

Kerala Tourism Insights

Vol. No. 1 Issue No. 1
June 2024



A News Journal from Kerala Institute of Tourism & Travel Studies (KITTS)



Kerala To Host Global Meet On Gender Inclusive Tourism

Kerala to host an international conference on Responsible and Gender Inclusive tourism in October this year



Monsoon - Experience the Essence of Kerala

Welcome to "God's Own Country" - Kerala, where nature unveils its breathtaking beauty during the mesmerizing monsoon season



Adventure Tourism in Focus - Kerala Sees Surge in Visitors

Kerala is witnessing a surge in visitors due to its renewed focus on adventure and camping tourism.

Record Breaking Domestic Tourism Figures in 2023

In a captivating display of cross-cultural promotion, Kerala Tourism has taken to the streets of London, adorning iconic red double-decker buses with vibrant advertisements showcasing the beauty of Kerala.

06



Pinarayi Vijayan
Chief Minister, Government of Kerala



No. 375/press/CMO/24
06 April, 2024

I am happy to note that the 'Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies' is bringing out a newsletter titled 'Kerala Tourism Insights'.

Tourism is a major contributor to Kerala's economic growth. In this post COVID era, our tourism sector is showing signs of resurgence. The increasing number of domestic and international tourists travelling to Kerala underlines this recovery.

To continue this robust growth and to ensure that it is sustainable. It is imperative to concentrate on two areas. The first is imbibing the globally emerging trends in tourism. The second is showcasing the unique peculiarities of our scenic state which make it synonymous with the tagline 'God's Own Country'.

I hope that this newsletter will go a long way in strengthening both.
I extend my best wishes.

Adv. P.A. Mohammed Riyas
Minister for Public Works and Tourism
Govt. of Kerala



Warm greetings to the readers of Kerala Tourism Insights!
Kerala's tourism sector has made a remarkable comeback from the challenges posed by floods, Nipah virus, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Surpassing the visitor count of 2018, we have demonstrated our resilience and strength in overcoming adversity. Tourism contributes 10 percent to the state's GDP and is one of the largest employers in Kerala. We are committed to continuing this growth, aiming to attract more tourists, especially by revitalizing foreign tourist arrivals following a record-breaking surge in domestic visitors.

Kerala Tourism is on a mission to expand the sector to account for 30 percent of the state's GDP. We plan to achieve this by attracting more investment and creating more jobs. Responsible tourism will be our primary policy, promoting sustainable growth. KITTS will play a crucial role by providing quality manpower and becoming a center of excellence for research, innovation, and best management practices in the tourism sector.

This newsletter will keep you updated on the latest developments in Kerala's tourism industry. I wish this initiative the very best.

Dr. Venu V. IAS
Chief Secretary
Government of Kerala



Kerala tourism has made a remarkable comeback after the catastrophic pandemic, thanks to the efforts of the department and the hard work put in by the industry members. We have to strive to keep up the momentum, and work on improving our products and services.

In order to ensure sustainable development and effective stakeholder involvement, it is critical to communicate the nuances of tourism development to all those concerned. The usual trade magazines on tourism often reach only a section of society. It is in this context that a newsletter that can disseminate various aspects of tourism development becomes significant. The initiative taken up by the Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies (KITTS) to publish a newsletter titled Kerala Tourism Insights is highly appreciable. It is proposed as one that will provide an excellent platform for providing an update on policy initiatives, documenting new initiatives, analysing new developments in the arena of tourism in the state and even outside, and bringing to light unexplored destinations in the state. In addition to providing an update on new concepts and sustainable practices in tourism, the newsletter can emerge as an instrument to bring together all stakeholders working in this field.

I wish this new venture all success.



Certainly, Kerala tourism is one of India's biggest success stories, and it could build a brand of its own in the realm of International tourism. Scripting an all-time record in domestic tourist arrivals, Kerala attracted 2,18,71,641 domestic tourists, while the foreign tourist arrivals crossed 6.5 lakh last year. The tremendous growth in domestic tourism in the post-pandemic period reiterates the strong resilience of the state as a tourist destination and endorses the state's high standing as an all-season experiential tourism hub. Diversification and innovation are continuing, and we aim to surge ahead by introducing novel tourism initiatives and products.

Tourism, one of the state's most significant economic activities, is also the future industry. In order to march ahead, we need to raise people's awareness of tourism development and its pros and cons. People, both guests and hosts, are the heart of the tourism industry, and their involvement is critical in its sustainable growth. We need to encourage people to participate in tourism to achieve benefits while protecting cultural and natural heritage.

It is appreciable that KITTS is publishing a Newsletter on tourism in the state. Let this be a good beginning for reaching the people by communicating various aspects of tourism. This futuristic initiative will surely help young minds rise and contribute to making Kerala a leader in Indian tourism. On behalf of Kerala Tourism, I wish KITTS the very best.



Kerala Tourism is actively enhancing its appeal as a year-round experiential destination, aiming to elevate Kerala's stature as a premier tourism hub. Following a record-breaking influx of tourists, 2024 promises to be another pivotal chapter in Kerala's tourism saga. Innovative initiatives such as Heli-tourism, linking prime tourist spots via helicopter services, are poised to revolutionize the tourism landscape. As Kerala prepares to unveil 'Mission 2030', the spotlight also shines on attracting substantial private investments. A thriving tourism ecosystem necessitates the active involvement of the local community for sustainable progress. This newsletter serves as a crucial tool to disseminate vital tourism insights and foster local engagement. Let's collaborate to empower our community and establish Kerala as a global tourism exemplar.

Kerala To Host Global Meet On Gender Inclusive Tourism

Showcasing its success in promoting participatory development in Tourism through the globally-acclaimed Responsible Tourism initiative, Kerala to host an international conference on Responsible and Gender Inclusive tourism in October this year. Country's first such initiative, this conclave will present before the world Kerala's experience in creating a sustainable and gender inclusive tourism model and chart out plans to further strengthen the movement that has made a deep impact at the grass roots across the state with local communities benefiting substantially.

Last year, Kerala Tourism organised the Global Responsible Tourism Summit, which could adopt the Kerala Responsible Tourism Declaration 2023 that dwells on three kinds of responsibilities: social, economic and environmental. The proposed conference will have riveting conversations involving domain experts, people's representatives, policy makers,



stakeholders, exponents of cultural heritage, conservationists and members of civil society outfits from India and Abroad. The event is being envisaged and organized by Kerala Responsible Tourism Mission Society, an agency of Kerala Tourism.

Responsible Tourism Mission has already initiated the women-friendly tourism project with the technical support of UN Women, a United Nations organisation dedicated to promoting gender equality and empowering women. The project, comprises of multiple components, aims to integrate 1.5 lakh women into the travel network, providing direct and indirect employment opportunities to 30,000 women, while also engaging 1.2 lakh women in the travel community. Moreover, the state is promoting Women-Friendly Tourism and steps are being taken to ensure safety and security of women in all tourism destinations while ensuring quality visit experience.

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PRINCIPAL SPEAKS

Dear Readers,

I am delighted to introduce the latest edition of the tourism newsletter from KITTS (Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies). At KITTS, our primary mission is to ignite and nurture a passion for travel and tourism. Through this newsletter, we aspire to captivate a sense of adventure, provide practical travel guidance, and highlight the captivating allure of diverse destinations across the globe.

Our esteemed Minister for Tourism and PWD and Chairman of KITTS, Adv. P. A. Mohammed Riyas; Secretary - Tourism and Vice Chairman of KITTS, Sri. Biju K. IAS; Director of Tourism Smt. Sikha Surendran IAS, executive committee members, general Body members, stakeholders, faculty, staff, our enthusiastic students, and well-wishers; are all dedicated to upholding excellence in tourism education and training. We firmly believe that exploring the world not only offers new experiences but also fosters cultural appreciation and personal development.

As the Principal of KITTS, I am excited to introduce this platform dedicated to sharing latest updates, travel insights, and captivating destination highlights with our esteemed audience. We believe that this newsletter will be a valuable resource not only for students and travel enthusiasts but also for the general public. Join us on this journey as we explore captivating travel destinations and emerging tourism trends. I hope this newsletter inspires unforgettable experiences for all our readers!

Warm regards,

Dr. B. Rajendran
Principal, KITTS,
Thycaud, Thiruvananthapuram



*Vol. No. 1 Issue No. 1
June 2024*

For Private Circulation only

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Kerala Reinvents the Year-round Charm!



After a devastating pandemic stint, Kerala marches ahead, scripting an all-time record in domestic tourist arrivals. By prioritizing product diversification and adopting a multi-USP focus, efforts to make it a 365-day destination are paying off. The phenomenal rise of tourism in this beautiful state post-COVID is a testimony to Kerala Tourism's vigorous efforts, supported by well-crafted policy initiatives and meticulously implemented promotional strategies both within and outside the country.

Now the state braces up to welcome Monsoon tourism, along with wellness tourism. The Ayurvedic rejuvenation holidays are ideal in this season while rain lures people from far and wide to experience the state. The summer seasons, though with scorching sun, went off well with festivals and adventure tourism events. Kerala tourism could make a mark by promoting the state as an all-season experiential tourism hub by adding new destinations, giving greater salience to adventure tourism and bringing in innovative ideas to reinforce the sector. Kerala could make a big leap in Adventure tourism during the last two years. We could line up international competitions in paragliding, surfing, mountain cycling and whitewater kayaking in some of its tourism hotspots. Water based adventure tourism activities become a major tourist attraction, especially for the domestic tourists. The promotion of Destination wedding concept also leverages the progress of tourism in the state.

The recognitions and awards at the international level fuelled the progress of tourism in the state. Recently, in a huge endorsement of Kerala's lively beach tourism, Papanasham Beach, Varkala, a stunning seaside getaway, has been featured among the 100 best beaches in the world in the prestigious Lonely Planet's "Best Beaches: 100 of the World's Most Incredible Beaches" guide book.

Tourism Investors Meet (TIM) certainly ignited the interest in investing in tourism. Corollary to it, a fast track investors cell was set up aimed to take forward the projects that came up at the Tourism Investors Meet (TIM)



held in November last year. International marketing campaigns take place more enthusiastically. Kerala Tourism could take part in almost all major events and engage in road shows in cities in major source markets.

Kerala could bag the global Responsible Tourism Award 2023, which could act as a major endorsement of the sustainable and women-inclusive initiatives successfully promoted by the RT Mission. With regard to women strengthening, Kerala turned up to be a model. Series of efforts are being taken to promote women-friendly tourism. Solo woman travel is promoted greatly. UN Women, a United Nations body working for gender equality and empowerment of women, has joined hands with Kerala Tourism to promote the Women-Friendly Tourism initiative launched by the State government. Besides building a conducive environment for women to visit the State as solo tourists or in groups, the aim is to ensure women playing a prominent role as entrepreneurs and professionals in the tourism and hospitality sector.

In order to expedite the infrastructure development initiatives, Kerala tourism would like to have a dedicated Engineering Section in the Tourism Department that

can facilitate time-bound and cost-effective implementation of projects, besides ensuring quality and accountability.

As part of promoting sustainable tourism, Kerala has been making efforts to turn villages in the state into a sterling model of sustainable and inclusive experiential tourism. Village tourism and rural tourism has been a priority of the state and through 'Destination Challenge', Kerala would like to have at least one tourism destination in every Panchayath region and Responsible Tourism is promoted effectively in the country sides.

In the early post-covid period, the marketing campaign titled 'Make up for lost time, pack up for Kerala', could revive the tourism promotions at the national and international levels, and it could pose a major shift by targeting the young crowd, exhorting them to savour the beauty of Kerala in a natural setting, be it adventure or leisure.

Kerala also promoted 'Ethnic Villages', to showcase the traditional art forms, cuisine, and handicrafts and other cultural expressions of Kerala's various indigenous communities.

Let us continue the efforts and promote tourism sustainability.

Dr. Dileep M.R
Director, KITTS

Kerala Achieves Record-Breaking Domestic Tourism Figures in 2023: Minister P.A. Mohamed Riyas

Kerala has set a historic milestone in domestic tourism, welcoming a staggering 2,18,71,641 visitors from within the country in the year 2023, marking an impressive increase of 15.92 percent compared to the previous year, announced Minister for Tourism and Public Works, Adv. P. A. Mohamed Riyas recently.

In the preceding year of 2022, Kerala hosted 1,88,67,414 domestic tourists. Notably, there was a remarkable surge of 18.97 percent in domestic tourist arrivals compared to the pre-COVID year of 2019, stated the Minister during a press conference, also attended by Tourism Director, Shri P. B. Nooh.

In 2023, Ernakulam district emerged as the most visited destination by domestic tourists, witnessing an influx of 44,87,930 visitors, followed by Idukki (36,33,584), Thiruvananthapuram (35,89,932), Thrissur (24,78,573), and Wayanad (17,50,267).

Furthermore, Kerala experienced a notable

upswing in international tourist arrivals, with 6,49,057 visitors in 2023, compared to 3,45,549 tourists in the preceding year, marking an impressive growth of 87.83 percent.

Ernakulam district led in international tourism with 2,79,904 tourists, followed by Thiruvananthapuram (1,48,462), Idukki (1,03,644), Alappuzha (31,403), and Kottayam (28,458).

This unprecedented surge in tourist footfall signifies not only a remarkable recovery from the adversities of the COVID-19 pandemic but also underscores Kerala's prominence as a year-round experiential tourism destination.

Minister Mohamed Riyas attributed this achievement to Kerala Tourism's robust efforts, driven by well-crafted policies and meticulously executed promotional strategies both domestically and internationally.

Despite the significant increase in international tourist arrivals, Minister Riyas noted that it remained 45.45 percent lower compared to

pre-pandemic levels. He highlighted ongoing challenges such as global conflicts affecting international tourism but expressed optimism, citing the planned adventure tourism events for the year and initiatives to attract tourists to the Malabar region.

Responding to concerns regarding human-animal conflicts in Wayanad, Minister Riyas assured that such issues would not deter tourism activities in the district. He also announced forthcoming regulatory measures aimed at ensuring the safety of adventure tourism activities, including mandatory registration and licensing for surfing training clubs and similar ventures, under a comprehensive regulatory framework.

Tourism Director hailed Kerala Tourism's innovative campaigns and its endeavor to position the state as a year-round experiential tourism hub by introducing new destinations, emphasizing adventure tourism, and implementing innovative strategies to bolster the sector.



Mission 2030 - Kerala Aims 30% of GDP from Tourism

Interview with Adv. P.A. Mohammed Riyas, Minister for Tourism, Kerala

What was the most important strategy we adopted to revive the tourism industry after the heavy lockdown and restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

In 2021, when the new government took charge, we were facing the worst times in our tourism sector. Most sightseeing spots and accommodations were closed due to lockdown measures. As the minister, my primary task was to reopen the sector during these difficult times, motivating and supporting the tourism industry to recover. After thoroughly examining the issues and brainstorming solutions with industry representatives, the government decided to adopt bubble tourism as our key strategy.

Bubble tourism involves opening destinations to visitors from regions where lockdowns have been relaxed due to lower COVID-19 cases. We asked stakeholders in these destinations to follow very strict COVID protocols to ensure visitor safety. This allowed us to gradually reopen destinations, enabling our tourism sector to rebound much earlier than the rest of the country. We capitalized on the concept of "revenge tourism," marketing Kerala as a safe and naturally peaceful place for the urban community to relax after the pandemic.

The open-air campaign by Kerala Tourism and the "Come Out and Play" advertisements played a crucial role in this strategy. Additionally, we supported the severely affected individuals in the sector with a revolving fund, providing financial assistance to those most impacted by the downturn in tourism.

The adventure tourism industry in Kerala has been witnessing tremendous growth, but there have been criticisms due to isolated incidents regarding safety. What is your vision for adventure tourism in the state, and what measures will be taken to ensure safety in this sector?

Adventure tourism, by its very nature, involves an element of risk, which is precisely what provides the thrill and excitement for participants. Kerala is introducing new and innovative tourism products and hosting international events such as the International Surfing Festival in Varkala, the Paragliding Festival in Vagamon, MTB Wayanad, Beypore Water Fest, and the Malabar River Festival in Thusharagiri because we understand the global travel trend. The majority of young



travelers are increasingly seeking thrilling adventure experiences. With our natural wealth of mountains, rivers, coastline, and lakes, it is essential that we offer these adventures; otherwise, travelers will go to places like Goa and Sri Lanka.

Regarding safety, Kerala is the first state in India to implement comprehensive safety guidelines for adventure tourism activities in air, water, and land. The Kerala Adventure Tourism Promotion Society oversees the implementation of these safety guidelines, and we are making steady progress in ensuring all operators adhere to them. These guidelines are regularly updated by an expert committee to maintain the highest safety standards.

While Goa witnessed 27 accidents in water sports activities in 2023, Kerala has maintained a much safer record with very few incidents. Our emergency action plans have been highly effective, and operators have successfully ensured the safety of visitors in critical situations.

The adventure tourism sector in Kerala is already generating over 23 crores in revenue and has created employment for more than 3,000 people. Our vision is to grow this sector to over 100 crores in revenue and create over 50,000 jobs. We will continuously update and rigorously enforce our safety guidelines to ensure Kerala remains the safest destination for adventure tourism activities.

What is Mission 2025 and Mission 2030 for Kerala Tourism, and what will be our way forward?

Kerala Tourism has been recognized

globally as a top brand, consistently winning international accolades. We are one of the states that the rest of India looks up to for our innovative products, marketing strategies, and offbeat attractions.

By Mission 2030 we aim to achieve a milestone where tourism contributes 30 percent to the state's GDP. To reach this goal, we will implement a comprehensive master plan that maps out tourism resources across the state and outlines a developmental roadmap. In mission 2025 our design policy will focus on creating vibrant infrastructure within the sector, starting with essential facilities such as toilets and improving accessibility to all destinations.

We will also seek investments by hosting an annual Tourism Investors Meet, aligning with our master plan. This initiative will lead to the development of more accommodations, activity operators, and ancillary sectors within the state.

Notably, Kerala will be the first state to establish an innovation center dedicated to promoting start-ups in tourism. Innovation, with an emphasis on sustainable development, will be crucial to our progress. Responsible tourism will be widely practiced, with practical policies ensuring that all stakeholders prioritize it. By 2030, Kerala aims to become one of the most sought-after destinations globally, renowned for its sustainable tourism growth.

We have been progressing year on year on our foreign tourist arrivals. What specific campaigns are planned to increase foreign tourist arrivals?

Kerala Tourism has consistently surpassed previous figures in domestic tourist arrivals and is making a swift comeback in foreign tourist arrivals. We have been strategic with our marketing expenditure, taking into account global scenarios such as the opening of air routes and the impact of events like the Ukraine war.

In response to current trends, we have launched aggressive campaigns to attract foreign tourists. Kerala Tourism has been prominently featured in major tourism trade meets and campaigns in foreign countries. For example, the London bus campaign showcasing our state's natural beauty is just one instance of our extensive marketing strategy.

In addition to initiatives like the Blog Express, we are developing a more impactful plan to attract foreign tourists. We are confident that these efforts will lead to surpassing our previous figures in the near future.

Monsoon in Kerala: A Unique Charm

Welcome to “God’s Own Country” - Kerala, where nature unveils its breathtaking beauty during the mesmerizing monsoon season. Nestled in the southwestern part of India, Kerala is renowned for its abundant rainfall and lush green landscapes. Monsoon tourism has gained immense popularity here, as visitors are enchanted by the unique experiences it offers.

Experience the Essence of Kerala

The verdant greenery and vibrant culture of Kerala come alive during the monsoons. Visitors can bask in the lush landscapes, participate in cultural festivals, and experience the unique charm of Kerala in its most refreshing season. The monsoon is not just a time for rejuvenation but also a period to witness the true essence of Kerala’s natural beauty and cultural richness.

Kerala is a beautiful destination year-round, but the monsoon season holds a special magic. The state experiences two main rainy seasons, during which heavy rainfall and cool temperatures create a serene and refreshing atmosphere.

The Monsoon Seasons

The Southwest Monsoon, from June to August, known as Edavappathy, arrives in June and derives its name from the Malayalam month of Edavam. The Northeast Monsoon, from October to November, or Thulavarsham, begins in mid-October, named after the Malayalam month of Thulam. The rain clouds gather from the Bay of Bengal and sweep through the Palakkad Gap in the Western Ghats, creating a breathtaking spectacle as they arrive on the

wings of the northeast winds.

The typical weather pattern involves a few hours of rain followed by golden interludes of sunshine, allowing visitors to enjoy both the cool darkness of the monsoons and the occasional sunlight. The temperatures range from a maximum of 29 to 23 degrees Celsius, making it a comfortable escape.

Kerala’s monsoon season is not characterized by incessant rains that halt all activity. Instead, it features periodic rain showers with sunny interludes, creating a harmonious balance. Occasionally, the rain might persist for a few days, but sunshine is never far away, providing equilibrium to life’s natural flow.

During the monsoon, Kerala transforms into a lush, vibrant paradise that offers a unique charm unlike any other time of the year. The rain-kissed Western Ghats, with their mist-covered peaks and cascading waterfalls, create a stunning backdrop. The lush tea plantations, paddy fields, and dense forests come alive with vibrant hues, making it an ideal time for nature enthusiasts and photographers to capture the raw beauty of Kerala.

Monsoon Tourism in Kerala

Monsoon tourism has gained immense popularity in Kerala, as visitors are enchanted by the unique experiences it offers. The tranquil backwaters in Alleppey and Kumarakom are a must-visit during this season. The serene houseboat cruises allow you to immerse yourself in the rhythm of the rain as you glide through the emerald waters, surrounded by lush greenery.

Kerala’s backwaters, especially during the

monsoon, offer a serene and picturesque setting. The rain enhances the beauty of the waterways, with lush green banks and blooming flowers creating a tranquil and enchanting experience. A houseboat cruise through these backwaters is a must-do, providing a unique perspective of Kerala’s natural beauty.

The vast green canvas of paddy fields in Palakkad and the thousand shades of green from the villages of Malappuram to Kasaragod are mesmerizing experiences for every visitor.

Ayurvedic Rejuvenation

Monsoon is considered the ideal time for Ayurvedic treatments in Kerala. The humidity and cool climate enhance the effectiveness of rejuvenation therapies and detoxification programmes. Ayurvedic resorts and spas offer a range of treatments to revitalize the mind, body, and soul, making it an enticing option for those seeking holistic wellness amidst the monsoon ambiance.

During the monsoon, special herbal oils and medications are applied to the artists’ bodies, enhancing their performance and overall well-being. This practice underscores the deep connection between Kerala’s cultural heritage and its natural environment.

Kerala’s monsoon season offers a unique and captivating experience for travelers. Whether you seek nature’s beauty, cultural enrichment, or holistic wellness, Kerala during the monsoon is a destination that promises unforgettable memories. So, pack your bags and immerse yourself in the magic of Kerala’s rainy season.



Adventure Tourism in Focus as Kerala Sees Surge in Visitors

Kerala is witnessing a surge in visitors due to its renewed focus on adventure and camping tourism. This trend is attracting those who seek challenges and the experience of living close to nature.

To bolster its appeal, Kerala Tourism has added at least a dozen new destinations offering various thrilling experiences. Furthermore, the state has planned four international events to solidify its standing on the global adventure tourism map.

Kerala's tourism hotspots are now hosting international competitions in paragliding, surfing, mountain cycling, and whitewater kayaking.

"Like traveling for leisure, adventure tourism is also getting a lot of attention these days," said Tourism Minister Adv. P.A. Mohammed Riyas. "Kerala has tremendous potential to emerge as a global adventure and eco-tourism hub. The state tourism department has major plans to further strengthen this segment, in partnership with water sports and adventure tourism promoters and local bodies," he added.

"The state government's focus is on developing world-class infrastructure. Our efforts are to make Kerala the finest destination for thrill seekers and adventure lovers," Shri Riyas emphasized.

Adventure tourism activities are now mainly concentrated in the districts of Idukki, Wayanad, Kannur, Kozhikode, Thiruvananthapuram, Kasaragod, Malappuram, and Ernakulam. These areas offer excellent opportunities for water sports, trekking, and paragliding.

Last year, the sector generated Rs 23.5 crores in revenue and created more than 3,000 regular jobs, besides triggering local business activities. The state government has already issued safety and security guidelines for camping and adventure tourism activities.

The entities working under the Department of Tourism mainly coordinate these activities in a public-private-participation mode. Additionally, approximately 200 adventure tourism activity providers operate in the private sector, with 60 registered with the tourism department.

This year's first major event, the 'International Paragliding Competition 2024,' was held from March 14 to 17 at Vagamon, Idukki. Over 100 nationally and internationally renowned gliders participated in India's largest aero sports adventure festival, with contestants hailing from countries such as France, Germany, Italy, New Zealand, Australia, the US, the UK, and Nepal.



In the same month, the Tourism Department organized a three-day International Surfing Festival on the famous Varkala Beach, also a first in India. Kerala is now emerging as a premier surfing destination in the country, with high potential as a global water sport hub.

The 7th edition of the International Mountain Cycling Championship (MTB Kerala-2024) was held in April at Priyadarshini Tea Plantation, Mananthavady, Wayanad. Cyclists from 25 countries participated in the cross-country competition, navigating mud, rock, and water terrains.

Earlier, Kozhikode hosted the Malabar River Festival, a three-day International Whitewater Kayaking competition, featuring some of the

best-known kayakers navigating the Chaliyar River. The Tourism Department organizes this championship under the aegis of the Kerala Adventure Tourism Promotion Society (KATPS), the Wayanad District Tourism Promotion Council (DTPC), and the Cycling Federation of India.

The 10th edition of the Malabar River Festival, renowned for its organizational excellence and spectator participation, will be held from July 25 to 28.

Kerala's emphasis on adventure tourism is not only boosting visitor numbers but also positioning the state as a leading destination for thrill-seekers and nature enthusiasts from around the world.

Excitement Builds as KTM 2024 Garners 1,810 Buyer Registrations

With just five months left until the highly-anticipated 12th edition of the Kerala Travel Mart (KTM-2024), excitement is building as the event attracts significant attention from both domestic and international spheres. Buyer registrations have surged past 1,810, with an impressive 495 buyers representing high-end foreign markets.

Organized by the KTM Society with strong support from the state Tourism Department and various state and industry bodies, this four-day extravaganza, starting on September 26, aims to spotlight Kerala's tourism prowess on a global stage.

Established in 2000, the KTM Society stands as India's largest organization in the travel and tourism sector. Its biennial gathering is recognized as Asia's premier tourism event, with robust international participation. Among the 1,315 domestic buyers registered so far, Maharashtra leads with 350 registrations, followed by Delhi (152) and Gujarat (140).

Furthermore, organizers have received 364 stall applications for KTM 2024. "The response, both nationally and internationally, has been unprecedented," remarked KTM Society



President Jose Pradeep. "The stalls will be categorized under eight segments."

The grand inauguration of the event will be held at Le Méridien Convention Centre on the evening of September 26, 2024, followed by three days of sessions at the Sagara and Samudrika convention centers on Willingdon Island from September 27 to 29.

Leading up to KTM-2024, a pre-mart tour is scheduled from September 22 to 26, engaging media personnel, vloggers, and influencers. Following the main event, a five-day post-mart tour across Kerala will commence from September 30, exclusively for select buyers of

KTM-2024.

The foreign buyers attending the event will hail from countries including the USA, UK, Russia, Canada, the Middle East, South Africa, and various European nations, including Scandinavia. Organizers attribute the keen interest from these regions to decades of Malayali migration, prompting residents to explore Kerala upon learning more about the state.

The 11th KTM in 2022 facilitated over 55,000 business interactions over three days, welcoming 1,134 buyers (including 234 from abroad) and hosting 325 seller stalls.

Business sessions for KTM 2024 are scheduled for September 27 to 29, while the expo will be open to the public on September 29.

The 12th KTM will particularly highlight Kerala as a premier wedding destination, leveraging the state's abundant natural beauty, cultural richness, and robust infrastructure. Additionally, the event will spotlight Responsible Tourism initiatives, Cruise tourism, and MICE tourism (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions), showcasing the state's capacity to host diverse events beyond urban centers.

Indian Cruise Tourism Reaches All-time high

Indian cruise tourism sector touches a new high with footfall touching 4.7 lakh in 2023-24, its highest ever. Before the pandemic, India could welcome 420,000 cruise passengers, including Domestic and Foreign tourists. This time, unlike the financial year 2019-20, number of domestic tourists is more than 80 percent. It hints at the scope of hike in cruise tourism with more international tourists in the years to come. In 2019-20, the share of domestic and international cruise tourists was almost 50-50..

Last Year, India had announced its interest to boost cruise tourism, setting an ambitious target of 4 million cruise tourists by 2041. It was during the G20 Summit last year, tourism officials announced the ambitious target and declared the interest in promoting cruise tourism aggressively along with developing River cruise tourism. Plans are also there to develop theme-based tourist circuits like Gujarat pilgrimage tours, west coast cultural and scenic trips, south coast ayurvedic wellness tours and east coast heritage trips. Having 12 Major and 200 Minor Ports along the 7500 km long coastline

across the west and east and a network of more than 20000 kilometres long navigable 110 waterways connecting around 400 rivers, India has immense potentials for developing cruise tourism.

Recently the ministry of ports, shipping, and waterways announced a ₹45,000 crore

investment to develop river cruise tourism, aiming to leverage India's inland waterways for economic growth. Last year, in order to make India the preferred cruising nation for deep sea cruises, coastal cruises, river cruises and yacht cruises a draft national cruise tourism policy was announced.



Smart Tourism to Take Centre Stage

Resilient tourism bounced back remarkably after a traumatic era of travel bans. The rising tourist arrival figures energize the sector to make grand strides ahead. While the sector marches ahead, new trends emerge with many prospects. Bleisure Travel, Staycation, Transformative Travel, Active Ecotourism, Workation, and the like have been the highlights in post-COVID tourism. Yet, the trend of Smart tourism, of late, is gaining increased significance and is poised to rule tourism in the years to come.

Conceptually, Smart tourism destination facilitates access to tourism and hospitality products, services, spaces and experiences through advanced technology solutions that can ensure seamless information dissemination and enhanced tourist experience. It primarily involves ubiquitous information services tourists receive during the touring process. Destinations can use such technology solutions



to strengthen visitor engagement and augment visitor experience. Tourism authorities are now open to adopting innovative technologies to support new tourism products and services that align with Smart Tourism goals. Along with

enhanced personalisation and convenience, Tourist attractions can provide immersive and interactive experiences by integrating latest ICT tools.

The trend involves integrated application of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), Virtual Reality (VR), and Big Data by Destinations and tourist attractions. They also use AI-powered travel assistants and Apps that can provide personalized recommendations. Visitor management becomes easier for destination management agencies by applying crowd management applications. While the US and Europe are at the forefront of initiating Smart Tourism and integration of Smart Tourism technology solutions, Asia, China, Japan, and South Korea have progressed significantly. Smart Tourism is poised to become a critical factor in Destination Competitiveness as technology advancements continue and the application becomes widespread.

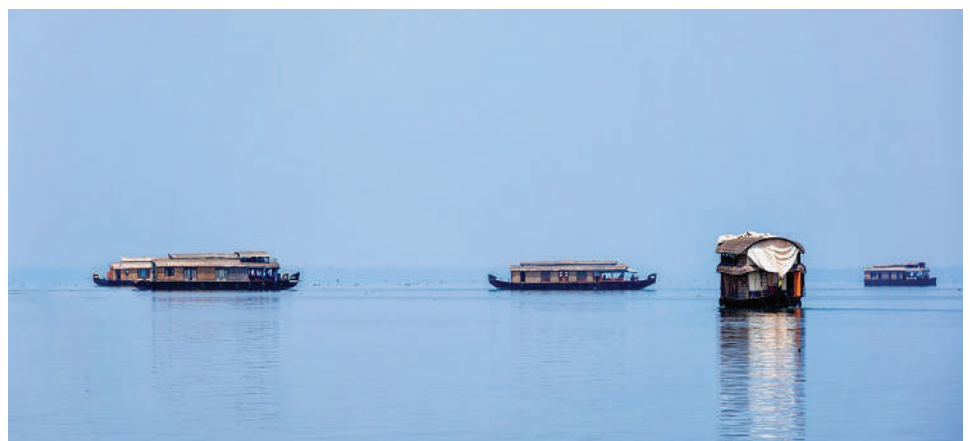
As More Seeks Tranquillity and Complete Relaxation, Sleep Tourism Gains Attention

Addressing the modern-day challenge of sleep deprivation, Sleep Tourism, also called “Napcations” or “Sleepcations,” is turning to be a growing component of wellness tourism. Unlike traditional tourism in which travellers engage in rigorous sightseeing and activities, Sleep Tourism focuses on complete relaxation for the visitors. It doesn't mean that tourist take a trip just to sleep alone, rather they pay more attention to sleep quality and choosing the hotels and other lodgings that enable them to sleep well. Realising the trend, a growing number of hotels are offering amenities and services, including access to a slate of in-house sleep experts, to enable the tourists get a healthy dose of rest. According to HTF Market Intelligence Sleep tourism market is projected to grow nearly 8% and by over \$400 billion between 2023 and 2028.

The target market primarily consists of the upmarket segment having tourists who lack of sleep and desire to get truly restful night of sleep. Increasing number of travellers understand the vital link between restful sleep and overall wellness. Sensing the trend, international chain hotels invest to offer customised rooms and

facilities to the guests. Innovative sound proofing technology is integrated into Hotels that intends to offer Sleep Tourism facilities. While noise machines, aromatherapy, and sleep-inducing technology are provided by some resorts. Specialized sleep programmes, hypoallergenic options, and natural sleep remedies are also in the offer. Many hotels even provide a pillow menu from which guests can choose their ideal pillow. In India too, the trend is catching up. Some of the resorts offer dedicated sleep programmes with a

sleep doctor on the premises, along with tailored advice on yogic kriyas, relaxing amenities, wellness therapies, overall health management, and nutrition. Some others have packages and meals for those seeking sleep tourism. Indeed the increasing awareness of the crucial role sleep plays in maintaining good health and productivity, along with the desire for unique and thoughtful experiences linked to relaxation and serenity, Sleep tourism is poised to grow further remarkably.



Incredible Return of International Tourism

Demand goes up in 2023, will reach pre-pandemic levels in 2024

International tourism records remarkable comeback in 2023, ended at 88% of pre-pandemic levels, with an estimated 1.3 billion international arrivals; UN Tourism (UNWTO) reports. As the demand remains strong, international tourism is forecasted to return to pre-pandemic levels in 2024.

While the global tourist arrivals registers remarkable progress, the Middle East region already surpassed the pre-pandemic level with arrivals 22% above 2019. Europe, with a strong intra-regional demand and travel from the United States, reached 94% of pre-pandemic level. Asia and the Pacific is at the bottom in the list of regions posed recovery, recording only 65% of pre-pandemic level.

The movement of 1.3 billion tourists across the borders resulted in USD 1.4 trillion as tourism receipts in 2023. Total export revenues from tourism (including passenger transport) are estimated at USD 1.6 trillion and the economic contribution of tourism, measured in tourism direct gross domestic product (TDGDP) point to USD 3.3 trillion in 2023, or 3% of global GDP.

The current estimates of UN Tourism reveal that international tourism will see a complete recovery in 2024, with initial estimates pointing to 2% growth above 2019 level. There is still



significant room for recovery across Asia, which expects boom in tourist influx from several source markets and destinations in this year. Anticipated hindrances to the sustained recovery of international tourism may include the economic and geopolitical headwinds, persisting inflation, high interest rates, volatile oil

prices and disruptions to trade. The continuing Hamas-Israel conflict and the uncertainty derived from the Russian aggression against Ukraine along with other mounting geopolitical tensions, can dampen scope of quick recovery of some regions/global tourism.

Saudi Arabia Crossed 100 Million FTA

Aggressive tourism promotion paid off; Saudi Arabia in the limelight by crossing 100 million tourist arrivals mark. What is more important is that this remarkable accomplishment achieved seven years ahead of its original schedule, not only underscores Saudi Arabia's emergence as a global tourism powerhouse but also highlights its leading role in the economic diversification and sustainable

development of the tourism sector worldwide.

Having much ahead of the initial goal, the Ministry of Tourism has announced that the Kingdom has now set a new ambitious target of welcoming 150 million tourists by 2030. The achievement not only showcases the Kingdom's robust tourism sector but also underscores the Saudi Ministry of Tourism's commitment to advanced data gathering and statistical analysis,

a priority echoed by UN Tourism. Tourism sector over there has shown remarkable resilience, with inbound spending reaching over USD 37 billion in 2023 and a significant increase in hotel keys across the kingdom, reports UN Tourism. As of 2023, with 925.5 thousand jobs in the tourism sector and significant investments in training, Saudi Arabia targets to make tourism the second-largest employer by 2030.

By welcoming 106 million tourists, Saudi Arabia marked an unprecedented record by registering an increase of 56 per cent compared to 2019. By this tremendous progress, Tourism has turned to be a significant contributor to the nation's economy, with domestic and international tourists spending over 250 billion riyals (US\$66.6 billion) in 2023, which accounts for over four per cent of GDP and seven per cent of the non-oil GDP over there. The achievement has garnered international recognition, with accolades from UN Tourism and the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), acknowledging Saudi Arabia's rapid development in the tourism sector.



WTTC and Microsoft Reports: AI Set to Revolutionize Travel & Tourism

Recent reports from the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) and Microsoft shed light on the transformative impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its pivotal role in shaping the future of Travel & Tourism. Presented during the WTTC's participation at the UN General Assembly in New York, these reports underscore a commitment to a digital future that prioritizes safety, ethics, and responsible AI integration.

The WTTC's "Responsible Artificial Intelligence (AI): Overview of AI Risks, Safety & Governance" and "Artificial Intelligence (AI): Global Strategies, Policies & Regulations" reports delve into the potential risks and benefits of AI deployment while emphasizing the importance of establishing frameworks for transparency, accountability, and fairness.

"Responsible Artificial Intelligence (AI)" outlines strategies to mitigate risks associated with AI, from combating bias and discrimination to ensuring human oversight of AI systems. This report empowers organizations to leverage AI responsibly and ensure ethical and equitable outcomes.

In the companion report, "Artificial

Intelligence (AI): Global Strategies, Policies & Regulations," WTTC provides an extensive overview of AI ecosystems across key countries and international organizations. It explores how policymakers navigate the AI landscape, shaping regulations, and fostering innovation while prioritizing ethical AI usage.

Ms. Julia Simpson, WTTC President & CEO, highlighted AI's transformative potential, emphasizing its role in personalizing customer experiences, driving sustainability, and shaping the future of Travel & Tourism. She cited examples such as major hotel groups like Iberostar using AI to reduce food waste, resulting in significant cost savings and environmental benefits.

Ms Julie Shainock, Managing Director of Travel, Transport, & Logistics Industry at Microsoft, echoed the sentiment, noting AI's widespread adoption across the travel ecosystem to enhance customer and employee experiences while improving operational efficiency. She expressed excitement about AI's future potential to elevate the human experience in travel.

According to WTTC, AI presents immense opportunities for growth and innovation in the Travel & Tourism sector. However, challenges

such as shortages of AI-skilled workers persist, underscoring the need for proactive measures to address barriers to adoption.

As AI continues to reshape industries worldwide, WTTC remains at the forefront, advocating for responsible and inclusive AI innovation in Travel & Tourism. The reports emphasize the urgency for businesses in the sector to prioritize AI investments, foster talent, and embrace collaboration between humans and AI to unlock its full potential.



PATA Forecasts Asia's Key Role in Asia Pacific Tourism Growth

The Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA) has released its comprehensive Asia Pacific Visitor Forecasts 2024-2026 report, following the recent publication of the PATA Executive Summary Forecasts Report for the same period. This detailed analysis delves into growth projections for the Asia Pacific region, focusing on source market-destination pairs from 2024 to 2026 across three scenarios, covering 39 destinations.

Noor Ahmad Hamid, CEO of PATA, underscores the importance of understanding the nuanced recovery patterns of individual destinations within the Asia Pacific region. While most destinations are rebounding strongly, the report highlights significant changes experienced by each destination, impacting their future growth trajectories compared to the overall region.

According to the medium scenario outlined in the report, international visitor arrivals

(IVAs) to Asia Pacific are expected to surge from 619 million in 2024 to 762 million in 2026, representing a recovery rate of 111.6% compared to pre-pandemic levels in 2019. Asia is projected to lead the recovery, with visitor arrivals reaching 564.0 million by 2026, followed by the Americas with 167.7 million and the Pacific with 30.4 million, underscoring the region's resilience and growing potential as a travel destination.

The report stresses the need to analyze recovery rates and trends for individual destinations, as they shape the overall narrative of the region's tourism resurgence. Out of the 39 destinations covered, 34 are predicted to recover to pre-pandemic levels, with Japan and the Maldives emerging as the fastest-recovering destinations. Japan is forecasted to welcome 49.3 million visitors by 2026, a 155% increase from 2019, while the Maldives is expected to host 2.5 million visitors, indicating a 148% recovery rate.

China, the US, the UK, and Australia are anticipated to maintain their positions as major source markets of IVAs to the Asia Pacific region, all projected to recover to pre-pandemic levels by 2024, driven by their economic growth potentials.

Noor Ahmad Hamid emphasizes the need for destination marketing organizations (DMOs) to adapt swiftly to changes in the marketplace, especially with shifts in source market output. Understanding the PATA forecast report, which considers economic indicators and travel capacity, will be crucial for destination marketers and policymakers to develop effective strategies in the post-COVID era.

Key insights from the report include forecasted international visitor numbers for Asia Pacific destinations, growth patterns for individual destinations over the next three years, and highlights of key source markets within each Asia Pacific region.

Marine Litter and Its Impact on Tourism

Marine litter refers to any persistent, manufactured, or processed solid material discarded, disposed of, or abandoned in the marine and coastal environment, as defined by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). This includes objects created or used by humans that are intentionally dumped into seas, rivers, or beaches, or transported indirectly through rivers, sewage, stormwater, or winds. It also includes items lost accidentally, such as during severe weather conditions at sea. The consequences of marine litter are extensive, affecting the environment, economy, safety, health, and culture. According to the International Maritime Organization (IMO), scientists warn that by 2050, the volume of plastics in the oceans could surpass that of fish. These plastics include both macro and micro particles. Macro plastics encompass items like plastic bags, water bottles, and fishing gear, while micro plastics, generally five millimeters or less, are classified as primary (originating from products like cosmetics and household cleaners) or secondary (resulting from the breakdown of larger plastic debris).

Micro plastics have been found in food, bottled drinking water, sea salt, and human feces. Tourism significantly contributes to marine litter, with research indicating that about 85% of floating marine debris and 45-95% of surface litter are plastics, primarily from tourism activities. Much of this plastic is

designed for single use and is not recyclable, leading to significant pollution. Coastal regions, where 80% of tourism occurs, are heavily impacted, with an estimated 8 million tons of plastic entering the ocean annually. Inland and urban tourism also contribute to marine plastic pollution, as plastic waste from these areas often reaches rivers and eventually the oceans.

Beaches are major contributors to marine litter, with over 60% of marine debris originating from shoreline and recreational activities. Common items found include cigarette butts, plastic bottles, caps, lids, cutlery, trays, straws, food wrappings, lolly sticks, metal cans, and, notably in the post-COVID era, face masks. Cruise ships are another significant source, contributing to 24% of marine traffic waste. A single cruise ship can produce up to seven tons of garbage and solid waste daily. Over a week, a cruise ship with 3,000 passengers generates approximately one million gallons of gray water, 210,000 gallons of sewage, and 25,000 gallons of oily bilge water. Faulty engine systems and inadequate repairs can lead to oil leaks, contaminating ocean waters. Solid waste from cruise ships includes paper, cardboard, aluminum, and other materials.

Recreational fiber boats, once abandoned, also contribute to marine litter, with their plastic parts and paint becoming pollutants. Sewage disposal from tourism establishments is another significant source. Many hotels, accommodations, and houseboats

indiscriminately discharge sewage containing fecal matter directly into water bodies. Tourists using cosmetics, participating in water-based activities, or bathing in natural water bodies also introduce micro beads into the environment. Wastewater from showers in accommodations often flows directly into water bodies, releasing micro plastics.

Marine litter negatively impacts tourism in numerous ways. It diminishes the aesthetic appeal of destinations, reducing tourist numbers and associated revenue. The decline in aesthetic value also affects the desirability and value of waterfront hotels and resorts. Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) are forced to allocate more resources for beach clean-ups to maintain attractiveness. Larger debris such as glass, metals, syringes, and medical waste pose physical risks to tourists. Contaminated seafood can harm tourists, and water-based activities like coral reef viewing are threatened by marine litter, as plastic debris can obstruct light and oxygen, damaging coral. The UNEP notes that a significant percentage of the world's coral reefs have already been destroyed or are under threat. Marine animals often mistake plastic for food, leading to entanglement or ingestion, and marine transportation is hindered by litter entanglement with screw propellers and clogging of water intakes.

It is crucial for DMOs to implement regulatory measures to curb waste disposal at marine destinations. They should develop best practice guidelines for tourists and tour operators. Serious efforts must be made to achieve Blue Flag Certification for beaches, marinas, and sustainable tourism boats that meet stringent environmental, educational, safety, and environmental criteria. DMOs should also encourage the tourism industry to join the Global Tourism Plastics Initiative, part of the Sustainable Tourism Programme of the One Planet Network, which aims to prevent plastic pollution and reduce the production of new plastic. The Promise project of Switch Asia, aimed at preventing marine litter in the Lakshadweep Sea, demonstrates how effectively enhancing the attractiveness of tourism destinations can also improve local living conditions.

Dr. Saroop Roy B.R.



Graphics by John K./NOAA Marine Debris Program

First Indian Part of Soaring Space Tourism

Gopi Thotakura proudly displayed Indian flag in space on board Jeff Bezos' Blue Origin, became the first Indian to be part of Space Tourism. This momentous event, part of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos' ambitious space travel program, marks a significant milestone for India and space tourism. Space tourism is basically a recreational space travel, flies either on established government-owned vehicles or on vehicles fielded by private companies. It seeks to give tourists the ability to become astronauts and experience space travel.

While Gopi Thotakura is the first Indian citizen to venture into space as a tourist, he follows Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma, who flew as a professional cosmonaut aboard Soyuz T-11 on April 3, 1984, as part of the Soviet Interkosmos program. Other notable astronauts of Indian origin includes Kalpana Chawla, Sunita Williams, Raja Chari, and Sirisha Bandla. There has been a number of space trips took place over the years. This time, Blue Origin successfully completed its seventh human spaceflight and the 25th flight for the New Shepard program held on 19th May.



All Set for Malabar River Fest

Kerala braces up for hosting another international adventure tourism event. The 10th Edition of Malabar River Festival, an international kayaking competition organized by Kerala Adventure Tourism Promotion Society (KATPS), is scheduled to be held from 25 to 28 July 2024. District Tourism Promotion Council (DTPC) Kozhikode and Jilla Panchayat, Kozhikode with technical collaboration of Indian Kayaking and Canoeing Association (IKCA) are also part of the event.

The renewed focus on adventure and camping tourism is attracting a wave of visitors to Kerala who love challenges and experience of living close to the nature. Besides adding at least a dozen new destinations offering various thrilling experience, Kerala Tourism has planned four international events to put the state firmly on the global adventure tourism map firmly. International competitions are being held in paragliding, surfing, mountain cycling and whitewater kayaking in some of its tourism hotspots.

Kayaking has always been a favourite water sport for most adventure enthusiasts. The thrill of riding on a narrow boat and paddling it around to witness the natural beauty surrounding all around is a beautiful experience.

The last edition of the Malabar River Fest,

turned to be a grand success, worked as a great booster to the water sports and adventure tourism in Kerala. With great vigor, world-class athletes take part in all the tough events like Boater Cross, Extreme Race, and Giant Slalom. The Malabar Kayaking Championship hosts Kayak Training, Whitewater Rafting, Local Slalom competitions as well and many more similar adventurous events. Participants also got an opportunity to explore the region by themselves both before and after the festival. Experts had found the Iruvanjipuzha and the Chalipuzha among the best white waters in southern India for kayaking considering their suitable temperature and relatively thinner chances of accidents.

One of the prime objectives of the event is to make Kerala a destination for Adventure Sports and promote the sport of White Water Kayaking in South India, while exhibiting the incredible, unexplored rivers that Kerala has to offer the international paddling community. Malabar River Festival has been very well received in the past years' events. The festival is one of the events in Kerala that draws in a lot of visitors. It is the only white water kayaking championship in South India. If you are looking for an adventure holiday, this is a good pick. The festival will definitely satisfy your adventurous spirit.



World Tourism Organization Becomes UN Tourism



UN Tourism

UNITED NATIONS
WORLD TOURISM ORGANIZATION

The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) entered into a new era with a new name and brand: UN Tourism. By this, the organization reaffirms its status as the United Nations specialized agency for tourism and the global leader of tourism for development, driving social and economic change through sustainable tourism.

Turning into UN Tourism, the former World Tourism Organization adopts a more approachable stance and capitalizes on its strengths: the "UN", signifying authority, and tourism, a simple and relatable concept for all. By adopting a new brand narrative that was crafted to seamlessly align with UN Tourism's central mission and priorities, it pivots around three main messages: the UN as a global altruistic organisation, the notion of connecting humans around the world, and the concept of proactivity and movement.

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Printed at Orange Offset Printers, Gandhari Amman Kovil Road, Thiruvananthapuram - 695 001. Design & Production: Tourism India Publications Pvt. Ltd., Sasthamangalam.P.O., Thiruvananthapuram - 695 010
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