared. Steps have already been taken to provide parking facilities as well as waste management.

Bid to molest tourist: Doctor held

(The New Indian Express, Kerala Kaumudi, Thiruvananthapuram 19.08.2003)

The Kovalam police today arrested a doctor on a complaint of attempt to molest a woman tourist. According to police, Dr. Manoj Vijayan who was running the Kovalam Multi-speciality Panchakarma Centre at Kovalam was arrested following a complaint from Swedish native Zanna Anderson. The tourist alleged that Vijayan attempted to molest her while she was being massaged by a woman masseur of the centre yesterday.

Illegal Activities in Kovalam in the name of massaging

(Mathurbhoomi, Thiruvananthapuram 23.08.2003)

Illegal Activities in Kovalam are increasing in the pretext of massaging. These centres function in the name of Ayurvedic massage centres and Panchakarma Treatment Centre. Usually the licenses are taken in the name of qualified Ayurvedic doctors and run by somebody else. The masseurs are the ladies who come in search for job in beach resorts. A number of domestic and foreign tourists visit these centres. Although the Tourism

Department has instructed for separate masseurs (men for men and women for women), this is not followed.

Boat Club Development Project started giving hopes to tourists

(Malayala Manorama, Thiruvananthapuram 29.08.2003)

The boat club development project at Neyyar Dam has started. As the first phase, the boat jetty will be relocated near the pavilion next month. The boat jetty is being relocated based on the recommendation from the Dam Safety Committee. The Irrigation Department has allocated four lakhs rupees for this. In addition to this, the state government has allocated ten lakhs for the boat club development. The final decision on spending has not been taken.

The Boat Club was started 11 years back and was constantly neglected by the authorities. The Club has now 2 Safari boats and 2 Speedboats. The Club has 11 staff including 7 woman and are appointed on daily wages basis. The Club has daily earnings of around Rs.750.

Varkala in for a facelift

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 121, September 2003)

A high-level meeting chaired by the Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas, gave nod for the implementation of the Rs. 300 million master plan prepared by the National Transportation Planning and Research Centre (NATPAC) for the beach resort at Varkala. The master plan has in it projects that would drastically enhance the destination value of this beautiful beach resort, which is catching up with Kovalam, near Thiruvananthapuram.

According to the Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas a proposal for setting up a hanging bridge at a cost of Rs. 20 million is under consideration. The construction of hanging bridge will be implemented only after a feasibility study and also after seeking the opinion of local people, the minister added.

Attending the high-level meeting the Tourism Secretary, Mr. T. Balakrishnan said that the Public Works Department (PWD) had been asked to submit a project costing Rs. 100 million for the development of roads at Varkala.

Mini pavilions to come up at Neyyar dam

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 121, September 2003)

Three mini pavilions will come up at the popular tourist destination of Neyyar Dam, located near the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram. These pavilions will be opened to public during Onam and is meant for having a panoramic view of the dam and the adjoining sights, enabling the visitors to get a lot of cool breeze.

These pavilions will come next to the Kerala Tourism Development Corporation (KTDC) Hotel and will have a height of five metres each. Work has been completed on the two bathing ponds and a traffic park meant for kids. They will also become functional in this Onam season.

New Initiative in Tourism Sector

(Southern Star Morning Daily, Thiruvananthapuram 02.09.2003)

The Vacation India Tour Company has started India's first Tourism Holiday Shop in Thiruvananthapuram. Visitors can buy Tourist Packages ranging from hundred rupees to two lakhs from the shop as one buys textiles or any other products from a shop. The shop also has numerous CDs on Tourism destinations and also facility to see it. The initiative would encourage both domestic and international tourists.

Being a new venture, this concept is introduced in Thiruvananthapuram first and will be later spread to other districts of the state, says Managing Director of Vacation India, Mr. Benny Thomas. The Holiday shop is targeting the middle class family. A number of tourist packages are designed for them ranging from 1 day to 4 days. Tailor made packages are also available depending on the choice of the tourists.

The shop also gives free services like information on tourist destination, hotel booking, travel facilities etc.

Packages can be booked through telephone also. A 24-hour service Information Bank on Tourism also has been started. The services can be available at +91 471 2313484.

Kovalam development: Recommendations not implemented

(Mathurbhoomi, Thiruvananthapuram 04.09.2003)

The recommendations in the master plan prepared by the Tourism Department to develop Kovalam are still not implemented. The three-member panel has recommended for the increase in width of the road, improving parking facilities, constructing heritage complex etc. The report says that Kovalam lost its beauty because of the unplanned multi-storeyed buildings constructed there. Although recommendation was given to demolish the unauthorised buildings, new buildings came up in the last tourist season.

The panel also found out that the street hawkers and beggars disturb the tourists. Although police has been deputed in the beach to curb these activities, it is not effectively implemented.

The panel has also recommended for the formation of an Authority for the development of Kovalam. Although there is an agency at present, meetings are not held periodically. Although every year before the tourist season, they meet and take some decisions, they are not implemented. The last meeting of the agency was held in November 2001. The meeting presided by the Tourism Minister decided to hold the meeting every three months.

Varkala Tourism development not effective

(Mathurbhoomi, Thiruvananthapuram 04.09.2003)

The tourism development project in Varkala, an international tourism destination is not effective in attracting tourists.

Although a project report has been submitted to the Centre on constructing a hanging bridge connecting cliffs, nothing has happened yet. The cliff that extended into the beach is now coming down. Only primary survey has been done on the cleaning of Varkala tunnel in connection with the Kovalam- Kollam water way. Although a master plan was prepared by NATPAC for the development of Varkala that is also not implemented.

Unauthorised constructions and encroachment of government land are the other main problems. The liquor-drugs lobby and unauthorised vendors harass the tourists. Illegal activities are taking place in the pretext of beauty parlours and massage centres.

The land of Tourism Department was handed over to ITDC for building hotel. But when the construction was over, it was transferred to private parties making it impossible for the common man to access it.

Private parties encroaching Vellayani Lake

(Mathurbhoomi, Thiruvananthapuram 04.09.2003)

Private parties are encroaching the only fresh water lake in Thiruvananthapuram by filling for years. Tourist cottages have spread in these encroached lands. Many prominent persons in Thiruvananthapuram have private cottages at Vellayani.

It was in 1990, the then agricultural minister K. R. Gauramma declared Vellayani as fresh water lake. Although restrictions were imposed on construction, all developments have taken place violating this. Vellayani Lake was naturally formed in the 300 hectares. Of this 144.25 hectares were agricultural fields of Vellayani Agricultural College. The new constructions are taking place preventing the flow of small streams from the nearby hills. The Vellayani Lake is also the main source of drinking water for Venganoor, Kalliyoor, Pallichal, Vizhinjam Panchayats as well as Thiruvallom and Nemom, which is now part of Corporation.

Although declared fresh water lake, nothing has been done to keep it fresh. The water source for the 6 crore Tourism Department and LIC sponsored Kovalam Water Supply Projects and the 2 crore Vizhinjam drinking water project of the Prime Minister's drinking water project is Vellayani Lake.

The area not declared as reservoir has cultivation. The insecticides sprayed in these fields have polluted the lake and many backwater fishes died last year.

Kovalam gets ready for yet another tourist season

(By S. Anil Radhakrishnan, The Hindu, Thiruvananthapuram 05.09.2003)

The Kovalam beach is gearing up for yet another tourist season. Even as the sea is well in its post monsoon retreat, tan seekers from around the world have started trickling into the crescent shaped Eve and Light House beaches of Kovalam.

Tourists from the UK, Germany, Japan, Spain, Belgium and other countries can be spotted on the two beaches of the resort these days. The beaches, which were deserted during the monsoon, have become lively all of a sudden with the arrival of tourists. Local people who make a living leashing out surfboards, beach umbrellas and beach chairs have already cornered vantage points along the beaches.

Domestic tourists especially those from North India have also started coming in. On account of the Onam vacation, a large number of tourists from within the state are also making a beeline for Kovalam. However as the sea is still rough, the signboards warning tourists not to swim in the sea are still all over the place and lifeguards are not permitting tourists to venture into the sea.

The Tourism Department has put up swings in the two beaches. Cultural programmes also have been planned for foreign tourists who arrived in Kovalam to celebrate Onam.

The construction of footpaths from the Kovalam junction to ITDC junction is on and is likely to be completed before the commencement of the tourist season. The widening of the road leading to Light House has already been completed.

The travel trade is optimistic about the forthcoming season that will officially commence in November. They hope that they can cash in on the slump in the tourism sector in north India.

The arrival for the first time, of chartered flights from Russia and Netherlands to the Thiruvananthapuram International Airport in November is also expected to boost the tourism industry.

A solution to the decades long problem of garbage disposal is in sight with the first biogas plant being set up under the Rs. 71 lakhs Zero Waste Kovalam Project, which is ready for commissioning. The work for the second biogas plant behind the Light House beach will begin this month.

The other problems dogging the beach resorts such as poor drainage, erratic power and drinking water supply and inadequate infrastructure facilities are yet to be addressed by the Department of Tourism and local Panchayat.

Most of the ornamental lights installed in the by lanes behind the two beaches and along the 600 m long pathway from Hotel Sea Rock to the Light House beach end are not working. The work to rectify these lights is on and is expected to be over soon.

Women show the way in tourist resort

(By S. Anil Radhakrishnan, The Hindu, Thiruvananthapuram 20.09.2003)

An eco-friendly revolution is on within the confines of a make shift shed near the international beach resort, thanks to an enterprising group of local women, most of them from families below poverty line.

The women are putting to use discarded newspapers and magazines for producing carry bags, covers and folders as well as utility and craft materials.

The Pioneer paper Bag unit, based at Vellar near here, is now in a position to offer over 120 designs of handmade covers in the range of Re.1 to Rs.85. These are made not only from old newspapers, but also recycled boards and even fresh pulp.

The women are also producing flower vases, woven carry bags, boxes, file folders, necklaces, bracelets and earrings from paper beads and pens. An attractive folder with a Kasavu lining is the latest product from the unit.

"We started off with paper covers costing Re.1 each. Within months, we started making all kinds of bags and carry bags, which can take weight up to 12 kg", says A. S. Seema, Secretary of the unit.

It all started with women from different 'Kudumsree' units of Muttakkad ward of Venganoor Panchayat being provided with training in producing paper bags under the Zero Waste Kovalam Project.

Encouraged by the training and the action plan chalked out by the Panchayat, 11 women most of them belonging to the families below poverty line, joined hands and invested Rs. 1,000 each to set up a shed for the unit. The Kerala tourism supported the venture by advancing Rs.10,000 to the group and the first order for 150 covers was placed by the Mahar Regiment of the Indian Army in connection with its Diamond Jubilee Celebrations.

Initially, the unit functioned with borrowed tools and furniture and made hardly any profit. The Kudumasree has now chipped in with a subsidy of Rs. 1 lakh and the local branch of a bank is providing a matching amount as loan to the unit.

"We want to diversify and produce cloth bags, folders and bags from palm leaves, banana fibre and mixed media. The fact is that there is a huge demand for eco-friendly products", says S. Saleena a trained nurse, who is treasurer of the unit.

Tourism Quiz

(Kerala Kaumudi, Thiruvananthapuram 20.09.2003)

The Thiruvananthapuram District Tourism Promotion Council (DTPC) will conduct quiz for the tourism club members on Saturday. Members of the schools and colleges in the district registered under DTPC can participate. The competition will take place at 2.30 pm at the Akkulam Tourist village. Winners can participate in the state level competition.

From classrooms to 'Thattukadas': IHMCT on a mission

(By Kavitha S. Kumar, The New Indian Express, Thiruvananthapuram 22.09.2003)

By organising daylong intensive training programme for the workers of wayside teashops and 'thattukadas', the Institute of Hotel Management and Catering Technology (IHMCT), Kovalam here is on a mission to impart to them the secrets of top class hospitality.

As many as 70 persons have been benefited by the training programme started by the Institute with the support of the Union Ministry for Tourism for the unorganised sector on June 14. The State Government has also contributed with a project 'Samskriti' wherein the small hotels around Kovalam are provided with smokeless chulas, water filters and food covers.

The programme has added momentum to the Zero Waste Kovalam project, says B.M. Mohanty, the principal of IHMCT who is heading the project. "The personal hygiene of the people in the State is at its best. They need to be fine tuned about maintaining professional hygiene especially when they are in the unorganised sector.

The participants are given training in maintaining personal and environmental hygiene, the means to avoid adulterated food items and the etiquette needed in the hospitality industry for attracting customers. "It is basically an interactive programme where the participants clear their doubts about food safety, sanitation and pest control in kitchens", say Achama Chandy, a visiting faculty of the Institute engaged in the programme.

As part of the day's schedule, the faculty take the participants on a study tour around the campus to show waste disposal mechanisms adopted by the institute. "We try to show them that if properly maintained, waste can be turned into a resource," says George Alexander, co-ordinator of the programme. The Kitchens in the Institute is partially run on biogas generated from the biogas accumulated on the campus.

The Institute provides each trainee with a stipend of Rs.100 and a certificate. "The stipend is meant to compensate for the income lost on the training day", says Mohanty.

The one-day training programme will be followed up by routine visits by the faculty to the food joints. The students of the institute are also included in the follow up programme. "We are planning to assign each food joint to a group of students as part of their course project. The students will be responsible for maintaining the standards of the eatery assigned to them," the Principal said.

"I am running a teashop at Vazhathadam for years. I have learnt many things here especially waste disposal," says Syed Ali a participant.

The institute is at present contemplating to diversify the training programme by imparting the lessons of etiquette and secure the police and customs personnel, guides, taxi-auto rickshaw drivers, coast guards etc.

Le Meridien to open its beach resort in November

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 123, September 2003)

Kerala would soon have its first five star beach resort coming up at Kovalam. This has been made possible by the efforts of 'Le Meridien Hotels and Resorts Worldwide' the renowned international, luxury hotel group, which is already having its presence in Kochi. This is one among the three hotels that is being opened by the group in India.

The beach resort at Kovalam will be under the management of Kovalam Hotel Ltd, and will have 144 rooms, 40 cottages and 4 suites. It will also be equipped with a health club, ayurveda treatment center, swimming pools and restaurants. A convention center to accommodate about 500 people will also be part of the upcoming resort. The Le Meridien Group headquartered in London currently has 135 luxury hotels spread over 56 countries.

East Fort to be made heritage zone

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 123, November 2003)

According to the Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas, the government has sanctioned a sum of Rs. 20 million to preserve the historic East Fort in Thiruvananthapuram and its surrounding area as heritage zone. The adjoining palace structures would also be preserved at an expense of Rs.15 million. As part of the project, concrete paths would be constructed from Attakulangara to Simhakotta and from Theerthapada Mandapam to Vettimurichakotta. Adequate drainage will also come up with lamp posts and aesthetically designed landscapes.

20 crores drinking water project in Kovalam Tourism Zone

(Malayala Manorama, Thiruvananthapuram, 05.11.2003)

Tourism minister K V Thomas has announce that a 20 crores drinking water project would be implemented from Chowara to Kovalam. Other projects like Kozhikode Dream City, Sanghumugham development, Killiyar

development were also evaluated by a higher group under the chairmanship of the minister.

The drinking water project is for the hotels as well as the local people. The Master Plan would be prepared by the Water Authority and presented before 15th of February. Although 5 crores is estimated, 20 crores is required for the implementation according to the Tourism Department. The Tourism Department, who is funding the project, has intimated the authority that money is not a constraint if the project is implemented within the stipulated time period of one year. Water from the Vellayani Kayal would be used for the project.

The development plan prepared by the Kumar Group on Sanghumugham was also presented on the meeting. After the completion, the project would be handed over to the Thiruvananthapuram City Corporation. The meeting has entrusted the City Corporation to have discussion with the various people's representatives before finalising the project in order to avoid controversies.

Another project on cleaning the banks of Killiyar and starting Water sports is also planned. The project proposal will be submitted within three weeks.

Coconut vs. cola

(By Anil Radhakrishnan, The Hindu, Thiruvananthapuram, 21.11.2003)

The dip in the popularity of artificial softdrinks following the controversy seems to have had its impact on the tourism scenario in the State Capital. Bunches of tender coconuts have been hung from the branches of trees at vantage points on the bypass leading to Kovalam. Foreign tourists sipping tender coconuts along with their kith and kin are a regular sight these days on the stretch with the start of the tourist season. Many wayside vendors in the Eenchakkal-Vazhamuttom stretch have stocked paper napkins and even plastic spoons, taking into consideration the needs of the new clients. Tender coconuts seem to have gained a definite edge over artificial softdrinks in the Kovalam beach resort also as most no longer sport soft drinks bottles suspended from the strings.

New road to link Ponmudi and Kovalam

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 124, December 2003)

As per the Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas, a modern road network is on the anvil, which would link the two major tourist attractions in the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram viz. Ponmudi and Kovalam. The former is a popular hill station around 50 km from the city and the latter is renowned for its beautiful beaches and resorts.

The proposed road network is to be completed with the cooperation of Local Self Governments and would take efforts to transform this sector into a major tourist center. The project is estimated to incur an expense of Rs. 150 million.

Rs 200 million drinking water project for Kovalam tourism sector

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 124, December 2003)

In a recent statement, the Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas said that a Rs. 200 million drinking water project would be implemented to the benefit of the tourist sector, stretching from Kovalam to Chowara.

The project once operational would provide pure drinking water to the local community, hotels, resorts and other tourist centers that dot the region from Kovalam to Chowara, which has one of the thriving beach-based tourism sectors in Kerala. The Kerala Water Authority would implement the project by using water drawn from Vellayani backwaters.

First chartered flight with tourists from Holland lands at Thiruvananthapuram

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 125, January 2004)

Kerala has emerged as the new traveller's destination in Holland. The first chartered flight from Holland

carrying 91 tourists arrived at the Thiruvananthapuram airport on December 7th. Of these 91 tourists, 60 were brought by Far Pavilion, a New Delhi based tour agent having a tie-up with Tui, a company based in the Netherlands. Thomas Cook, the travel services major, brought the 31 tourists from Holland to Kerala.

The first flight also consisted of tour operators from Holland as part of the tourism promotion schemes. The flights from Holland would arrive at Thiruvananthapuram every Sunday up to March.

Leisure Zone to be set up at Shankhumukhom beach

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 125, January 2004)

It seems that the coming year would soon witness strong winds of change sweeping over the beautiful Shankhumukhom beach in the State capital. Kerala Tourism has decided to set up a leisure zone on the 26 acres of the Shankhumukhom beach, at an estimated cost of Rs.48 million. The plan of the leisure zone was presented at a high-level meeting presided by the Tourism Minister, Prof. K. V. Thomas. The project is being implemented by Kerala Tourism in co-ordination with the City Corporation under the Capital City Development Programme.

The leisure zone focuses on providing fun and entertainment for families, especially children. It would be set up with minimum construction and permanent structures would be avoided in accordance with the Coastal Regulation Zone norms in order to protect the natural beauty of the beach.

A roundabout would be set up at the junction where the road from the All Saints' College, Airport and Vettucaud coincides. Vehicles arriving at the leisure zone can be parked on the way to Vettucaud. Vehicles proceeding to the airport would be diverted through the existing road passing through the side of the mermaid park to the South Palace.

The road adjacent to the District Tourism Promotion Council's restaurant and the children's park would be made the new traffic corridor. The stretch would be re-laid with tiles and grass. The football ground in the locality would be fully retained.

The 250-metre-long and two-metre-wide walkway to be constructed by the department would be extended further north of the Kalmandapam. The walkway would also be provided with a circular track so that it can be used for jogging and other fitness exercises.

The centuries old South Palace, which is under the City Corporation, is being renovated with the support of Kerala Tourism. It has been decided to convert the South Palace in to a children's museum. While one floor of the palace would be set apart for electronic games, the other would be solely an area for traditional games.

At present, a children's park and a traffic park of the District Tourism Promotion Council are functioning at Shankhumukhom. Additional facilities for recreation and entertainment would also be provided at the beach as part of this project.

Convention Centre planned

(The Hindu, Thiruvananthapuram, 24.01.2004)

The Government is planning to set up a state of the art convention centre at Akkulam as part of a Rs. 500 crore project to boost the availability of quality conferencing and accommodation facilities in the State capital.

The Tourism Minister K. V. Thomas told press persons that the convention centre would be able to seat 1500 persons and accommodate another 1500. The Central Government was expected to give a grant of Rs.500 crores for the project. The State Government would think of going in for a joint venture if this did not work out.

The Minister said top priority was being accorded for the convention centre, which would come up on 54 acres. Road connectivity, proximity to the airport and a waste disposal system were of key importance for such a centre. The Convention centre was expected to tackle the lack of quality hotel rooms in the State Capital. The Kerala Travel Mart could not be held here due to this reason and Kochi not only had a convention centre but also more hotel rooms of three star classifications and above.

Renovation project on Kanakakunnu Palace begins in full swing

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

The century - old Kanakakunnu Palace would soon gain a sigh of relief from its dilapidated existence as Kerala Tourism's Rs.950 million project to renovate the heritage monument is in full swing. The restoration work on the 103 - year old monument in the State Capital is being executed by the Public Works Department under the supervision of the LBS Centre for Science and Technology, Thiruvananthapuram. A team led by the Conservation specialist, Mr. M. S. Mathews of the Department of Civil Engineering, IIT, Chennai inspected the work recently.

The ravages of time on this grand old building are well seen in the form of extensive damages to its magnificent exterior and its equally fabulous interior. The renovation work focuses on resurrecting this imposing palace building back to its former splendence and grandeur.

Kerala Tourism has already landscaped the premises of the palace building at an expense of 10 million. The renovation project which has been taken up with out any structural changes to the monument, will be completed by March this year.

A flowery touch for a regal mansion

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

Beautifully draped in its grand flowery attire of multifarious hues, the historic Kanakakunnu Palace was indeed a feast to the eyes of the spectators. The century - old monument played a warm and royal host to the Flower and Fruit show that commenced on January 23. The Governor, Mr. Sikander Bakht inaugurated the ten - day Flower Show. Over 36,000 plants of the first generation hybrid varieties of annuals such as Vinca, Zinnia, Marigold, Slavia, Phlox and Aster were planted in the 'natural' flowerbeds set up on a 12,000 sq. ft. stretch on the palace premises. Over one lakh plants, including 25,000 in the competition section were exhibited at the show.

The mega show was conceived in three zones around the Kanakakunnu Palace as a carnival. The Kanakakunnu Palace grounds was the primary zone for the flower show. A permanent flower - bed was prepared on the premises of the palace grounds consisting of variegated species of plants such as ornamental plants, crotons, fruit trees and vegetables. A large collection of different types of orchids, anthuriums and other shade - loving foliage were also displayed on the Kanakakunnu palace premises.

Renovation work for six historic buildings underway

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

The Fort heritage zone in Thiruvananthapuram is all set to attain its past magnificence as the six major historic monuments in the city are being reconstructed by the Archaeology Department in one of its largest renovation projects. The Central Government has offered an assistance of Rs.20 million for this massive renovation project while the Kerala Tourism is contributing Rs.510 million for the purpose.

The project mainly involves the repair and maintenance of several ancient structures in the heritage zone. The huge complex that houses the Valiya Kottaram and its subordinate structures at the eastern entrance of the Sri Padmanabha Swamy Temple would undergo heavy maintenance work.

The Ananthavilasom Palace, that houses the State Bank of Travancore Recreation Club and the adjoining

Padippura towers are also being renovated.

The other buildings that are to be renovated include the 150-year-old Rangavilasom Palace, the 19th century Sree Padam Palace and the 150-year-old Nityachelavu Bungalow where the Travancore Royal family used to maintain its financial accounts. The Krishnavilasom Palace, old secretariat and the historic buildings lining the street from Vadakkenada up to the Padmatheertham pond will also undergo renovation. The Archaeology Department has also taken up the century-old Shankhuchakra Palace at the Airport Road for the purpose of reconstruction.

In the first stage of the project, the seven entrances of the East Fort at Vettimurichakotta, Pazhavangadi, East Fort, West Fort, Puthen Street, Sreevaraham and Virakupurakotta as well as the entrance near the Fort Government Hospital were reconstructed.

Kerala Tourism is also preparing to take up another project to pave the footpath leading from the East Fort gate to the Padmatheertham and beyond, to the front of the temple.

Another paved footpath would be soon provided along the stretch that leads from Vettimurichakotta to the Theerthapada mandapam.

Renovated Gandhi Park opened to the public

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

The Gandhi Park at East Fort in Thiruvananthapuram has been thrown open to the public after the completion of the renovation work undertaken by the Kerala Tourism. The Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas formally handed over the park to the City Corporation at a function held on the eve of the New Year.

The renovation work involved the integration of the Gandhi Park with the adjoining Pattom Thanu Pillai Park and the asphalted area in between which is being used for public meetings. The entire project that covers 5000 sq metres is built around a central East - West Axis linking the Chala Road with the East Fort gate and the splendid gopuram of the Sri Padmanabha Swamy Temple. The park has been designed with the statue of Mahatma Gandhi as the prime visual focus.

An elevated walkway covered with Himalayan stones has also been constructed. The walkway that runs through this median is accessible from the gates on either side and the ramp at the northern end. The three-tier stage that incorporates the statue of Mahatma Gandhi has been constructed at the southern end with a sprawling lawn in front.

A covered pavilion has been set up and seats have been provided for the convenience of the senior citizens. Car parking facility and a food court has been provided. Sand pits for children have been constructed on either side of the stage.

Rs. 5000 million Convention Centre to be set up in Aakkulam

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

Speaking at a news conference, The Minister for Kerala Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas said that the State Government was planning to set up an International Convention Centre at Aakkulam with the assistance of the Central Government at a cost of Rs.5000 million. About fifty four acres of land has been earmarked for this purpose. The Minister added that in case the Central Government fails to sanction the project, the Convention Centre would be set up with private partnership.

In a discussion held earlier between the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the Chief Minister of Kerala, Mr. A. K. Antony, the Chief Minister had appealed to the Centre for the establishment of an International Convention Centre in Aakkulam. Kerala was also the first state to put forward the proposal for an International Convention Centre to the Central Government.

Passenger ship service from Vizhinjam to Sri Lanka: Minister Prof. K. V. Thomas

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

Speaking at the opening function of the newly renovated Gandhi Park in Thiruvananthapuram Prof. K. V. Thomas, the Minister for Kerala Tourism said that the State Government and the Sri Lankan Government has reached a consensus to establish a passenger ship service from Vizhinjam to Sri Lanka. The proposed

agreement was the outcome of the recently held discussions between Mr. Ravi Karunayake, the Sri Lankan Minister for Commerce and Prof. K. V. Thomas.

'Eco Floatel' launched at Poovar Resort

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

A floating cottage named 'Eco Floatel' has been launched at the Poovar Island Resort, a resort complex at Vizhinjam near Thiruvananthapuram. The Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas inaugurated the resort on January 8th.

'Eco-Floatel', the floating cottage that has been conceptualised and constructed with eco-friendly features, is one of the finest examples of Eco-friendly tourism spots.

'Eco-Floatel' is built on a compact and cosy 550 - square feet space, comprising of all the facilities available in a suite. The cottage consists of two rooms, each with a private deck looking out towards the vast Arabian Sea. Its thatched roof is made of natural grass.

KOLLAM

Plans to exploit Sasthamkotta Lake in the name of tourism

(Madhyamam, Thiruvananthapuram 09.08.2003)

Government and Private agencies have started plans to develop Kerala's largest freshwater lake Sasthamkotta into a tourist destination. The State Ecotourism wing along with a private agency in Sasthamkotta and in association with the "Sthree Sakthi" unit has organised a one-day workshop spending Rs.50000/- as the first step to initiate tourism in the area.

Sasthamkotta situated amidst so many hills spreads over 991 acres. The average depth of the lake, which was 50 metres in 1973, has now reduced to 15 metres. A study conducted by CESS says that the depth is getting reduced by 1 cm per day. A study by KSSP in January last year says that in every monsoon season, hundreds of tonnes of sand are eroded into the lake from the hill slopes. Ecotourism is being started neglecting all these factors. The environmentalists criticise that it is the first time that Ecotourism is being promoted in a freshwater lake. They added that this is the easiest way to accumulate wastes including plastic in the lake. The KSSP has suggested the government to provide toilets and free drinking water from the lake to the 5000 families settled around the lake rather than going for tourism development.

Palaruvi becoming pleasure spot for tourists

(Mangalam, Kottayam 08.08.2003)

With the monsoon coming in, Palaruvi has become a major tourist attraction. The gate to Palaruvi was opened on August 1 with all facilities for tourism. Entry to the area is charged at Rs.5 for adults while for education institutions, the entry will be free. Vehicles have to take separate pass for entry. Facilities like Canteen and dressing room have been provided.

As part of the development plan prepared and submitted to the officials, Palaruvi-Puzha Samrakshana Samithi has been constituted including 134 families from Aryankavu Panchayat. Fourteen people have been appointed for the protection of Palaruvi. Tourists are also getting services from them. Protection of River and Forests with people's participation is the aim of the Samithi.

DTPC transfers two resorts and parks to private sector

(Madhyamam, Thiruvananthapuram 11.08.2003)

Two resorts, Adventure park and Children's Park of Kollam DTPC is being transferred to the private sector. The move is based on the Government's policy to handover government initiatives in tourism to private parties to

enhance profits.

Lakhs worth DTPC run resorts at Aalumkadavu and Paravur are being leased to the private parties. The Gree Channel Resort at Aalumkadavu is being leased to Glacier Tourism Services for 3 years. The Agreement, which will be signed today, has provision for extending the lease period to 5 years. DTPC claims to get Rs.14211 per month by leasing the property. The Lake Sagar Resort at Paravur has already been leased out to two private parties for Rs.40000 per month.

It was the DTPC Executive Committee that has taken decision to transfer the resorts to private sector. In addition to the resorts, decision has been taken to lease out the Adventure Park and Children's Park at Ashramam. Quotations will be invited for leasing out the property.

Recognition for Thenmala Ecotourism

(Madhyamam, Thiruvananthapuram 11.08.2003)

The Thenmala Ecotourism Project has got recognition from the World Tourism Organisation, said Minister for Tourism Prof. K. V. Thomas while speaking at a function on Swarnam 2003. The Project has got mention on the Sustainable Development - compilation of good practices in SMEs. Thenmala ecotourism Project is the only project listed out from India from the other 47 countries included in the compilation.

Promote Ecotourism Project in 56 Forest Areas

(Madhyamam, Thiruvananthapuram 12.08.2003)

The fifth report of the Legislative Estimates Committee has recommended starting of ecotourism projects in 56 forest areas taking into account the lessons learnt from Thenmala Ecotourism Project.

The Tourism Department has identified 56 forest areas for implementing ecotourism. The Chairman of the Committee, Shri. E.T. Mohammed Basheer has recommended the government to prepare priority list from the identified sites and implement ecotourism. The Committee said that the Thenmala Ecotourism Project is not well promoted and steps have to be taken to distribute pamphlets through all Information Centres. Problems in Palaruvi have to be sorted out and bring under Thenmala Ecotourism Project. A tourism package has to be developed connecting Courtallam, Palaruvi, Ponnudi, Thenmala and Veli. Facility for bathing has to be provided at Palaruvi. Immediate steps have to be taken for starting Interpretation Centre at Thenmala. Accommodation facilities should also be provided here.

Action has to be taken for establishing Electricity Substation at Thenmala dam site. Special attention should be given to prevent landslide when involved in construction activities in this area. A project for producing electricity from solar system has to be considered. The Committee has also recommended for posting Tourism Police in the area.

ALAPPUZHA

Alappuzha port has potential for tourism

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

Tourism to the rescue of Alappuzha port. In a statement made recently in the Kerala State Legislative Assembly, the Minister for Cooperation and Ports, Mr. M. V. Raghavan said that the Government would like to convert the Alappuzha port into a tourist project, catering to the needs of both foreign and domestic tourists. The port is losing prominence due to the proximity of Kochi, which is a major port. A consultant has been appointed to study the feasibility of converting the port into a tourist destination, and the government expects the study report in a month's time.

Pathiramanal handover: SC notice

(Mathurbhoomi, Thiruvananthapuram 06.09.2003)

The Supreme Court has issued a notice to the State Government on 05.09.03 against handing over of Pathiramanal Island to Oberoi Group for ecotourism. The Kottayam Nature Society whose plea was earlier rejected by the High Court approached the Supreme Court. The petition was accepted by Justice Brijesh Kumar and Arun Kumar. The petitioner has said that Pathiramanal is a bird sanctuary and also included under the Ramsar List. If the hotel comes, that would affect the environment. Another argument is that the transfer of land to Oberoi is illegal. The excess land in the hands of Anthraper family was taken over by the Government under the Land Reforms Act. The Land acquired by this Act can be transferred only to landless agriculturists. Both these arguments were rejected by the High Court. Same arguments raised by the petitioner in the High Court are again being raised in the Supreme Court. Adv. V. Giri and M. P. Vinod appeared for the petitioner.

Master plan for Alappuzha town to be ready in March

(The New Indian Express, Thiruvananthapuram 28.12.2003)

Tourism Minister K V Thomas said that the master plan for the Alappuzha town will be finalised during the last week of March. He told reporters after discussing the issue with the people's representatives of the area today that the plan envisaged the total development of the town and the Chief Secretary had already been asked to propose the steps to raise funds for the plan. He said the project consultant, Engineering Services of Delhi, would prepare a draft of the master plan by the middle of March. The draft would be finalised by the end of March.

However, he said, the Rs.1.5 crore cleansing of the highly polluted Vadai and commercial canals, which are passing through the town, would begin next week.

"Palace on Waves" launched in the Alappuzha back waters

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 125, January 2004)

As part of the MICE Tourism project being promoted by the Kerala Tourism, a houseboat with a conference hall has been launched in the Alappuzha backwaters. The houseboat aptly named "Palace on Waves" was inaugurated by the member of Planning Commission, Mr. Sompal on December 27th. The conference hall was inaugurated by Prof. K. V. Thomas, the Minister for Tourism. The houseboat is launched by Pullickattil Houseboats, a leading houseboat operator in Alappuzha.

This two-decked houseboat is designed in such a manner that the spacious conference hall is located in the top deck of the boat. The hall is 80-foot long and 14-foot wide. The conference hall has the enormous capacity to accommodate about 150 people. In addition, director board meetings, birthday parties etc; can also be conducted in the hall. The conference hall is well equipped with all the facilities needed for a conference including appropriate lighting, mike, slide projector and screen. The hall also contains the facility to prepare and serve food.

The deck below the conference hall consists of five air-conditioned bedrooms. The houseboat also contains a sit-out and a kitchen. The houseboat also contains television settings in order to provide entertainment to the guests.

The conference hall in the houseboat is named "Kailasam". Interestingly, the rooms in this highly spacious houseboat have been named Sindhu, Ganga, Narmada, Kaveri and Yamuna, the names of the five great Indian rivers.

KOTTAYAM

Government to probe Vagamon encroachment

The Forest Minister Mr. K. Sudhakaran has stated in the Assembly that the Government will not allow any encroachments in Vagamon. He said that different departments have land in the Vagamon region and instruction has been given to forest officials to find out where encroachment has taken place.

In the meantime the Tourism Minister Prof. K.V. Thomas has stated that the Subject Committee of the

Tourism Department would visit Vagamon to investigate whether encroachment has taken place. The Minister said that the Revenue Department has handed over 741.848 hectares of land to the Tourism Department on 8th March 2000. The Central PWD is now in the process of fencing this area. He added that the preparation of Tourism Master Plan for Vagamon has been awarded to PKF World Wide and once the Master Plan is obtained, discussion with the people's representatives including the Opposition Leader will take place. India's largest ecotourism destination is being planned here and indication has already been given that more than 5% construction activities should not take place in the region.

Construction work continues in Vagamon in spite of order

(Mathurbhoomi, Thiruvananthapuram 11.08.2003)

The construction work of resorts continues in Vagamon in spite of order from Revenue Department. Although the order was issued on August 8th the construction work is still continuing and the Revenue Department hasn't taken any steps to curb this. The ADM issued "Stop Memo" on 4th August. But the revenue department issued the memo to the resort owners only on 8th August.

Kumarakom Tourism Development Authority to be formed

(Madhyamam, Thiruvananthapuram 12.08.2003)

Considering the CESS Report, the Legislative Estimate Committee has recommended the government to form Kumarakom Tourism Development Authority. The Chairman of the Committee, Shri. E.T. Mohammed Basheer said in the press conference that eco-friendly backwater tourism combining agriculture and fisheries is most suited for Kumarakom.

The Committee recommended that the width of the Kottayam-Kumarakom-Vaikom road has to be increased considering the importance of Kumarakom. The Forest Department has to undertake the regeneration of mangroves in the marshy areas. The Committee also recommended for refixing of boards showing "Conserve Birds" and for constructing a bird watching tower with modern facilities for easy sighting of birds. Restriction for speedboats are to be imposed in the migratory season of birds November to May. Hotels other than Taj and KTDC are not paying tax to the Panchayat. It has to be ensured that they pay tax.

Facilities like Snack bar, toilets etc. has to be provided for tourists visiting bird sanctuary. Mud soil from Kumarakom to Thannermukkom has to be removed from the lake to ensure proper flow. Steps have to be taken to provide food for tourists at cheaper rates. Ensure providing drinking water for local people. Kumarakom has to be declared as plastic free zone. Immediate steps are to be taken for establishing waste treatment plant. The Committee has made 11 recommendations including the steps to be taken to prevent water pollution

The Committee Members K C Joseph, Therambil Radhakrishnan, M P Gangadharan, Binoy Viswam, P K Abdul Rabb and K Babu also attended the press meet.

Vagamon: HC stays vacation of heritage resorts

(The New Indian Express, Thiruvananthapuram 12.08.2003)

The Kerala High Court today restrained the Tahasildar, Peerumedu from dispossessing Summer Sand Hill Resorts and Ayurvedic Centre, Vagamon and Saj Flight Services, Vagamon for 10 days pursuant on the notices issued to them directing them to vacate the premises. The Court directed to post after 10 days, the writ petitions filed by the resorts aggrieved by order issued by Tahasildar requiring them to vacate the property. According to them, they had set up eco friendly heritage resorts including expenses running up to Rs.1.5

crores. The impugned order were issued without conducting any inquiry and coming to the conclusion that the petitioners are in unlawful occupation of the property.

Kumarakom Panchayat to collect tax from house boats

(Jeevan News, 10 PM 30.08.2003)

The Kumarakom Panchayat has decided to levy tax on houseboats that ply within the Panchayat area. The Kumarakom Panchayat President Ms. A. G. Ushakumari said that a number of luxury boats with accommodation facilities ply in the Vemband Lake and anchor within the limits of the Kumarakom Panchayat.

Sex tourism in Vemband Lake

(By Shaju Mathew, Mangalam, Kottayam 02.09.2003)

The houseboats that ply in the Vemband Lake have become the platform for Sex Tourism. Tourists have to spend around Rs.5000 to 10000 for staying in big hotels. With the same amount, they can hire houseboats is something attracting tourists for sex tourism. In addition to this, usually the police do not raid the houseboats.

Most of the time, the houseboats ply from Kumarakom to Alappuzha. The journey that starts in the morning will reach Alappuzha only in the evening. Allegations are also there that blue film production is also taking place in houseboats. The tourism police had enquired a case on blue film production in the houseboat some months back.

This bird sanctuary is also in the path of reminiscence

(By Shaju Mathew, Mangalam, Kottayam 02.09.2003)

The sight of migratory birds spreading their wings and landing in Kumarakom is fast disappearing. Kumarakom is changing with the huge number of resorts built for welcoming foreign tourists. With the resort construction and Kayal encroachment, Kumarakom forgets the migratory birds and for the next generation, the bird sanctuary will be just memory.

The construction of resorts the, plying of speedboats and noise made by the tourists at the bird sanctuary have resulted in the decrease of number of birds in Kumarakom. The spotlights used by the big hotels also have become a threat to birds. The survey done by the Kerala Forest Department and Kottayam Nature Society on 19th January 2003 has shown a decrease of 33% of migratory birds. The only rise in number was in the case of Egrets because of drought in north India.

The number of Cormorants has declined by 33% and the number of Little Cormorants has reduced by 40%. Although the number of Pond Herons has increased from 572 to 811, the number in the Vemband Kayal has decreased by 45%. The number of Whiskered Tern has reduced from 3493 in 2002 to 846 this year. The number of birds in Pathiramanal has reduced from 2078 to 310.

In addition to this the number in shells found in the lake has also come down because of the waste disposal and pesticides into the lake.

Kumarakom: real issues remain unsolved

(By George Jacob, The Hindu, Thiruvananthapuram 03.11.2003)

The month long stand off between the DYFI activists Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana (SNDP) Yogam at Kumarakom over the issue of encroachment of the Vemband Lake and the violent turn it took, though amicably settled later, may be viewed as a pointer to the shape of things to come.

The sudden rise in tourism activity has put immense pressure not only on the ecosystem of this wetland area,

but also on the socio-economic system. And the recent conflict was only a manifestation of the simmering internal strife evident ever since the once-sleepy village turned itself into one of the hottest international destinations.

Tourism was heralded as the sunrise industry, which would bring with it a hoard of economic bounties to the local people – employment, new local business opportunities and general economic growth. However, till now, the employment generation has been confined to a share of the construction work and lower grade jobs mostly in cleaning and other manual labour. In the highly competitive hospitality industry, the untrained locals have found themselves unfit even in these jobs. And already minor conflicts are evident among the local workers and their local managers.

The expected new business opportunities too have so far failed to materialise. One of the major avenues for the local economic boom to percolate down at Kumarakom and the Vembanad rim economy was the emergence of local suppliers (mainly of fish and vegetables) to the big hotels. As elsewhere the taxi services and other small business ventures, which would cater to the tourists, were also expected to flourish in the area.

Even after so many years, the local people to their dismay have found that the new industry brought affluence only to handful of individuals who could purchase land at dirt-cheap rates and turn them into heritage hotels with material from old houses bought at equally cheap rates.

The new chains took their supplies from other large supply chains with whom they already had business connections. The taxi services did not materialise, as the hotel chains preferred boating down their guests from Kochi through the waters of Vembanad Lake. And the tourists seldom ventured out of these resorts to create any new local business opportunity.

On the other hand, the effects of one of the most uncertain business activities on one of the most fragile ecosystems, which supported an equally delicate socio-economic system, are already telling. Birds, at the apex of a food chain of a wetland ecosystem, are good indicators of the health of the ecosystem in general. The report of the latest water bird survey in the area shows certain alarming tendencies.

Kumarakom, once promoted to tourists on its strength as a bird sanctuary, especially for the migratory birds, has during the past one decade shown a sharp decline in bird population. The latest report of the water bird survey has pressed alarm bells as it has found that the ducks and teals, one of the greatest attractions of the area, have already abandoned the Pathiramanal area as their roosting place. The steady decline of birds at Kumarakom Tourist Complex, and the general degeneration of bird population not only in number but also in diversity, has been directly linked to the rise of the tourism industry in the area.

The lack of proper waste management by the resorts too have created conflict with local fishermen who allege the managements, in spite of their declarations otherwise, dump the waste into the lake. In many places the bed of the lake has risen to visible levels on account of the unscrupulous dumping. This in many places has started affecting the livelihood – fishing and mussel mining of the local people.

With the increase in number of hotels, the pressure on the lake is moving to new territories: the recent one is the need for these waterfront resorts to have their own landing facilities as all of them want to take the lake route from Kochi to their hotels. This has forced the authorities to give large areas on the lake on lease (the real bone of contention between DYFI activists and the SNDP Yogam). If the present pace of providing lease continues, the entire waterfront would be lost to the local people within a few years.

It is pointed that time has come for all concerned – the authorities, the resort managements, the local people and those concerned with the ecological impact of tourism on this Ramsar site, to sit down and take a look at to what direction things are moving since the Vembanad wetland and emerging Vembanad rim economy are equally important for the state as they are equally interdependent.

PATHANAMTHITTA

Gavi ecotourism project

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

In its first year of inception itself, Gavi Ecotourism, a project of the Kerala Forest Development Corporation in Pathanamthitta has caught the attention of tourists, mostly from European countries. The project is exclusive in many respects and the majority who visited were nature lovers and adventure tourists. Gavi Eco-Tourism will soon find a place in the list of leading ecotourism centres acknowledged by the world-acclaimed tourism major Alistair International.

A highlight of the Gavi eco project is the involvement of the local populace in its activities as guides, gardeners and cooks. This will provide livelihood for the locals and also will help to create awareness on conservation of nature. Gavi offers its visitors activities like trekking, wildlife watching, outdoor camping in specially built tents, and night safaris. Gavi can be reached via the Vandiperiyar-Vallakadavu route and the Moozhiyar-Kakki-Anathode-Kochu Pampa route.

Rural Tourism to be promoted in Aranmula

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 125, January 2004)

The Government of India (GOI) and The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is considering Aranmula as the only centre in the State to launch its Endogenous Tourism Project initiative.

A high-level team of the Government of India and the United Nations Development Programme recently made a visit to Aranmula to explore the plausibility of the project. The team led by the Public Sector Undertakings Selection Board Chairman, Mr. T. K. A. Nair, comprised the UNDP Resident Representative, Mr. B. B. Vyas, the UNDP Programme Officer, Mr. Hineck Bieri and the UNDP consultant Mr. Sudhir Sahi.

The village of Aranmula has been proposed as an Endogenous Project Tourism site mainly because of its strong rural tourism potential. Aranmula is well known for its wonderful metallurgy, the fascinating Aranmula Kannadi, the snake boats, the Vijnana Kalavedi, a centre for the promotion of native culture and arts, and the State-run Vasthu Vidya Gurukulam meant for the promotion as well as preservation of the traditional Kerala architecture and murals.

The UNDP is to provide the necessary funds for project implementation to the nodal agencies, the Vijnana Kala Vedi and the Vasthu Vidya Gurukulam. The Government of India Rural Tourism Project would fund the expenses for infrastructure development. The activities at the pilot sites would include training of the local community in hospitality-related work. Mr. Amitabh Kant, Joint Secretary, Union Ministry of Tourism, is the Project Chairman.

IDUKKI

Central government rejects State's request on renewal of KTDC lease land at Thekkady

(By P. K. Prakash, Madhyamam, Thiruvananthapuram 02.09.2003)

The Central Ministry of Environment and Forests has rejected the State's request on renewal of forestland leased to KTDC at Thekkady. With this the KTDC resorts of Aranya Nivas, Periyar House and Lake Resort are to be shifted out of the sanctuary.

The lease period of KTDC was over in 1996. The request given for renewal by the State Government was rejected by MoEF in 2000. After that the Tourism and Forest departments had jointly requested for the

renewal. Now this request is also rejected.

The Forest Department has made its laws very strict and has enforced that forestland cannot be given for non-forest activities. The Supreme Court has also given verdict against using forestland for non-forest activities. The MoEF has issued this order in connection with this.

It was in 1976 June 30, the State Government has leased out 21.20 acres of land for 25 years to KTDC. The order was issued with retrospective effect from 1971. The leased land includes Aranya Nivas (9.96 acres), Periyar House (7 acres), Lake Resort (3 acres 50 cents) and Anakkodu totalling to 21.20 acres. The lease period ended on 8th August 1996. The State Government and the Tourism Department had discussions during the time on vacating from the sanctuary. The Forest Department offered the forestland at Anavachal on lease for moving out the resorts from the sanctuary. But the Tourism Department did not agree as they were reaping huge profits from the resorts inside the sanctuary.

When Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary was given the status of Tiger Reserve, the Forest Acts became more stringent. With the wastes disposed from the resorts became threat to the wildlife, the Forest Department demanded for moving the resorts out of the sanctuary.

KTDC is now trying to get relaxation on the Forest laws and making efforts to continue their resorts inside the sanctuary. The State Government decision is to renew the lease to KTDC. Another request has been given to MoEF with more details so as to get a decision in favour of KTDC says Mr. V. S. Varghese, Conservator Forest (Forest Protection).

ERNAKULAM

Pilgrim Tourism at Kalady

(Madhyamam, Thiruvananthapuram 11.08.2003)

The Government has initiated a 250 crore project on Pilgrim Tourism centring Kalady said Minister for Tourism Prof. K. V. Thomas.

CPT's overture for more cruise traffic to Kochi

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 123, November 2003)

A joint venture with the State Government will see the Cochin Port Trust (CPT) constructing a special berth for handling cruise vessels. The new move will attract cruise vessels to anchor along the western ports circuit comprising Mumbai, Goa, Mangalore and Kochi.

According to the CPT chairman, the State Government and the Union Ministry of Tourism will each have 26 per cent equity share in the project. CPT would provide basic facilities at the berth and other partners would provide the rest, the chairman added. The project is expected to cost about Rs. 500 million.

For the purpose of berthing, the CPT has identified three spots at the Ernakulam Wharf, Vallarpadam and Fort Kochi. Last tourist season witnessed 11 luxury vessels getting berthed at the port, and the situation is expected to improve with the start of the new season.

CPT is also involved in a tourism project to explore the possibility of promoting yachting and other water sports in the backwaters of Kochi. Currently CPT has sought the services of marina expert, Mr. Mike Derret to ascertain the possibilities of water sports in the backwater stretches of Kochi. Another project being considered by the CPT is that of developing the National Waterway-3 from Kottapuram to Kollam for tourist cruises. Around 13 jetties have been identified along this stretch, which are now being used for cargo transport.

Kerala Tourism launches the first model "Tourism Village" in India

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 125, January 2004)

With the inauguration of the model Tourism village in Kumbalangi, Kerala Tourism has given a fresh lease of life to this small backwater village, near the Kochi city, which had so far remained in the dark. The inaugural function, which was held on December 23, was presided by the Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas. Mr. Sompal, the Member of Central Planning Commission and Central Finance Commission formally inaugurated the Kumbalangi Integrated Tourism Village project at St. Peter's Higher Secondary School Ground in Kumbalangi. He also released the brochure for the project.

The Kumbalangi Tourism Village focuses on protecting and preserving the natural beauty, biodiversity and ecological balance of the location. An amount of Rs. 7.5 million has been spent in Kumbalangi under the project and Rs. 5.0 million has been allotted by the centre for this purpose. The project aims to preserve the age-old, magnificent culture and heritage of the place, at the same time providing more stability to the rural economy.

Tourism Minister Prof. K. V. Thomas while presiding over the function said that there was considerable increase in the number of tourists in Kerala; which is an impressive hike of 30 percent.

The "Kumbalangi Fest", held as part of this massive project showcased the unique facets of God's Own Country at its marvellous best. The Festival, which was held between December 26th and 28th, contained a variety of exhibits reflecting the culture of Kerala including the traditional Kerala cuisines, the succulent fish cuisines, fishing equipments and a truly exquisite display of its different cultural and ritual art forms. The "Kumbalangi Fest", offered a fascinating glimpse of the simple and prosperous livelihood of the villagers of Kumbalangi.

Kumbalangi tourism project to get financial aid from UNDP

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has decided to offer financial support to the Kumbalangi tourism project taken up by the Kerala Tourism. A two - member team from the UNDP completed its visit to the Kumbalangi village as part of the process of approving the village tourism project. As the first major step, a sum of Rs. 250 million each will be allotted for development of software components required for creating awareness among the local public at Kumbalangi and Aranmula, the two village tourism destinations identified in the State.

THRISSUR

Kids village to start functioning soon

(Kerala Kaumudi, Thiruvananthapuram 08.08.2003)

The Dream World Water Park is starting Kids Village immediately. Selected kids will inaugurate the village. Interested children are to send in application with photographs to the Dream World.

MALAPPURAM

Concern over ecological impact of bio-valley project

(The Hindu, Thiruvananthapuram 21.11.2003)

Concerns have been expressed over the ecological impact of the proposed herbal bio-valley project in the Silent Valley.

A paper prepared by EQUATIONS, a Bangalore based NGO, says that the project which was proposed by the State Government at the Global Investor Meet (GIM), will definitely have an adverse effect on the environment, the local population, the fragile land in the Silent Valley and the unique flora and fauna

in the Western Ghats.

The NGO is concerned over the Government proposal to make this project the focus of tourism and Ayurveda. Studies on the impact and trend of similar projects in the past and their cost-benefit analysis have proved to be heavier on the cost side, according to it. The report for the bio-valley project presented at GIM was part of an analysis of the issues related to sustainable agricultural trade security system for the state in the context of WTO-led regime.

The proposal for the Silent Valley Biosphere Reserve is among the budgetary proposals and the Finance Minister K. Sankaranarayanan, has made a token allocation of Rs.10 lakhs in his budget for preliminary work on the project.

In 2001, a Government-sponsored committee headed by M S Swaminathan recommended a series of proposals for a sustainable agricultural trade security system. Among these was a proposal to set up a bio-valley in the Silent Valley National Park to cater to health and nature tourism and to set up a herbal park in Wayanad.

The herbal bio-valley, the first of its kind, is proposed to be developed over a region extending from the Silent Valley Biosphere Reserve up to Wayanad, including areas of the Western Ghats around the area of Agasthyakoodam.

As a logistical extension, the Government has decided to combine tourism and Ayurveda in the Silent Valley. Specific financial allocations have been made in the proposal for the development of ecotourism in the Silent Valley.

At the GIM, the Silent Valley was promoted from two angles – as a retreat for ecotourism and as a region for the growing and processing of herbal and medicinal plants.

The paper prepared by EQUATIONS says that the global demand for herbal and ayurvedic medicines has put considerable pressure on the Silent Valley, as the region is rich in herbs and medicinal plants. A report prepared by Dr. Swaminathan envisages the export of Ayurvedic medicines worth \$ 5 billion by 2010.

The paper warns that going by the experience in places where similar projects have been tried, local people will get a raw deal. The investors' aim is to make a fast buck and make a quick exit from the project area, leaving the local people to fend for themselves, it says.

A detailed cost-benefit analysis has to be done and further action has to be based on that, the report adds.

WAYANAD

Spa at Vythiri resort

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

A Spa of international standards and equipped with health rejuvenation therapies was recently opened at the Vythiri Resort by the Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas. The Spa is equipped with facilities of international standards, and is designed for relaxation in harmony with nature. The Spa is managed by Serena Spa Pvt. Ltd., which operates spas in Maldives, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

KANNUR

Arakkal palace to be made museum

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

The historic Arakkal Palace gets a much-needed face-lift. The Arakkal Palace facing the sea, about 4 km from Kannur will soon be restored and made into a place of tourist attraction and also as a museum to convey its place in the annals of history. The palace used by the Arakkal royal family, who were the former rulers of the region, played an influential role in the history of Kannur and adjoining areas. The palace is in a dilapidated condition, and the main structure, which houses a bell-tower and other structures called 'Arakkal Kettu' is badly in need of restoration. The State Government has sanctioned a Rs. 96-lakh project for the renovation and conservation work. The palace complex has interconnected building clusters, comprising residential structures, pandikasalas (warehouses) and mosques around a large open ground.

Airport at Kannur essential for tourism development

(Malayala Manorama, Thiruvananthapuram, 30.09.03)

The tourism development in Kerala would not be possible without an airport in Kannur, says Chairman of Leela Hotels, C.P. Krishnan Nair. 300 acres of land is now available for airport. Another 2000 acres more are required. But the government is not interested with the project, says Krishnan Nair, who is also the Vice Chairman of the Kannur Airport Committee.

There are projects by Leela Hotels, Taj and other groups in Bakel and other centres. Without the airport at Kannur, the projects are not moving forward. The doubts on whether Kannur can have international airport is irrelevant. Goa is only the size of a district in Kerala. Many Charter flights come to Caribbean Islands. Captain Krishnan Nair explained at the CEO Conference organized as part of the Matha Amirthananda Mai birthday celebrations. The Indian Hotels Vice Chairman and Tata Sons Director R. K. Krishnakumar said that the Taj Group is interested in ecotourism projects in Kerala.

Events & Festivals

Kerala Food Festival in Bangalore

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

Southern states are getting ready for aggressive marketing of South India's tourism potential. Inaugurating the Kerala Food Festival in Bangalore, the Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas said the South Indian States have started taking initiatives jointly to promote the tourist destination value of South India. He cited the Kerala Food Festival being held at Bangalore as one among those many initiatives to come in future. Kerala would soon introduce tourism packages in cooperation with the southern states of Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh, Tamilnadu and Pondicherry.

9th August 2003

Nehru Trophy Boat Race

(Southern Star Morning Daily, Thiruvananthapuram 09.08.2003)

The Tourism Minister Prof. K. V. Thomas while inaugurating the Cultural meet organised as part of the Nehru Boat Race at Alappuzha said that Rs.10 lakhs has been allotted for Nehru Trophy Boat Race. He added that Rs.25000 would be given for the renovation of each Chundan Valloms.

14th to 16th August 2003

'Mystiques of Malabar 2003'

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 121, September 2003)

Conceived and launched as the exclusive travel mart to highlight the vast tourism potential of the Malabar region (Northern Kerala), the three-day event termed 'Mystiques of Malabar 2003' was held from August 14 to 16 at Kadavu Resort in Kozhikode.

The event was solely designed to enable Malabar region, which comprise the northern districts of Kerala to rediscover itself and regain its lost prosperity. Over 180 delegates from all over India and abroad attended the travel mart. Tour operators, travel agents, travel writers and a host of media personalities like Ms. Janice

Broxup and Mr. Audrey Brently of Shooting Star Television Ltd based in United Kingdom, and Mr. Tim McIntyre of Travel Asia, Singapore and a host of personalities from leading media names like BBC took part in the 3-day event. The time spent at the travel mart was worth the effort, especially for the international media, who had a close look and understanding with regards to the immense tourism potential of Malabar region.

Hectic business deliberations and buyer-seller meet were the highlights of the second day. The seminar sessions of the travel mart was inaugurated by the Karnataka Minister for Tourism, Mr. D. B. Inamdar. The mart literally paved way for its visitors to have a good understanding of the Malabar region and its unique tourism specialities. Mementoes were given for the best stall, the best homestay, and for the best natural product. A post-event tour for the delegates was conducted towards the end of the travel mart.

5th to 12th September, Thiruvananthapura

Onam week celebrations starts on September 5

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 121, September 2003)

The State Government sponsored Onam Week celebrations will start on September 5. The Chief Minister, Mr. A. K. Antony will inaugurate the weeklong celebrations at the Nishagandhi open-air auditorium in the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram.

This year, the government has decided to shoulder the responsibilities with residents' associations to make the celebrations a people's programme. According to the Tourism Director, Mr. Alkesh Kumar Sharma, the new move would lessen the workload of the Tourism Department, restricting it to the role of a co-ordinator.

The highlight of the inaugural ceremony at Nishagandhi will be a dance programme with emphasis on communal harmony. The dance, choreographed by eminent theatre personality, Mr. Kavaalam Narayana Panicker is expected to bring forth the traditional and cultural elements that form the essence of Kerala. The Kanakakunnu Palace will be the main venue of the six-day celebrations this year. The Nishagandhi open-air auditorium inside the Kanakakunnu Palace premises will be handed over to the Federation of Residents' Association, Thiruvananthapuram (FRAT) to stage cultural programmes.

During the festival days, folk arts will be staged at three venues viz. Kanakakunnu Palace, Jawahar Balabhavan and V. J. T. Hall. Artistes from the East and North-Eastern part of the country will present folk arts of their regions.

Noted Carnatic and Hindustani singers would perform at the Karthika Tirunal Theatre in East Fort, while classical art forms will be staged at the Theerthapadamandapam, also in East Fort.

Screening of films acted by the leading Malayalam cine star Mohanlal will be held at the Tagore Theatre, which has been booked by the Tourism Department and handed over to the Mohanlal Fans Club. The screening is as part of the celebrations to mark the acting career of Mohanlal, which has reached its 25th year.

The government has sanctioned Rs. 3.1 million for the celebrations in the capital city of Thiruvananthapuram and a sum of Rs. 0.25 million has also been allocated for the festivities at Akkulam and Neyyar Dam.

7th to 13th September

Jalotsavam at Karamana River

(Madhyamam, Thiruvananthapuram 28.08.2003)

The City Corporation is organising Jalotsavam in Karamana River during Onam. The Jalotsavam will have long distance swimming competition and boat race. On 13th there will be a water procession starting near

Karamana Bridge. The procession will have flots, traditional art forms, ferries, fibre boats as well as Kettuvalloms. The 8 km long procession will end at Thiruvallom.

21st September 11th November

'Soorya Festival'

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

The 51-day annual Soorya Festival will be inaugurated by the cine star Mr. Mammootty on September 21. This year, the festival will have Ramayana Festival besides the regular programmes that have been part of the festival in the past years. A festival of classic Indian films, titles 'Old is Gold' will be a major attraction this year and would feature films like 'Do Ankhein Baarah Haath', 'Mrugaya' etc. Painting exhibition, ethnic food festival, crafts festival, artists' village and open forum will be part of the event.

The dance and music festival will feature eminent artistes like Mr. K. J. Jesudas, Ms. Bombay Jayasree, Ms. Padma Subramaniam, Ms. Chitra Visweshwaran, Ms. Daksha Seth and others. The 51-day extravaganza will also have a 'Talk festival', a theatre festival and Kaviyarangu (session for poetry recital), and video festival.

26th to 28th September 2003, International Convention Centre, Le Meridian, Kochi

International boat show in Kochi

(Kerala Tourism News Letter, Issue 120 August 2003)

Kochi will once again play host to India International Boat Show (IIBS) this year Organized by Kerala Tourism, the boat show is being promoted aggressively in India and abroad by India Tourism and India Trade Promotion Organization (ITPO). The Southern Naval Command, Coast Guard, Cochin Shipyard and Cochin Port Trust have extended comprehensive support to the show. Leading tour operators and hotels in Cochin have also extended their support by offering discounted tour packages and accommodation for the boat show participants. The scope of the event will be expanded with special segments for sports boating, leisure boating, defence boating, boating equipment and technology & software. IIBS will be a premier event of its kind in the region between Middle East and South East Asia and in the course of two to three years will establish itself as a definitive boat show.

According to Mr. Alkesh Kumar Sharma, Director, Kerala Tourism, "The response has been extremely impressive with 30 exhibitors having confirmed participation already. And 70 more are in various stages of committing participation. It is a very positive sign." International companies and brands that will be present at the boat show include Polaris, Regal Marine - USA, Ferrati Yachts - Italy, Gulf Craft, Exalto Marine, Emirates Inflatables and Grandweld - UAE, IMCO Services - New York, LP Marine - UK, J V Marine and Zodiac Group - Australia among others.

17th September, Kovalam

Kovalam Carnival

(The New Indian Express, Thiruvananthapuram 27.09.2003)

The Association of Tour and Transport Operators (ATTOI) is organising a Kovalam Carnival at Kovalam beach. Announcing this at the news conference the other day, Association secretary Jayachandran said that the carnival was being organised as part of the efforts to open the eyes of the authorities, who were not taking appropriate steps to promote tourism in Kovalam. According to him, the carnival is one of the preliminary steps towards attracting domestic tourists to Kovalam and thus ensuring business during off-season. Arrangements have been made for free transportation to the carnival. The interested should reach Transport

Bhavan at East Fort at 3.30 pm on September 27th. Seminar, Cinematic dance, games and fireworks all form part of the carnival.

2nd to 5th October 2003, Padmavati Cultural Centre, Coimbatore

India Tourism Festival 2003

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 121, September 2003)

Kerala Tourism is all ready to take the centre-stage at the India Tourism Festival 2003. Kerala is participating as a partner state in the event, and will showcase its cultural and tourism potential in a big way.

Some of the popular Indian personalities have been roped in to form the committee of hosts, and these include actor, Mr. Mithun Chakraborty, racetrack sensation, Mr. Narain Karthikeyan, and the queen of pop Ms. Usha Uthup. The fair patron is Mr. Mark Tully, who is a popular media personality in India, who was BBC correspondent for a long time in New Delhi.

ITF would have an array of exhibitors ranging from international tourism directorates, state tourism departments, international and national airlines to airport directorates, heritage tourism promoters, travel magazines and a host of media personalities.

ITTM: State to highlight tourism specialities

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 121, September 2003)

As per the Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas the upcoming 5th International Travel and Tourism Mart (ITTM) 2003 at New Delhi will be a venue to highlight the unique qualities of Kerala as a tourist destination. The minister said this while addressing the presentation-cum-industrial meet held recently in connection with ITTM, which is being organized directly by the Union Government's Department of Tourism. Prof. Thomas expects the event to generate excellent business opportunities for tour operators and travel agents in Kerala. The Tourism Director, the President of the Kerala Hotel and Restaurant Association, and the President of the Kerala Travel Mart also attended the function.

10th October to 11th November

Gold Festival makes its debut

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 123, November 2003)

The much-awaited Kerala gold festival 'Swarnam- 2003' was inaugurated on the 10th of October by the Minister for Finance, Mr. K. Sankaranarayanan at a glittering ceremony held at the Kanakakunnu Palace in Thiruvananthapuram. The festival is being organized jointly by Kerala Tourism, All Kerala Gold and Silver Merchants Association and World Gold Council. The inaugural function was presided over by the Minister for Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas.

In his address, the Prof. Thomas expressed his hope that festivals of this nature would keep the so-called tourist off-season active. The Secretary for Kerala Tourism, Mr. T. Balakrishnan opined that in future Kerala, which is already a popular tourist destination, would also be reckoned as significant shopping centre as in the case of Dubai.

The festival is intended to make Kerala the gold capital of the world. To achieve this, the festival would take special efforts that include popularising ethnic design and quality of jewellery, making the tourists visiting Kerala aware of the specialities and details of local craftsmanship, and also to bring the fraternity of gold merchants under one roof.

Kerala, which is having the maximum number of jewellery outlets in India, is looking forward to gain some

extra mileage through foreign travellers who could spend money on locally made exquisite jewellery designs. This is perceived to make a positive impact on the state's economy.

Others who participated in the inaugural function include the Director for Kerala Tourism, Managing Director of the World Gold Council, and the President of the All Kerala Gold and Silver Merchants Association.

12th to 14th October

Workshop held on Kerala Heritage

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 123, November 2003)

A 3-day Workshop on Kerala Heritage was organized by Kerala Tourism in association with Indian National Trust of Art and Cultural Heritage. The workshop came up with several suggestions for preserving the rich heritage of God's Own Country.

Inaugurating the seminar Prof. K.V. Thomas, Minister for Tourism said that booming tourism industry had enabled the preservation of many 'illams' (traditional houses) and kottarams (palaces) in Kerala. However, conservation should progress to preserving 'Kerala as it is' rather than confining the efforts to buildings and monuments. Prof. Thomas pointed out the recent move by the State Government by spending Rs. 2.5 million for acquiring the Chirakkal Kovilakam in Kannur for the Kerala Folklore Academy, and also the initiative taken for cleaning a chain of canals in Alappuzha.

Mr. S. K. Mishra, Vice Chairman of Intach in his presidential address said that there is great synergy between tourism and cultural heritage in Kerala, the State Government has done a good job of building tourism on its rich foundation. However, Kerala cannot afford to be complacent and therefore the proposed legislation (The Kerala Urban and Regional Planning and Development Act 2003) is an important step in this direction. Mr. Mishra also referred to the 'training the trainers' program at the national level whereby school and college teachers are provided training in conservation that in turn will spread it to the students.

Conservation expert, Mr. Benny Kuriakose in his keynote address pointed out the need to preserve old aesthetic buildings, which are well suited to the local climate and environment. The structures should strike harmony with the existing landmarks of an area and that is an important step to ensure conservation and continuity of tradition. However, he cited some good examples of conservation including the Padmanabhapuram Palace, several other landmark buildings in Thiruvananthapuram like the Public Library, University Men's Hostel, and Secretariat, which were extended without tarnishing its traditional aesthetics.

Prof. K. T. Ravindran, Head of Dept of Urban Design, School of Planning and Architecture, Delhi in his presentation said that religion has influenced the very fine architectural texture of Kerala. He suggested that the Padmanabhapuram Palace in Tamilnadu under the administrative control of Kerala is a rich piece of traditional architecture that could qualify it for World Heritage Site status conferred by UNESCO.

Mr. G. Venu, an expert on performing arts of Kerala and Director of Natana Kairali, Thrissur said that there is an urgent need to revive the gurukula system of imparting training for a comprehensive regeneration of our art forms.

Dr V. R. Prabhodhachandran Nair, Chairman, Kalamandalam spoke on Performing Arts of Kerala, and Mr. T. J. Johan, Convenor, Intach Kerala Chapter spoke on cuisines of Kerala. An MoU was signed between Kerala Tourism and INTACH for collaboration in heritage conservation and promoting sustainable eco and rural tourism in the State. The MoU was signed by Mr. S. K. Mishra, Vice Chairman, Intach and Mr. T. Balakrishnan, Secretary, Kerala Tourism.

7th to 10th November

Global Kerala Festival to begin on November 7

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 123, November 2003)

Around 200 people from Kerala are expected to participate in the Global Kerala Festival in London. The inaugural function of the festival will be held at the Bharatiya Vidya Bahavan, which will be presided over by the Deputy Speaker of the Upper House of the Parliament, Ms. Najma Heptulah. The deliberations as part of the festival will have the presence of Union Ministers, Mr. O. Rajagopal, Mr. P. C. Thomas, and ministers from Kerala, Mr. K. V. Thomas, Mr. P. K. Kunhalikutty, Mr. G. Karthikeyan, Mr. M. V. Raghavan, Mr. M. M. Hassan, and Mr. M. K. Muneer.

20th to 23rd November

Exclusive presence of Kerala Tourism at CITM

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 124, December 2003)

Kerala once again proved to be a prominent player in India's tourism aspirations, when it was given a separate stand inside the India pavilion, during the recently concluded China International Travel Mart 2003 (CITM-2003). The travel mart was held at the Kunming International Trade Centre.

The Secretary, Kerala Tourism, Mr. T. Balakrishnan, and the Director, Kerala Tourism, Mr. Alkesh Kumar Sharma, represented Kerala Tourism at CITM- 2003.

CITM- 2003 had the presence of high quality buyers and suppliers from all over the world, and a host of other tourism-related organizations like airlines, cruise companies, railway, automobile rental companies, holiday resorts, hotel/hotel groups, and the media. Besides selected international buyers, CITM- 2003 also had the participation of buyers from Hong Kong SAR, Macau SAR and Taiwan Province.

The Kerala segment in the Indian pavilion received lot of attention and the officials of Kerala Tourism did an excellent job by responding to queries of varying nature. The two-day travel mart did give Kerala Tourism an opportunity to establish good business contacts through meetings with selected buyers and suppliers. The outstanding performance of Kerala Tourism was featured in the 'Spring City Evening,' the only English daily in Kunming.

Kerala reaffirms its charm at WTM 2003

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 124, December 2003)

The recently concluded World Travel Mart (WTM) was an occasion to reaffirm and to build up further the destination value of Kerala among other competing destination. Kerala was among the few states from India, which had a separate mini pavilion set up in the India Pavilion. A total of 191 countries participated with 119 new exhibitors.

Kerala had the biggest contingent from any state in India with 10 private sector trade participants and KTDC. The Kerala Mini Pavilion of 52 sq. mt within the India Tourism pavilion was designed around the new Kerala Tourism theme campaign "Life in a New Light". The pavilion had a reception counter at its entrance with a brochure dispenser. Well-designed Kerala Tourism information kits consisting of brochures, folders and CDs were also made available at the counter and they were greatly appreciated by the visitors to the pavilion. Souvenirs like the Kasavu shawls, spice kits and the hairclips from coconut shells were also a great attraction to the pavilion visitors. A plasma screen was also put up near the information counter and the films 'Water Colours By God' and 'Temple of Healing' were continuously screened.

The Kerala delegation was led by the Chief Secretary, Mr. N. Chandrasekharan Nair, the Secretary for Tourism, Mr. T. Balakrishnan. Others who participated representing Kerala include Kerala Travels, The Travancore

Heritage, Le Meridien, Lake Palace, Kadayu Resorts, Kumarakom Lake Resort, The Great India Tour Company, Aquaserene, Green Channel Resort, Chera Beach Resort.

The WTM 2003 also turned out to be an occasion for Kerala Tourism to hold meetings with leading editors and trade representatives to promote Kerala aggressively in international markets. The Tourism Secretary had meetings with editors of leading international publications like Travel & Leisure, Conde Nast Traveller, The Sunday Times Travel Magazine, eTurbo News, BMI Publications etc, and with leading travel writers like Ms. Christina Kamp, Ms. Sally Ramsden, Mr. David Pauline, etc.

15th January 2004 : Dubai Festival

Kerala would be a partner state in next year's Dubai Festival starting on January 15.

4th to 7th May 2004

Kerala to participate in Arabian Travel Mart

(Southern Star Morning Daily, Thiruvananthapuram 12.08.2003)

Kerala will participate in the Arabian Travel Mart (2004), which would help in the Tourism development of the state. The Arabian Travel Mart will be held at Dubai Airport Expo. The government has sanctioned Rs.35 lakhs for participating in the fair.

India Pavilion opened at the Dubai Shopping Festival

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

The Minister for Kerala Tourism, Prof. K. V. Thomas inaugurated the India Pavilion at the Dubai Shopping Festival. According to a statement issued by the Department of Tourism, Kerala has been selected as the theme state of India pavilion this year. One of the major attractions is a 15 metre long and 6-metre high houseboat set in an artificial pool inside the India Pavilion. The sprawling pavilion, that occupies an area of 7000 square feet, is the biggest India Pavilion that has so far been set up in the Dubai Shopping Festival. It is designed in traditional Kerala royal architecture and features a wide variety of crafts and jewellery from Kerala. The India Pavilion has 215 stands displaying arts and crafts from different parts of the country as well as 15 restaurants serving exquisite Indian cuisines. In addition to this, there are five stalls that showcase the State's Ayurveda healing remedies.

30th September to 2nd October

Kerala Travel Mart from September 30

(The Hindu, Thiruvananthapuram, 24.01.2004)

The third Kerala Travel Mart (KTM), the biennial tourism buyer-seller meet conducted by Kerala Tourism, will be held at the Le Meridien Convention Centre, Kochi from September 30 to October 2.

The Tourism Minister, K V Thomas told at press conference on 22nd January that the mart was expected to attract tour operators from new markets like South America, the US Russia and Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), China, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand.

Mr. Thomas said this year's mart would be bigger in scale than the 2002 version of the mart, in which 1250 buyer delegates from India and abroad and 182 exhibitors representing the tourism-travel trade from Kerala had participated.

The KTM was the only travel mart of its kind to focus on a single state, the Minister said. Henceforth, the mart would be held on fixed days during the last weekend of September in alternate years.

The State Government would shell out Rs. 50 lakhs for the event, while the rest of the investment would come in through sponsorships and hotel accommodation provided by hoteliers. The lack of quality hotel rooms was a major hurdle for the growth of the industry in the State.

The Tourism Director, Alkesh Kumar Sharma and the general convener of the KTM organising committee, E M Najeed also attended the press conference.

Tourism Courses

Applications invited for Ecotourism Course

(Malayala Manorama, Thiruvananthapuram 09.08.2003)

Calicut University has invited applications for Post Graduate Diploma in Ecotourism (Self Finance Course). The candidates should have a minimum of 55% marks in Degree examination and the age should be below 25 years. SC/ST candidates will get relaxation on age as per the permitted rules. If the student is sponsored by Travel & Tourism organisation, there is no age bar. The total fee is Rs.30000 in addition to Caution Deposit of Rs.10000. There are 2 seats reserved for NRA/NRI students. Their fee is \$1000. Admission will be based on entrance examination. Applications will be issued from August 11 and the last date of receipt of application is September 17.

Continuing Education: TTM class starts on 20th

(Kerala Kaumudi, Thiruvananthapuram 20.09.2003)

The Travel and Tourism Management Courses under the continuing education programme of the Kerala University will commence on 20th September 9 am. Some seats are still vacant for the course. Interested candidates are to contact: Director, C.A.C.E.E., Kerala University, PMG Junction, Thiruvananthapuram- 695033

Humour

Truly God's Own Country

(Kerala Tourism Newsletter, Issue 126, February 2004)

A man in Jammu and Kashmir, decided to write a book about the country. He started by flying to various pilgrimage places and started moving south from North.

Going there, he began taking photographs and making notes. He spotted a golden telephone on the wall and was intrigued with a sign, which read "Rs. 1000 a minute." Seeking out the religious guru he asked about the phone. The Guru answered that this golden phone is, in fact, a direct line to Heaven and if he pays the price he can talk directly to God. The man thanked the guru and continued on his way. As he continued to visit places in Delhi, Sarnath, UP, Maharashtra, Orissa, Andhra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and all around the country, he found more phones, with the same sign and price, and got the same answer from each Guru. Finally, he arrived in Trivandrum.

Here also he saw the usual golden telephone. But this time, the sign read "Calls:1.26 Rupees/Minute." Fascinated, he asked the Guru.

"Guruji, I have been in cities all across the country and in each place, I have found this golden telephone and have been told it is a direct line to Heaven and that I could talk to God, but, in other places the cost was Rs.1000 a minute. Your sign reads 1.26 Rupees/Minute. Why?" The Guru, smiling, replied, "Son, you're in Kerala now. This is God's own country... and it's a local call."



Equations

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