

FKHA Magazine

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SWAGAT

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE FEDERATION OF KERALA HOTELS ASSOCIATION

BI-LINGUAL BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION



COVER STORY

MARAYOOR

Hidden Gem

REPORT

ITB BERLIN

**AN EXCELLENT
BUSINESS YEAR
AHEAD!**

FEATURE

*Culture
Bars*

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Editor

V. Sunil Kumar*

(Responsible for Selection of content under PRB Act)
mdwhitedammar@gmail.com

Printer & Publisher

Sqn Ldr K. B. Padmadas (Rtd.)

General Secretary on behalf of Federation of
Kerala Hotels Association
Address: FKHA House, TC 16/253/1, EVRA 371, Eswaravilasom
Road, Vazhuthacaud, Tvm- 695014
fkhastate@gmail.com

Consultant Editor

C. Gouridasan Nair

Editorial Co-ordinator

Asokan Pallickal
asokanpallickal@gmail.com

Marketing & Creative Head

Siji Nair

sijicn@gmail.com

Metro Mart

Address: MERA 46, Medical College Murinjapalam Rd,
Murinjapalam, Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala 695011

Address

FKHA Magazine SWAGAT
Reg No. : KERBIL 02317,
FKHA House, TC 16/253/1, EVRA 371,
Eswaravilasom Road, Vazhuthacaud,
Thiruvananthapuram 695014
fkhamagazineswagat@gmail.com

For Trade Enquiries

+91 99477 33339 / 99951 39933

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orange@orangexpress.com



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SWAGAT

March-April 2024 3



STATE BUDGET A BIG DISAPPOINTMENT FOR HOTEL INDUSTRY

Hotel industry in Kerala had looked forward to the State Budget with great expectations. We have been raising several issues that are indispensable for the survival for the industry. We had also taken up some of the burning issues affecting the industry with the Finance and Excise Ministers directly and raised the same during the pre-Budget discussions. However, regrettably, none of these issues have found any resonance in the budget.

We are not overlooking the many steps taken by the government in 2016 to remedy the debilitating blow that the industry received in 2014 on account of the government's decision to shut down as many as 730 bars at one go. We also acknowledge the many steps taken to promote the hotel industry post-2016. However, there has been no follow up action on any of the issues that still remained unaddressed or that which have cropped subsequently.

Everybody is agreed that hotels are an inseparable part of the tourism sector, which helps the State earn a robust sum as tax revenue and generates tens of thousands of job opportunities. But, unfortunately, we find that the government is not willing even to treat the hotel sector, where hundreds of crores of rupees have been invested, as an industry.

Those who invest in the hotel sector are not given any of the concessions being extended to other industries. We have been demanding waiver of the existing one-time property tax, extension of industrial power tariff and various concessions now available to industries to cover bank loans taken by hotel owners and, above all, industry status for the tourism sector, but in vain.

There are 801 hotels with bar licences in Kerala. The purpose of tourism development would not be served if hotels are to be constructed merely for securing bar licence. If there is a stipulation that bar licence would be issued to only three-star hotels with 30 rooms, four-star hotels with 40 rooms and five-star hotels with 50 rooms, it would best serve the interests of both the tourism sector and the hotel industry.

We have been demanding a one-time settlement scheme for tax arrears in the hotel sector. However,

hotel industry has been excluded from the Amnesty 24 Scheme for tax mop-up announced in the budget. Instead of showing leniency towards the hotel industry, the attempt of the government is to humiliate us. Tax arrears have been categorized into four slabs and concessions have been announced in the budget. However, the Finance Minister has made it explicit that the benefits of the scheme will not be available to the hotel industry.

Entrepreneurs in the hotel industry are looking forward to reasonable returns on investment and decent working conditions. However, both the government and the general public appear to believe that the hotel industry does not deserve the protection of the laws of the land. Like other industries, the hotel industry also functions within the general legal framework of the country adhering to the rules laid down by the government from time to time. As such, the hotel industry is eminently qualified for treatment on par with other industries, especially at a time when tourism is developing as a major revenue earner for the State.

Kerala is the only State in India that still retains Turnover Tax (ToT). ToT is not applicable to liquor anywhere in the country, but hotels in Kerala are still being asked to pay ToT. Now, every hotel owner must file monthly and annual returns, make monthly remittances and suffer assessments and re-assessments if they are to run the business. Notices are issued at random and there are several court cases pending against many. To top it all, the hotels are victims of unreasonable demands from officials.

For long, we have been urging the government to collect ToT at the first point so that it would get the revenue due to it at the time of purchase and save on tax collection expenditure. The hotels would also be spared intimidation by officials. This would render redundant the need for filing of monthly and annual returns, making monthly remittances, assessments and re-assessments, and help avoid the present spate notices, court cases, amnesty, etc.

Each hotel with a bar has been constructed spending between Rs. 25 and 100 crore. But, with the Kerala

State Beverages Corporation (KCBC) opening its retail outlets in close proximity to the bars, hotel revenues have been hit. We have constructed the hotels taking hefty loans from banks and other financial institutions. Each one of us provide direct employment to over 50 persons and indirect employment to many more. The Government receives a tidy sum by way of taxes from us. The Government should, therefore, take urgent steps to shift the retail liquor shops near hotels to other locations.

Following the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government had restricted bar timing from 11 a.m. to 11 p.m. Earlier, bars functioned from 8 a.m. to 12 midnight. In most neighbouring States, bars function till 1 a.m. The restrictive timing is hurting our revenues. The right thing to do is to extend bar timings to 12 midnight in municipal and corporation areas and in tourist destinations. Bar opening time should also be synchronized with that of liquor outlets which open at 10 a.m.

The decision to observe Dry Day on the first day of every month is also hurting us. This measure was introduced on the plea that the first day of every month is the salary day. The argument has no merit today because salaries are now being credited to bank accounts. Further, while the minimum age for a person to purchase liquor is 21 years in all other States, it has been raised 23 years in Kerala. The Government is closing its eyes to reality on all these issues because of its worries about the impact of politically motivated campaigns.

The Government should conduct a study into the state of affairs in the hotel industry on account of all the issues listed above. Decisions that governments take may have relevance at particular point in time, but they lose their relevance later and should be reviewed. There has been a 40 per cent fall in business in bars over the past two years. The Government should conduct an audit of this and effect changes in its policies to ensure smooth functioning of the hotel industry, both in the interests of the State's tax revenue and the employment opportunities that the hotel industry offers.



V. Sunil Kumar
President, FKHA
& Editor, Swagat

Contents

ITB BERLIN AN EXCELLENT BUSINESS YEAR AHEAD!

The crème de la crème attending the just-concluded ITB Berlin were confident that the global tourism industry is poised for a splendid business year ahead, writes **Harisankar**

18



24

NEW GLOBAL STANDARD FOR SUSTAINABILITY OF TOURISM

UN has adopted a groundbreaking statistical framework, developed under the leadership of UN Tourism, for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST).

46

എഫ്കെഎച്ച്എ-റെഫിഎച്ച്എം 2023 ബാച്ച് കോൺവൊക്കേഷൻ

പുതിയ തലമുറ
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ഹോട്ടൽ മേഖലയിലേക്ക്,
സ്കാഡ്രൺ ലീഡർ
കെ.ബി. പത്മദാസ് (റിട്ട.)
എഴുതുന്നു

50

Culture Bars

Gone are the days when visiting a bar or pub was frowned upon, at least in Kerala. The bars/pubs in the State have undergone a major transformation, writes **K.R. Rajeesh**

58

മുംബൈ നവി മുംബൈ തീസ്തി മുംബൈ !

ഇന്ത്യൻ നഗരവികസന ചരിത്രത്തിലെ ശ്രദ്ധേയമായ ഒരു നാഴികക്കല്ലാകയാണു് തീസ്തി മുംബൈ എന്ന മൂന്നാം മുംബൈ നഗരം, ഉമാശങ്കർ ജി. എഴുതുന്നു

62

END OF AN ERA

Chef Imtiaz Qureshi, the legendary cook who passed away on February 16, took traditional Awadhi cuisine to modern upscale settings, all the while pursuing culinary excellence. A homage by **Siji Nair**



CHEF IMTIAZ QURESHI
(1931-2024)

COVER STORY

MARAYOOR HIDDEN GEM

Marayoor, just a stone's throw away from Munnar, retains an air of mystique and, as its Malayalam name suggests, its wealth and ancient secrets refuse easy access, writes **Giji K. Raman**

32

42

EMPOWERING ENCOUNTERS MARAYOOR'S TRANSFORMATIVE 'CHILLA' INITIATIVE

A visit to Marayoor is no longer just about historical exploration; it's an experiential journey that allows visitors to witness first-hand the power of collaboration and community upliftment.

66

KERALA'S NEW PUBLIC DESIGN POLICY

Kerala's unveils India's first ever public infrastructure design policy

68

HEALTH BEAT: PROTEIN AND YOU

Including protein-rich foods in your diet is vital for maintaining overall health and well-being, writes **Umasankar G**

72

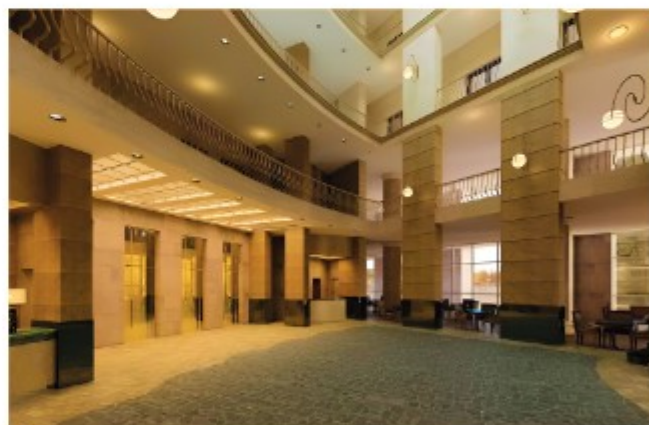
DAWN OF AI IN HOSPITALITY

The adoption of AI is on the fast track and it holds huge potential for both the hotels and the new generation guests, writes **Kiran Kumar**, Principal, FKHA-IHM

74

HOSPITALITY A FINE YEAR AHEAD

Hospitality Industry's occupancy will be at decadal highs in 2025 financial year, says professional investment information and credit rating agency ICRA in its February report.



An aerial photograph of Varkala Beach in Kerala, India, taken during sunset. The sky is a vibrant orange and yellow, with soft clouds. The sea is a deep blue-green, meeting a wide, golden-yellow sandy beach. A few small figures of people are visible on the beach. The overall mood is serene and beautiful.

VARKALA BEACH **BEST OF 100!**

Varkala Beach in Lonely Planet's List of 100 Best Beaches Worldwide

In a significant validation of Kerala's vibrant beach tourism scene, Papanasham Beach in Varkala, a breathtaking coastal retreat, has been recognised among the top 100 beaches in the world in the esteemed Lonely Planet guidebook titled 'Best Beaches: 100 of the World's Most Incredible Beaches'.

Situated in Thiruvananthapuram district, Papanasham Beach, commonly referred to as Varkala Beach, offers captivating views of the Arabian Sea. Its shimmering sands and tranquil atmosphere have established it as a beloved tourist spot. Lined with swaying coconut palms and blessed with endless azure waters, the beach is renowned as a haven for travellers seeking relaxation and rejuvenation. Spas nestled along the surrounding

laterite cliff offer therapeutic experiences, further enhancing its allure.

In addition to its popularity as a tourist destination, Papanasham Beach holds deep religious significance as a revered pilgrimage site. According to Hindu belief, immersing oneself in the waters here can absolve sins (papam), hence the name "Papanasham" for the beach. Furthermore, ashes from cremation grounds are ceremonially immersed in the sea, symbolizing the purification of the soul of the deceased and the attainment of moksha (eternal salvation).

Another peculiarity of the beach is that it is the only place in southern Kerala where cliffs are found adjacent to the Arabian Sea. This

has been recorded as a geological monument by the Geological Survey of India (GSI).

Expressing happiness at the development, Tourism Minister P. A. Mohamed Riyas said, "Featuring in the list of best beaches in the world is a remarkable recognition for Varkala Beach. Lonely Planet travel book has a global readership among travel enthusiasts, and the recognition accorded by it will further reinforce the reputation of the beach as an attractive destination."

Mr Riyas announced that the government is expediting the destination development project for Varkala, aimed at transforming

both the core site and its surrounding areas into a world-class tourism hub.

This comprehensive project encompasses various aspects, including the preservation of the iconic Varkala Cliff, the exploration of alternative transportation methods such as buggies and electric autos for cliff access, enhancement of infrastructure and safety measures, and a significant reduction in the usage of plastic and other pollutants.

The beach's tourism development and marketing strategy includes promoting adventure sports like parasailing, scuba diving and paragliding.

Kerala Tourism is set to host the International Surfing Festival in Varkala from March 29 to 31. Surfing athletes from both overseas and India's east and west coastal cities are expected to participate in various categories throughout the festival.

Mr Riyas said, "This event seeks to establish Kerala as the leading surfing destination in India and foster the growth of surfing as a nationwide sport." He added, "The festival also aims to elevate Varkala, Kerala's premier surfing spot, into a globally renowned surfing hotspot." ■



Higher taxes slowed down liquor consumption growth in 2023: Report



Liquor sales, considered to be a key revenue stream for State governments, suffered a hit during 2023 on account of higher taxes and fall in alcohol consumption in the country.

There was a 4 per cent slump overall in liquor sales during the year, but the situation was better than that in 2022 when liquor consumption fell sharply by 12 per cent, a common report appearing in *The Economic Times* and *Livemint* said.

One reason cited in both the reports for the lower demand for alcoholic spirits during the year is the high baseline effect which, in this case, refers to the sharper fall of 12 per cent seen in 2022.

The reports, citing industry executives, said that going by the latest excise department data, whiskey, constituting two-thirds of the segment, saw a growth of 5.3 percent in volume. Brandy and rum followed with 2.7 percent and 1.1 percent growth, respectively. This did not, probably, result in higher

net growth because the fall in demand was sharper during 2022.

Notably, vodka and gin experienced more robust growth at 18.8 percent and 15.3 percent, respectively, but that was on a lower base. The reports quoted Hina Nagarajan, Managing Director, United Spirits, as saying during an investor call that the demand environment remained subdued, with people still exploring different options in their alcohol choices.

She told *The Economic Times* that United Spirits anticipates this subdued environment to persist in the coming quarters. While the overall spirits market saw an increase in sales volume from 392 million cases in 2022, to 409 million cases in the January-December period of 2023, the industry has normalized after the 12-15 percent growth observed in the post-Covid years.

Experts told the paper that despite volume pressure, premiumization remains a driving force across categories. For example, scotch

sales surpassed 9 million cases annually and are expected to double in 2024 if the current trend continues.

The spirits segment's performance mirrored the overall consumer discretionary sector in India, where sales of products like apparel, footwear, and beauty slowed in 2023 after two years of pandemic-induced growth, as per the report. Record increases in raw material prices a year ago have softened, although grain prices have surged, impacting profit margins.

Karnataka, the largest consumer of spirits, implemented a 20 per cent increase in Additional Excise Duty (AED) on Indian-made liquor (IML) from August, affecting volumes. In States accounting for over 65 per cent of the market, government control over retail, wholesale, and pricing makes rapid price adjustments challenging.

With an estimated drinking population of 300 million in India, nearly half can only afford cheap unbranded liquor, as per the report. To capitalize on the growing middle-class segment, companies have launched products in the premium-and-above category. For instance, Allied Blenders and Tilaknagar Industries introduced premium products, aiming to target the expanding consumer base.

In December, Pernod Ricard, the maker of renowned brands such as Chivas Regal and Absolut, expressed optimism about India becoming its largest global market, outpacing the US.

While specific timelines were not provided, Pernod Ricard India's Managing Director, Jean Touboul, highlighted India's strong macroeconomics and rapid growth compared to other affiliates in the group, the newspaper reports said.

HRAWI urges Govt. to revisit GST for restaurants in hotels



Hoteliers from the Western region, associated with the Hotel and Restaurant Association (Western India) -- HRAWI -- have appealed to the Government for a revision in the GST structure for restaurants operating within hotels.

In a letter to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, HRAWI sought separation of GST rates on food and beverage services from the rates applicable to hotel room tariff

to align the former with the 5% GST rate applicable to standalone restaurants, as opposed to the current 18% GST levied when linked with hotel room rates above Rs.7500.

The association has pointed out that this linkage unfairly burdens restaurants in hotels, especially when compared to standalone establishments that offer similar quality dining experiences but are taxed less. A uniform GST rate for all restaurant services, regardless of their location within or outside hotels, would level the playing field, HRAWI has pointed out.

Highlighting the detrimental effect of the current GST structure, the HRAWI said it posed serious difficulties for larger hotel chains to attract walk-in diners and the

confusion when banquet services are offered. Sustainability of the hospitality sector can be ensured only through equitable competition and GST uniformity is essential to foster fair business practices across all food and beverage offerings.

Established 73 years ago, HRAWI is a prominent association representing the hospitality industry in Western India, comprising members ranging from eateries to 5-Star Deluxe hotels across Maharashtra, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Goa, and the Union Territories of Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu. It functions under the larger umbrella of the Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) based in New Delhi, serving as a significant voice for the region's hospitality industry.

Govt. of Goa, MakeMyTrip ink pact to promote State's cultural, culinary traditions



Government of Goa and Indian travel major MakeMyTrip (MMT) have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to lift Goa to the status of a year-round destination, moving beyond its iconic sun, sand, and beaches combination. The public-private

partnership aims to outline a series of innovative initiatives to showcase Goa's lesser-known inland treasures, its rich cultural tapestry and delectable culinary traditions.

As part of this pact, Make My Trip would broaden the reach and appeal of the coastal State by

bringing to the table its expertise in digital innovation and marketing.

Speaking at the MoU signing ceremony, Goa Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte said the State government is committed to transforming Goa, leveraging the State's spiritual tourism potential alongside other core strengths. One of the projects on anvil is the Ekadasha Teertha Campaign, where eleven places of worship would be linked together to form a travel circuit.

In the next 36 months the Tourism Department's goal is to promote environmental restoration, cultural preservation, and community empowerment by means of four paths -- spirituality, indigeneity, civilizational and cultural nationalism, and conscious tourism, as part of the Regenerative Tourism Initiative, he said.

Swachhata Green Leaf Rating to revolutionise tourism industry



In a major move to improve sanitation practices in India's tourism industry, the Ministry of Water Resources, in collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, has introduced the Swachhata Green Leaf Rating (SGLR) initiative.

This programme aims to provide world-class hygiene and sanitation facilities for tourists, marking a crucial step towards cleaner and sustainable tourism practices. Launching the programme, Union Minister for Water Resources Gajendra Singh Shekhawat

appealed to all tourist facilities to enhance aesthetic and sanitation levels at tourist destinations.

"As ambassadors of our country's hospitality and development, all our tourist facilities should actively involve themselves in enhancing the aesthetic and sanitation levels," he said.

Bison Resorts, Madhai, in the heart of Narmadapuram in Madhya Pradesh, has taken the lead by obtaining the first Five Swachhata Green Leaf Rating Certificate of Recognition.

PHDCCI's Film Tourism Conclave calls for policy reforms to boost the sector



PHDCCI held its 6th Global Film Tourism Conclave, held at the Novotel, Juhu, Mumbai, on March 1, has called for steps to leverage India's rich cinematic heritage to position itself as a leading film tourism destination.

The event was marked by the release of the PHDCCI-KPMG report titled 'Transforming Location into Vacation - A Report on Film Tourism' which pointed out that the global film tourism market is projected to grow at a CAGR of 7.2 per cent in the coming years.

India, one of the largest film producers in the world, rolls out more than 1,500 movies yearly. The Media and Entertainment industry in India is expected to reach INR 8 lakh crore by 2030. Last year, the Indian gross box office collection

(GBOC) exceeded INR12,000 crore.

The report said there must be policy reforms targeted at putting India's core competencies to use to attract tourists. There must be greater encouragement for filmmakers to come and make their films in India. States such as Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan have introduced policy reforms such as single window clearances and incentives for filmmakers. The Central Government should also evolve a national-level policy and guidelines for the film tourism sector.

The report listed several measures that could make India a major film tourism destination. These include steps to allocation of dedicated funds to support film tourism initiatives, establishment of a supervisory committee to ensure effective implementation of policies and dispute resolution and implementation of a clear process for registering agencies managing film festivals and tourism-related events.

The report also sought encouragement for public-private partnerships for infrastructure development in tier-2 and tier-3

cities, simplification of licensing requirements for production houses, streamlining clearance processes and promotion of investment in modern film technologies and virtual reality experiences.

on March 1, 2024. The event featured addresses by esteemed dignitaries including the Guest of Honour, Dr. Vinay Sahasrabudhe, President of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, Representatives of the Ministry of Tourism and Tourism Boards of various states.

Furthermore, the renowned filmmaker duo Abbas Mustan, famous scriptwriter and filmmaker Rumi Jafri, singer Hariharan, Actor Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Grammy winner Flutist Rakesh Chaurasiya were honoured for their significant contributions to the Indian film industry during the session. The event garnered attendance from members of the film fraternity, policymakers, film boards from various states, and delegates, contributing to its success.

Among several thought-provoking sessions with industry experts on measures required to elevate the Indian film tourism sector,

SATTE 2024 draws huge turnout of buyers and exhibitors



discussions on key topics such as Vision@2047, MICE tourism, tangible and intangible heritage, and strategies to boost inbound tourism in India.

Themed "Inclusive and Sustainable Tourism," SATTE 2024 underscored the industry's commitment to

responsible tourism practices and inclusive growth. As many as 1,500 exhibitors and more than 50,000 pre-registered trade attendees, including 1000 domestic and international buyers graced the event.

Notable participation from States such as Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, and the 8 North Eastern States added to the event's significance.

The 31st edition of SATTE 2024, held at the India Expo Mart in Greater Noida, witnessed an extraordinary turnout of buyers and exhibitors, solidifying its reputation as South Asia's leading travel show.

SATTE 2024 emerged as a pivotal platform for driving growth and sustainability in the sector with buyer-seller meets, destination presentations, and engaging panel discussions. The interactive sessions paved the way for strategic

SATTE Awards, an initiative to recognize excellence in the travel, tourism and hospitality sectors, were presented at the meet. Separate awards titled 'Shakti - Honouring Women Achievers' were also given away to women professionals in the field at the event.

Yogesh Mudras, Managing Director of Informa Markets - India, Alhasan Ali Aldabbagh, President (Asia Pacific), Saudi Tourism Authority, among others address the event.

Mr. Ali Aldabbagh commended SATTE 2024's role in strengthening ties with the Indian tourism market and said Saudi Arabia is committed to attracting Indian travellers to the Kingdom, aligning with its Vision 2030 and streamlining travel processes for a seamless experience.

Uzbekistan elevates tourism ties with India



Uzbekistan marked its significant presence at SATTE 2024, emphasising the strengthening tourism ties between it and India. The Silk Tourism Minister, Axhor Sarovar, expressed the commitment of Uzbekistan to enhance collaboration with the

Indian market, which has been identified as a top priority for the Central Asian nation.

Sarovar, while addressing the media at SATTE 2024, highlighted the remarkable growth in tourist arrivals from India over the past year. "The statistics speak for

themselves - we are delighted to announce that the number of Indian tourists visiting Uzbekistan tripled in 2023 compared to the previous year," he said.

Uzbekistan recorded 45,000 Indian visitor arrivals in 2023, registering a staggering 200 per cent growth over 15,000 arrivals recorded in 2022.

The Uzbek delegation also included Umarbek Esanmuradov, Axror Valijanov, Inomjon Madrimov, Nuriddin Hasanov, Ikboljon O. Soliev, H.E. Sardor Rustambayev, and Sadridin Suyarov.

Five notable Destination Management Companies (DMCs) from Uzbekistan actively participated in SATTE 2024. These DMCs were Blessed Travel, UZINTA (Uzbek-India Tourism Association), Enjoy Travel, TITF Team and Co, and Travel Together.

CIAL announces more services to London, Maldives, Agatti and Bangkok



The Cochin International Airport Ltd (CIAL) has announced its summer schedule, effective from March 31 to October 26, 2024, with more services to London, Maldives, Agatti and Bangkok. A total of 1,628 weekly operations against the 1,330 operations for the ongoing winter schedule is the highlight of the schedule. Additional domestic services to Hyderabad and Bengaluru have also been included in the summer schedule to meet the rising demand in these routes. As many as 29 airlines would operate international services

from the airport during summer. Indigo tops the list with 49 weekly departures to international destinations, while Air India Express will have 41 departures weekly. There will be 66 weekly departures to Abu Dhabi alone. Doha comes second with 46 operations and Dubai third with 45 departures. Air India, which now operates flights to London-Gatwick airport every Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday will expand its operations with an additional flight every week. CIAL's efforts to expand services on busy routes and introduce

regional routes have garnered positive feedback from travellers. Recent tourism development in Lakshadweep has also sparked increased interest. Currently, in the ongoing winter schedule, there are 10 weekly departure flights to Agatti, all operated by Alliance Air. The number of flights would go up to 16 as Indigo commences daily flights to Agatti. "The company is making vigorous efforts to adapt and innovate in response to the evolving landscape of the Indian aviation sector, as CIAL is the only airport in Kerala to handle 10 million passengers in a calendar year. Also, CIAL is the 4th largest airport in the country in terms of international traffic," said S. Suhas, Managing Director, CIAL. "CIAL is actively preparing and formulating strategies to accommodate this growth, devising new route maps for the future. As is evident, there is a definite increase in the number of domestic flight services, and additional services to many Gulf cities are firmly scheduled for commencement," said Mr. Suhas.

Bhuj earthquake museum transforms Gujarat's tourism scene



Bhuj, Gujarat's westernmost major town, stands as a landscape dominated by modest

structures. With rare exceptions, no buildings in Bhuj exceed two stories or 11 meters in height.

This architectural characteristic is a lasting consequence of the devastating 2001 Bhuj earthquake, which claimed nearly 13,000 lives and left a profound impact on the region.

A transformative addition to Bhuj's skyline, the Bhuj Earthquake Memorial, stands tall at 50 meters, symbolizing resilience and remembrance. Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Smritivan Earthquake Memorial and Museum on August 28, 2022. The memorial, situated atop Bhujiyo Dungar hill, not only pays homage to the lives lost but also serves as a cultural hub, potentially becoming the heart of the city.

CIAL in pact with BPCL to become world's first airport to establish green hydrogen plant



The Cochin International Airport Ltd (CIAL) has entered into a strategic agreement with BPCL to establish the world's first green hydrogen plant in an airport. Under the agreement, a green hydrogen plant would be set up in the premises of the airport.

The agreement for the green hydrogen plant was signed at a function held at Legislative Complex, Thiruvananthapuram in the presence of Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who is also the chairman, CIAL.

CIAL currently has a cumulative installed capacity of 50 MW producing 200,000 units of power

a day. Ever since the installation of its first plant with a capacity of 12 MW, it has been augmenting its capabilities. The present MoU with BPCL would lead to establishment of a 1000 KW pilot project. Under the agreement, BPCL will oversee the establishment of the integrated green hydrogen plant and fuelling station at Kochi Airport, providing technology and managing the operations. CIAL will contribute suitable land, water, and green energy resources. The initial output of the plant will be utilized for powering vehicles within the airport.

'As pioneers in sustainable

aviation, CIAL is happy to start a groundbreaking journey with BPCL towards establishing the country's first Green Hydrogen plant in an airport at CIAL", said CIAL managing director S Suhas. He also said that this strategic collaboration underscores CIAL's commitment to green energy and propels closer towards a zero-carbon future in the aviation landscape.

BPCL Chairman & Managing Director G. Krishnakumar said the collaboration marked a pivotal moment in the journey towards sustainable solutions. He underscored the significance of innovation and partnership in driving meaningful change, emphasizing BPCL's commitment to India's energy independence through initiatives like 'Atma Nirbhar Bharat' as evidenced by the indigenous electrolyser showcased at India Energy Week 2024 by BPCL. Minister for Industries P. Rajeeve, Chief Secretary Dr. V. Venu, Additional Chief Secretary (GAD) K.R. Jyothilal, Principal Secretary (Industries) Suman Billa and BPCL Director (Finance) V.R.K. Gupta, among others, were also present at the event.

MP Tourism's 7-Day All-Women Bikers Event A Big Draw



Madhya Pradesh, renowned for its captivating landscapes and ambiance, invited travelers to break free from conventional tourist destinations and embrace a truly unique experience. Madhya Pradesh Tourism proudly presented 'Queen On The Wheel,' a groundbreaking initiative aimed at empowering women and promoting adventure tourism in the enchanting surroundings of Madhya Pradesh.

Recently announced on social media, this initiative was meant to empower women through adventure tourism in the scenic beauty of Madhya Pradesh. 'Queen

On The Wheel' was a remarkable 7-day journey covering over 1,400 km, providing adventurous women with a distinctive opportunity to explore diverse destinations in the heart of India.

This extraordinary adventure from March 2nd to 8th offered women from across the nation the chance to participate in a week-long biking experience. The route gave an extravagant traveling experience on the road, allowing participants to witness the magnificent beauty and rich cultural heritage of the state, creating memories to last a lifetime.

Maldives-based Manta Air connects India to Dhaalu



Maldivian airline Manta Air has launched its commercial operations into India from March 1.

The airline took to international skies on the morning of February 16, for the first time since it commenced commercial operations in 2019, with a non-commercial flight from Bengaluru's Kempegowda International Airport to Dhaalu Airport in Maldives. The

flight was welcomed with the sound of BoduBeru, the heart of traditional Maldivian music.

This comes at a time when the Maldives is walking a diplomatic tightrope with India. However, according to Mohamed Khaleel, the chief executive officer of the airline and Dhaalu Airport, it was just a blip and there is no real effect on the arrival numbers.

Fly91 is a new player in the Indian skies



Indian skies will see a new airline soon as regional airline Fly91 has got approval from the government. DGCA has granted flying permit to the airline after examining documents and multiple test flights.

The airline is starting flights with two ATR-72 aircraft. It has won rights to operate flights from Sindhudurg, Jalgaon, Nanded and Agatti Lakshadweep to Bengaluru, Goa, Hyderabad and Pune under the government's regional connectivity scheme. The airline will have the new Goa airport built by GMR as its main base.

The airline is owned by Harsha Raghavan, former head, Fairfax India, businessman Chenna Reddy and Manoj Chacko, executive vice

president of WNS Global. Reddy and Chacko were earlier associated with Kingfisher Airlines.

Raghavan and Chacko's company Just Udo Aviation Private Limited is the parent company of the airline and has raised capital of Rs 200 crore. That is enough for a small airline which is looking at measured growth, the person quoted above said adding the airline's operation is being modelled on the lines of IndiGo or Air Arabia which have one of the lowest cost of operation.

The airline is planning to induct six aircraft in the first year to provide last mile connectivity and connecting remote locations which doesn't have infra for an Airbus A320 or Boeing 737 aircraft.

None of the earlier regional airlines could survive for long and have shut shop after a few years of sustaining losses. Some airlines like Truejet, Pegasus had to shut down despite well-funded promoters backing them. One reason for this is stated to be the failure of the regional airlines to scale up quickly to face competition from mainline airlines which have a bigger business and hence a lower unit cost.

Adequate capitalization with proven and qualified management has been lacking in regional airlines which hinders growth of regional carriers. Airlines run in losses during the first few years as there is a high cost of setting up operations which doesn't get covered rapidly

FHRAI signs MoU with Sustainable Hospitality Alliance



The Federation of Hotel & Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance to pilot and implement comprehensive solutions to meet

the hospitality industry's social and environmental sustainability challenges.

The MoU signed by Pradeep Shetty, President, FHRAI, and Glenn Mandziuk, CEO, Sustainable Hospitality Alliance, indicates

a shared dedication to explore collaborative opportunities and synergies between the associations to have a lasting positive impact on Planet Earth and global population.

This collaborative action aims to bring together hospitality companies and strategic partners to act collectively to find comprehensive solutions for the sustainability challenges. "I am excited to share a substantial advancement in our industry's sustainability commitment through our partnership with the Sustainable Hospitality Alliance," said Mr. Shetty.

The partnership would strive to integrate the Hospitality Employability Programme designed for marginalized groups into the curriculum of Indian Institute of Hotel Management (FHRAI IHM) programmes, he said.

Policies in the offing to make Kerala climate change resilient



The Kerala Climate Change Adaptation Mission (KCCAM), an entity formed by the state government to assess the impact of climate change and monitor mitigation activities, is gearing up to formulate policies and legal frameworks to make the state resilient to climate change. KCCAM aims to make Kerala net carbon-neutral by 2050. The proposed legislative framework and policies are likely to be applied across

different sectors such as agriculture, transportation, energy, waste, environment, industry, buildings and more.

The government constituted KCCAM last August with the vision to make Kerala carbon neutral, disaster resilient and a knowledge economy based on green jobs. A senior official of the environment and climate change department said the first-ever high-level meeting chaired by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, who is also the chairman of KCCAM, after its constitution will be held on Wednesday to discuss the way forward. "The primary focus of the legislation would be on adaptation and resilience. It's in the draft stages and will be finalised soon," the official added. Mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, promoting cleaner technologies,

carrying out developmental activities based on disaster vulnerability and ensuring funds for mitigation measures are some of the responsibilities of KCCAM.

The mission is expected to play a crucial role in the effort of the state government to transform Kerala into a 100% renewable energy-dependent state by 2050 and attain net carbon neutrality by 2050. The state cabinet has created nine posts including the chief resilient officer for the mission. The proposed legislation is expected to bring reformatory changes in the construction, transportation and energy sectors to make Kerala carbon neutral. The existing building rules do not prioritise making the buildings climate resilient. KCCAM is expected to introduce a lot of reforms in diverse areas to attain the target.



ITB Berlin AN EXCELLENT BUSINESS YEAR AHEAD!

Despite global crises, the industry displayed confidence at ITB Berlin 2024 that people's desire to travel is unabated. The most important topics discussed at the world's leading travel show were the growing importance of AI, shortage of skilled labour and climate justice, writes Harisankar

The odds are heavy: a world wracked by regional conflicts, persisting supply chain woes and the possibility of further disruptions as major democracies elect their new governments. But the travel industry the world over is confident that the people's desire for travel is stabilising in the green zone. And that was the message everybody carried home as this year's ITB Berlin, held from March 4 to 6, drew to a close after three days of successful deliberations.

Despite widespread strikes in European nations, this year's ITB Berlin recorded a slight increase in participation with nearly 100,000 attendees—a result that exceeded expectations. Diverse and globally represented, more than 5,500 exhibitors from 170 countries illuminated the three business days, occupying all 27 exhibition halls at the Berlin Exhibition Grounds.

Proof of the fact that the industry is a driving force for innovation was given by the ITB Berlin Convention, which took place parallel to the three-day show and featured high-profile attendees and a total of 400 leading international speakers at 200 sessions and 17 theme tracks discussing trends and innovations. All in all, around 24,000 attendees came to the panels, discussions, keynote speeches and lectures, again acknowledging the convention as the industry's leading international thinktank.

“

ITB Berlin once again mirrored industry developments. The mood among exhibitors, visitors and speakers was very positive throughout. They generally agreed that people's desire to travel is not just satisfying pent-up demand after the pandemic, but that it will remain basically stable. Neither inflation nor high energy prices appear to be curbing demand,”

Dr. Mario Tobias,
CEO of Messe Berlin.

On course for success

The ITB Buyers Circle with its 1,300 senior buyers served as an industry barometer and underlined the importance of the World's Leading Travel Trade Show as a leading business platform. Together with the management consultancy Dr. Fried & Partner, ITB Berlin compiled the new Global Travel Buyer Index.

The survey asked several hundred Buyers Circle members about the economic mood and their business goals. The findings reflected a positive mood throughout regarding the market situation and provided an optimistic outlook for business over the next six months.

Around 3,200 accredited journalists from 103 countries and over 300 bloggers reported on ITB Berlin. The world's leading tourism trade show was once again a meeting place for politicians and diplomats from all over the world. In addition to numerous delegations, almost 80 Ministers and State Secretaries as well as 72 Ambassadors visited this year's ITB Berlin.

A forward-looking thinktank

AI and its potential uses were a much-discussed topic. For the first time, the ITB Berlin Convention hosted a dedicated AI Track, which was very well received by the event's 24,000 attendees. It was generally agreed that no organisation or company could any longer ignore AI.

Glenn Fogel, CEO of Booking Holdings, was certain that "generative AI can be of more assistance than real humans when customers are making their travel plans." Charuta Fadnis, SVP, Phocuswright, also acknowledged the growing importance of AI and personalised travel apps.

Generative AI is already improving sales, while in Fadnis' view, using virtual agents and combining AI with blockchain technologies will be key to preventing misuse in the future. The convention participants





also agreed that it was impossible to ignore climate justice and the skills shortage, for which there were promising solutions however.

Jeremy Sampson, CEO, Travel Foundation, appealed to the tourism industry to aim for net zero by 2030. His study entitled 'Envisioning Tourism in 2030 and Beyond' outlines a dynamic path with a focus on regulating air travel and 40 measures in six categories for achieving sustainable tourism by 2050.

AI was also a big topic for the ITB Innovation Radar, which this year celebrated its second edition. The focus was on 16 forward-looking innovations presented by industry visionaries. They ranged from B2B services for the hospitality industry and travel industry professionals to sustainable concepts. The innovations offered a glimpse of future trends.

This year's host country Oman made a strong showing, doubling its display size in Hall 2.2 to more than 800 square metres. Around 3,000 guests witnessed a wide-ranging presentation of the country's natural attractions, culture and especially music.

Azzan bin Qassim al Busaidi, Under Secretary of Tourism of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism in Oman, highlighted the success of his country in building a tourism infrastructure and praised the cultural heritage and natural attractions of the Sultanate.

In 2023, Oman had registered four million visitors, a 22 per cent increase over 2022. Of them, 231,000 came from Germany, an increase of 182 per cent. Great care was being taken to take sustainability and diversity into account with the expansion of the tourism infrastructure, he said.

"Despite all the euphoria and the positive outlook, the participants were all aware of the huge challenges that the travel industry faces. The 'Together' in this year's slogan underlines the fact that only community action can master the travel industry's challenges," Dr. Tobias said.

In recent months, the invasion of Ukraine has been followed by another geo-political conflict in the Middle East, adding further uncertainty to the urgency of achieving sustainability. Ukraine, Israel and Palestine all exhibited at ITB Berlin. At Israel's press conference the tourism minister promoted travel to Israel and appealed for travel warnings to be dropped.

Following the pandemic and compared with 2023, this was the first time the industry registered a positive trend in the Asian-Pacific



region. One example was China, which celebrated its return as an exhibitor this year and now welcomes visitors from select countries by fast-tracking their visas.

All in all, the attendees at ITB Berlin were able to return home in positive expectation of this year's developments and can look ahead to excellent business and a large volume of early bookings, especially for summer 2024.

There was positive news at the show regarding hall occupancy. The re-opening of five refurbished halls permitted several changes, together with improvements in many areas. For the first time, the German-speaking countries were all under one roof and together occupied hub27.

China, Liechtenstein and the Emirates airline were welcomed back to the show, along with newcomers Dominica, the Cayman Islands and Disney Cruise Lines. The fact that many exhibitors had expanded

their displays was also positive. They included the popular holiday destinations Italy, Greece and Turkey as well as exhibitors from the Asian, Arab and African markets.

The Travel Tech segment also expanded again. This year the Mobility segment also reflected a growth market, and the Cruise segment again showed itself to be ever-popular.

Onward to Albania

Albania, an emerging destination with great potential, is the host country of ITB Berlin 2025. The management of Messe Berlin and representatives of Albania officially sealed their partnership with the signing of an agreement on day two of ITB Berlin, following the announcement of their collaboration a few months ago.

The next ITB Berlin will take place as a B2B event again from Tuesday to Thursday, 4 to 6 March 2025 on the Berlin Exhibition Grounds.

UN Tourism returns to ITB Berlin with new Logo



Under its new look and name, UN Tourism once again made ITB Berlin a top platform for high-level collaboration and for advancing several of its key priorities for the sector.

UN Tourism returned to ITB Berlin, bringing its new name and look to the leading travel trade fair and uniting the sector around its focus on sustainability, investments and collaboration.

Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili joined the Governing Mayor of Berlin, Kai Wenger, and other public and private sector leaders in officially opening the 2024 event. He said: "Tourism's return means so much to so many people. Tourism is a great uniting force. Together, we are growing new areas of our sector, to build greater resilience and spread the benefits of tourism even wider."

At the opening, the event's host, Messe Berlin was recognized for its 40 years as a UN Tourism Affiliate Member and for its key role in advancing international meetings and events tourism and fostering partnerships in the German capital. "Together, we are growing new areas of our sector, to build greater resilience and spread the benefits of tourism even wider," Pololikashvili said.

Better data for deeper transformation

UN Tourism and the World Tourism Cities Federation (WCTF) launched a joint report highlighting the need to measure the social and environmental impacts of tourism in urban destinations in a more effective and harmonized way. The report stresses the importance of embracing big data and other forms of technology and looks ahead to the creation of a first global urban tourism database.

The launch of the publication comes in the same week that all 193 UN members adopted the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST) (see separate story).

Accelerating Climate Action

Continuing its leading role in the One Planet Tourism Network and the Glasgow Declaration, UN Tourism launched Policy Guidance to Support Climate Action by National Tourism Administrations (NTAs). The guide will assist NTAs everywhere to develop policies and create initiatives designed to accelerate the shift towards a low-carbon sector.

The guide, which also contains examples of best practice, was developed after consultations with Ministries of Tourism of Member States. The guidance is complemented by a Glasgow Declaration Engagement Pack, with practical recommendations on how to get started on climate action in tourism. Also, at ITB Berlin, UN Tourism officials participated in a roundtable event on 'Reconciling Safety and Sustainability'.

Additionally, bringing together its focus on rural development, gender equality and sustainability, UN Tourism also participated in a special side event, 'Sustainable Rural Tourism: A Foundation for Biodiversity Preservation and Gender Equality - Potentials and Interactions', providing insights and best practice recommendations.

Within the framework of ITB 2024, UN Tourism Secretary-General Pololikashvili held a series of high-level bilateral meetings with Ministers of Tourism and other high-level representatives from Member States from across the world. The meetings served to advance plans for joint projects and for key upcoming UN tourism events. ■



New Global Standard for Sustainability of Tourism

Staff Writer

The UN has adopted a groundbreaking statistical framework, developed under the leadership of UN Tourism, for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism (MST).

The framework, approved by all 193 UN member-nations, thus becomes the internationally agreed reference framework for measuring the economic, social and environmental aspects of tourism.

The adoption of the statistical framework by the UN Statistical Commission at its 55th session (27 February – 1 March 2024) marks a historical milestone towards harnessing the full potential of the sector, providing a solution to the pressing need for a harmonized methodology to effectively assess the sustainability of tourism.

“Tourism is a powerful force for positive change when managed



responsibly and sustainably,” says Zurab Pololikashvili, UN Tourism Secretary General. “The adoption of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism marks a paradigm shift, going beyond GDP by enabling the measurement of what matters most to people and planet.”

Collaborative effort

This achievement is the fruit of a seven-year UN process led by Austria and Spain as co-chairs of the UN Tourism Committee on Statistics, with Saudi Arabia and Seychelles as co-vice chairs.

Under auspices of the Committee, the Framework was developed thanks to the extraordinary work of the multistakeholder Expert Group on Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism composed of 40+ countries and 30+ international and regional organizations including the UN Statistics Division, the International Labour Organization (ILO), subnational authorities and observatories, academia and others.

The work involved technical guidance from an

Editorial Board chaired first by the Philippines and then by Canada, as well as extensive engagement and consultation with input from numerous pilots in countries.

The Statistical Commission expressed an overwhelmingly enthusiastic support with 34 countries, 3 world regions and international organizations taking active part in the deliberations: Antigua and Barbuda, Austria, Benin on behalf of the African Group, Cabo Verde, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Croatia, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Finland on behalf of the European Statistical System, Greece, Jamaica, India, Indonesia, Kuwait, Malaysia, Malta, Mexico, Morocco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia on behalf of the Gulf Cooperation Council, Slovenia, Spain, Tajikistan, Tanzania, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, the Committee for the Coordination of Statistical Activities and ILO.

Looking ahead, the Commission also welcomed the future development of an implementation programme, including a compilation guide, and called on the international donor community to support the financing for measuring the sustainability of tourism.

Established in 1947, the UN Statistical Commission gathers Chief Statisticians from Member States and international organizations, and is the highest decision-making body for international statistical activities.

The last time the Commission adopted a statistical standard for tourism was in 2008, when the International Recommendations for Tourism Statistics and the Tourism Satellite Account framework were presented.

In the margins of the United Nations Statistical Commission, Austria, Spain and UN Tourism co-organized the high-level side event “Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism: Closing the gap between policy and statistics”, in collaboration with the UN Committee for Economic-Environmental Accounting.

Austria and Spain shared their vision on the importance of the Statistical Framework for Measuring the Sustainability of Tourism for evidence-based policy and decisions, while acknowledging its significance in upholding the relevance of statistical systems worldwide and the links to key topics like data governance and stewardship.

Mexico, the Philippines and Canada reflected on their pioneering experiences with implementing the framework, showcasing the power of integrating data from different domains and sources to distill more holistic and meaningful information on tourism.

The event raised awareness of the Statistical Framework for MST and functioned as an informative preamble to the UN Statistical Commission’s formal deliberations. ■

International tourism to reach pre-pandemic levels in 2024

Following a strong 2023, international tourism is well on track to return to pre-pandemic levels in 2024.

Staff Writer

International tourism is expected to fully recover to pre-pandemic levels in 2024, with initial estimates pointing to 2% growth above 2019 levels. This is, of course, subject to the pace of recovery in Asia and to the evolution of existing economic and geopolitical downside risks.

This positive outlook, expressed by UNWTO (now UN Tourism), is reflected in the latest UNWTO Tourism Confidence Index survey, with 67% of tourism professionals indicating better or much better prospects for 2024 as compared to 2023. Some 28% expect similar performance, while only 6% expect tourism performance in 2024 to be worse than last year.

There is still significant room for recovery across Asia. The reopening of several source markets and destinations will boost recovery in

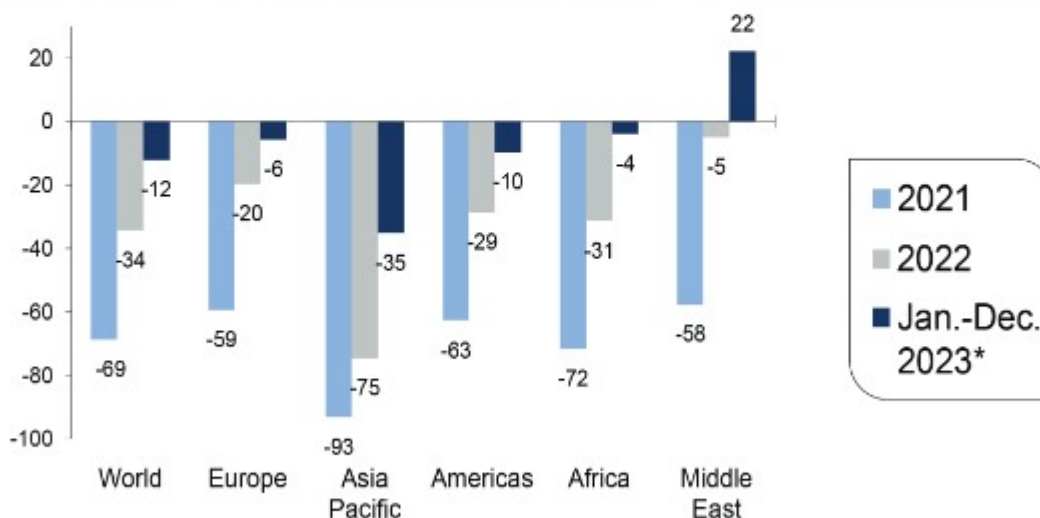
the region and globally. Chinese outbound and inbound tourism is expected to accelerate in 2024, due to visa facilitation and improved air capacity. China is granting visa-free travel for citizens of France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and Malaysia for a year up to 30 November 2024.

Visa and travel facilitation measures will promote travel to and around the Middle East and Africa with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries implementing a unified tourist visa, similar to the Schengen visa, and measures to facilitate intra-African travel in Kenya and Rwanda.

Europe is expected to drive results again in 2024. In March, Romania and Bulgaria will join the Schengen area of free movement, and Paris will host the Summer Olympics in July and August.

International Tourist Arrivals

(% change over 2019)



Strong travel from the United States, backed by a strong US dollar, will continue to benefit destinations in the Americas and beyond. As in 2023, robust source markets in Europe, the Americas and the Middle East, will continue to fuel tourism flows and spending around the world.

International tourism ended 2023 at 88% of pre-pandemic levels, with revenues in the region of US\$1.4 trillion on 1.3 billion international arrivals.

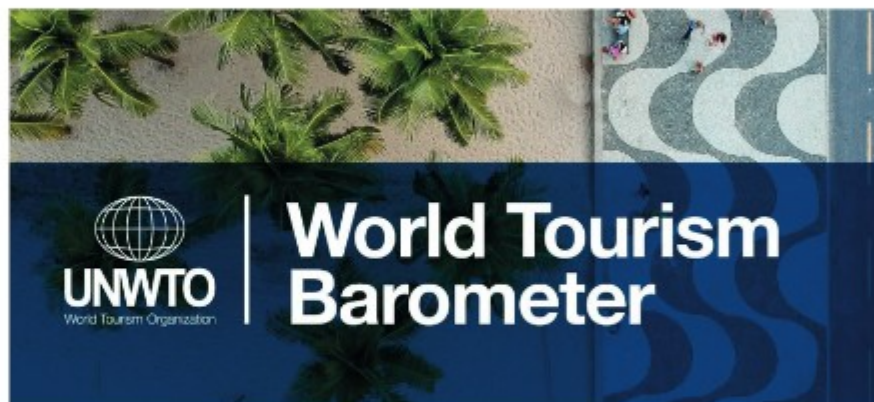
The unleashing of remaining pent-up demand, increased air connectivity and a stronger recovery of Asian markets and destinations, are expected to underpin a full recovery by the end of 2024, says the first UNWTO (now UN Tourism) World Tourism Barometer report.

The Middle East led the recovery in relative terms as the only region to overcome pre-pandemic levels with arrivals 22% above 2019. Europe, the world's most visited region, reached 94% of 2019 levels, supported by intra-regional demand and travel from the United States.

Africa recovered 96% of pre-pandemic visitors and Americas reached 90%. Asia and the Pacific reached 65% of pre-pandemic levels following the reopening of several markets and destinations. However, performance is mixed, with South Asia already recovering 87% of 2019 levels and North-East Asia around 55%.

Available data shows that several destinations, including both large, established destinations as well as small and emerging ones, reported double-digit growth in international arrivals in 2023 when compared to 2019. Four sub-regions exceeded their 2019 arrival levels: Southern Mediterranean Europe, Caribbean, Central America and North Africa.

UNWTO Secretary-General Zurab Pololikashvili says: "The latest



UNWTO data underscores tourism's resilience and rapid recovery, with pre-pandemic numbers expected by the end of 2024. The rebound is already having a significant impact on economies, jobs, growth and opportunities for communities everywhere. These numbers also recall the critical task of progressing sustainability and inclusion in tourism development."

At USD 1.4 trillion, international tourism receipts reached about 93% of the USD 1.5 trillion earned by destinations in 2019. Total export revenues from tourism (including passenger transport) are estimated at USD 1.6 trillion in 2023, almost 95% of the USD 1.7 trillion recorded in 2019.

Preliminary estimates on 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. This indicates a recovery of pre-pandemic TDGDP driven by strong domestic and international tourism.

Several destinations reported strong growth in international tourism receipts during the first 10 to 12 months of 2023, exceeding in some cases growth in arrivals. Strong demand for outbound travel was also reported by several large source markets during this period, with many exceeding 2019 levels.

The sustained recovery is also reflected in the performance of industry indicators. According to

the UNWTO Tourism Recovery Tracker, both international air capacity and passenger demand recovered about 90% of pre-pandemic levels through October 2023 (IATA). Global occupancy rates in accommodation establishments reached 65% in November, slightly above 62% in November 2022 (based on STR data).

Economic and geopolitical headwinds continue to pose significant challenges to the sustained recovery of international tourism and confidence levels. Persisting inflation, high interest rates, volatile oil prices and disruptions to trade can continue to impact transport and accommodations costs in 2024.

Against this backdrop, tourists are expected to increasingly seek value for money and travel closer to home. Sustainable practices and adaptability will also play an increasing role in consumer choice.

Staff shortages remain a critical issue, as tourism businesses face a shortfall in labor to cope with high demand.

The evolution of the Hamas-Israel conflict may disrupt travel in the Middle East and impact traveller confidence. Uncertainty derived from the Russian aggression against Ukraine as well as other mounting geopolitical tensions, continue to weigh on confidence, says the UNWTO Tourism Barometer report. ■

Swadesh Darshan 2.0 launched at Kumarakom



The tourism potential of Kumarakom, a popular tourist destination on the banks of the Vembanad Lake in Kottayam, has received a big boost with its inclusion in the Swadesh Darshan 2.0 of the Union Ministry of Tourism.

The Swadesh Darshan Programme 1.0 and 2.0, covering 53 projects worth ₹ 6,400 crore with focus on development of tourist destinations in a sustainable and responsible manner, was unveiled nationally by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on March 7. State Tourism Minister P.A. Mohamed Riyas presided over the function held at KTDC Waterscapes at Kumarakom.

Kumarakom and Beypore in Kozhikode are the two destinations in Kerala that have been included in the list of 36 tourist destinations in 19 States in Swadesh Darshan 2.0. A sum of Rs. 70 crore would be spent for Kumarakom's infrastructure development in four phases under the scheme.

The initial phase would focus on transforming the Kumarakom bird sanctuary into an ecotourism hub, at an investment of Rs. 13.53 crore. The development includes kiosks, canal revitalisation, landscaping, construction of footpaths that are friendly to differently abled individuals and reconstruction of pedestrian bridges and a boat jetty-deck. Additionally, a 400-metre-

long boardwalk, a watchtower, an interactive zone, and a digital terminal deck with bird information are part of the comprehensive plan.

Addressing the function, the Tourism Minister highlighted the ongoing efforts to elevate Kerala as a premium tourist destination and hoped that the Swadesh Darshan Scheme would play a pivotal role in further enhancing the State's tourism sector.

Cooperation and Ports Minister V.N. Vasavan was the Chief Guest. District Collector V. Vigneswari, who chairs the Destination Management Committee (DMC) at Kumarakom, briefed the meeting about the detailed strategic plan for the scheme's implementation.



Kochi Water Metro to float tenders for 15 more ferries

Kochi Water Metro Limited (KWML) is awaiting German lending agency KfW's approval to float tenders for 15 of the 30 electric hybrid ferries that it plans to launch in Phase Two of the Water Metro Project.

The Water Metro ferries offer excellent comfort and safety to tourists at rock bottom rates. The visual treat they offer to the visitor to Kochi backwaters is far beyond the expenses involved. With the extension of the Water Metro network touch 38 terminals spread over the mainland and 10 islands that are in different stages of construction.

Cochin Shipyard Limited had handed over 13 of the 23 passenger ferries that KWML had placed orders for, and the rest are expected to be delivered by June. The ferries that have already been deployed for service are being operated in the High Court-Vypeen, High Court-Bolghatty and Vyttila-Kakkanad corridors.

The average patronage per day in these routes is 5,500. Terminals that have been readied at South Chittoor, Eloor, Cheranalloor and North Mulavukad would soon play hosts to ferries from the High Court terminal. Terminals are also getting

ready on Willingdon Island and Kumbalam.

Pontoons have been installed at Fort Kochi that passengers can enter and alight from the ferries safely regardless of the tidal level. The Water Metro authorities have constructed the terminal here taking into account the concerns expressed by heritage enthusiasts. The ferry terminal at adjacent Mattancherry is expected to be ready by September, before the onset of the annual tourist season in October.

UK authorities seek Kerala techies' participation in London Tech Week-2024



British High Commission representatives visited Technopark in Thiruvananthapuram in early March seeking cooperation with IT companies in Kerala and to explore new business opportunities.

Impressed with the State's IT ecosystem, Geetha Krishnankutty, Head, Investment (South India), Business and Trade Department, British Deputy High Commission, Bengaluru, invited Technopark companies to the London Tech Week-2024. This proposal was made at a meeting with Technopark CEO Col. Sanjeev Nair (Retd.) in the Kerala capital. GTech CEO Vishnu Nair, GTech Secretary and Tata Elxsi Centre Head Sreekumar V and other officials of GTech attended the meeting.

London Tech Week-2024 will be held from June 10 to 14 this year at Olympia, a famous exhibition venue in Kensington, England. It would feature visionaries, entrepreneurs, investors and leading technology firms who would share ideas on the changes happening in the technology sector.

The programme will provide an opportunity for the participants to gain new insights, discover new opportunities and establish business contacts related to the sector. More than 1,000 investors will participate in Tech Week, where more than five thousand startups will showcase their products and services. Around 45,000 delegates are expected to visit the Tech Week.

Geetha Krishnankutty pointed out that India's technical skills are developing at a very fast pace and hoped that health tech companies at Technopark and companies leveraging emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI) would take advantage of the Tech Week.

England is eyeing next-generation professionals from bioengineering and semiconductors fields in India. England has a good standard of living and amenities, business environment and a favorable economic and tax regime. The government is also ready to support companies investing in England, she said, and added

that companies participating in London Tech Week will be given the opportunity to visit leading technology and knowledge institutions in England.

Technopark CEO Colonel Sanjeev Nair (Retd) said England can effectively leverage the excellent technology ecosystem and workforce of the Kerala IT sector. He also pointed out that MedTech, AVGC, Space Tech and FinTech companies from the State are attracting attention as part of important projects and investments worldwide.

The meeting discussed possibilities for the London Tech Week offering platform companies from Kerala to explore opportunities on the global stage. The meeting also discussed the potential of GCC countries to establish IT-technology facilities in Thiruvananthapuram and Kochi, which are emerging technology hubs with excellent infrastructure, eco-social standards, skill capacity and strong startup ecosystem.

Tourism registers robust growth in Kerala in 2023



There were challenges aplenty, but Kerala proved its resilience and huge potential for tourism growth attracting 2.18 crore domestic tourists during 2023, official estimates show.

The year witnessed a 15.92 per cent

surge in domestic tourist arrivals as compared to 2022. Ernakulam district emerged the top performer welcoming 44,87,930 domestic visitors, followed by Idukki (36,33,584), Thiruvananthapuram (35,89,932), Thrissur (24,78,573), and Wayanad (17,50,267).

International tourist arrivals also showed substantial growth during the year, reaching 6,49,057 visitors in 2023 as compared to 3,45,549 in 2022, marking an impressive 87.83 per cent increase. Here too, Ernakulam district led the way, hosting 2,79,904 international tourists, followed by Thiruvananthapuram (1,48,462), Idukki (1,03,644), Alappuzha (31,403), and Kottayam (28,458).

Disclosing the figures at a news conference, Kerala Tourism and Public Works Minister P.A.

Mohammed Riyas attributed the State's success in attracting a higher number of domestic and international tourists to the State's shores to the robust efforts of Kerala Tourism, driven by well-crafted policy initiatives and effective promotional strategies adopted both domestically and internationally.

While acknowledging the positive trend in foreign tourist footfalls, Mr. Riyas said that despite a significant uptick, the numbers remained 45.45 per cent lower than pre-COVID-19 levels. This could be on account of regional conflicts. The State is doing its best to offer a versatile range of tourism products, including high profile events such as in the area of adventure tourism, to attract a greater number of international tourists, he said.

Munnar Panchayat installs double-chamber plastic baling machine



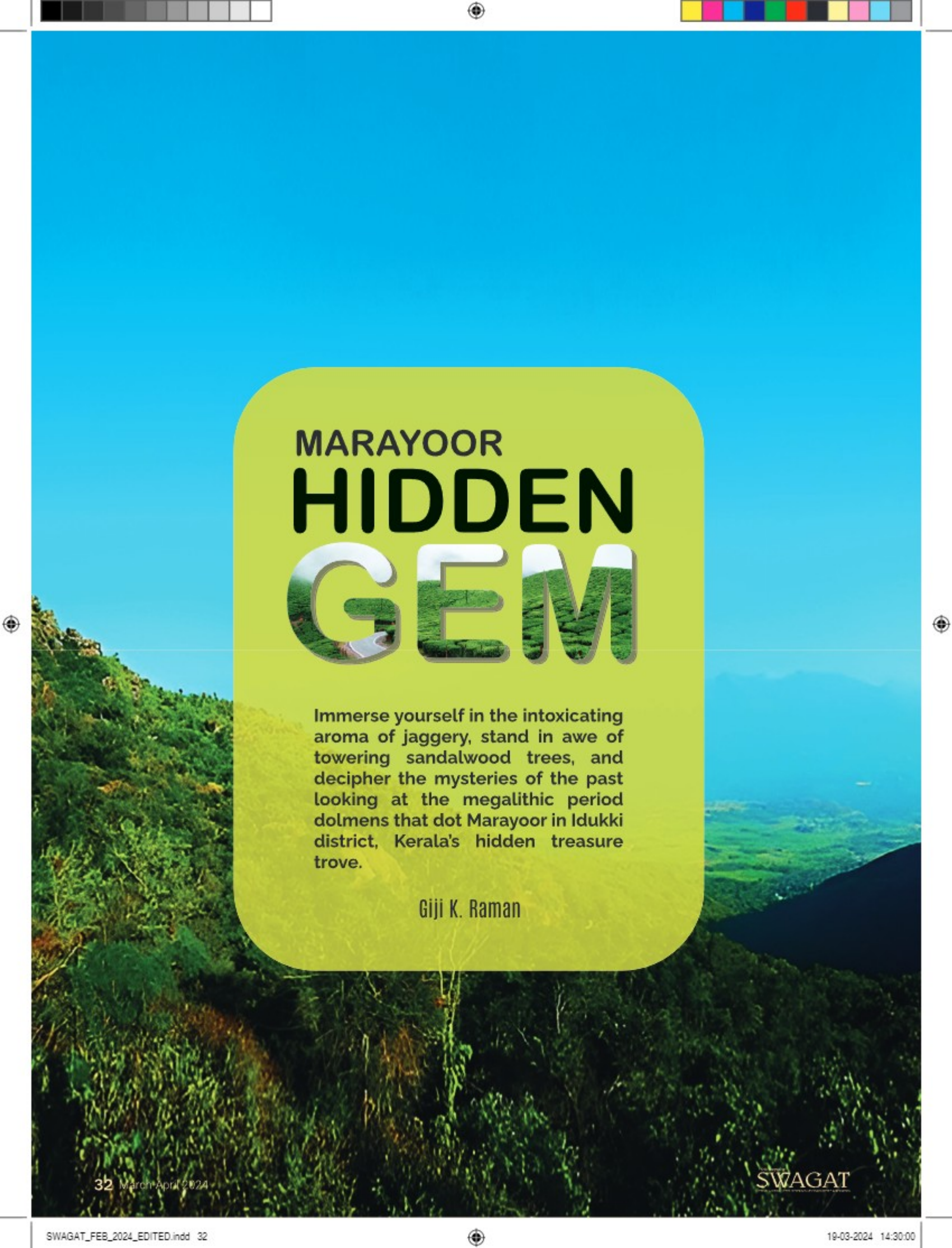
In what is stated to be a first in the State, the Munnar Panchayat has installed a double-chamber plastic baling machine to address the plastic waste management issues at the Munnar hill station.

Munnar Panchayat, a major tourist destination, generates around 8 tonnes of waste every day. Out of this, over 2 tonnes are plastic waste. The panchayat's single-chamber baling machine could not handle so much plastic waste.

The double-chamber baling machine has been set up by Floret Technologies, a start-up registered under Kerala Startup Mission. The company developed the machine specially for Munnar Panchayat.

With the installation of the machine, plastic waste generated on a given day is disposed of the same day. This has helped the panchayat avoid the chance of wild animals consuming plastic waste. The baled plastics can be easily sold to plastic companies and cement factories.

The plastic waste management challenge in Munnar came to light when wild elephants were seen eating plastic waste from a dumping yard at Kallar, near Nallathanni, in January. The Kerala High Court intervened and asked the State government to see to it that the plastic waste generated in Munnar Panchayat is disposed of instantaneously.



MARAYOOR HIDDEN GEM

Immerse yourself in the intoxicating aroma of jaggery, stand in awe of towering sandalwood trees, and decipher the mysteries of the past looking at the megalithic period dolmens that dot Marayoor in Idukki district, Kerala's hidden treasure trove.

Giji K. Raman

Many destinations explode onto the travel scene, splashed across glossy magazines and dazzling websites. Yet, some hidden gems remain coy, offering only tantalizing glimpses of their treasures. Marayoor, located 42 kilometres north of Munnar in Kerala's Idukki district, exemplifies this intriguing duality.

Significant road improvements over the past two decades have made Munnar effortlessly accessible, making the journey to this British-era hill station an unforgettable experience. Rolling hills carpeted in meticulously maintained tea plantations unfurl beneath a veil of low-hanging clouds, while a refreshing mountain breeze caresses your face.

The distant peaks, painted in shades of pale blue, complete the breathtaking symphony of greens and blues. Unsurprisingly, Munnar has become a must-visit destination in Kerala, particularly bustling during the rare bloom of the Neelakurinji (*Strobilanthes kunthiana*).

Munnar is known for its stunning scenery, pleasant weather, and diverse activities. The period from October to February is considered

the peak season in Munnar, with temperatures ranging from 10°C to 28°C. The weather is perfect for enjoying outdoor activities like trekking, rock climbing, and exploring the natural beauty of the region. This is the best time for outdoor activities in Munnar.

From March to June, Munnar has comfortable temperatures, with highs ranging from 15°C to 25°C. You'll enjoy pleasant evenings and the chance to witness the charming sight of blooming flowers across the landscape. At night, you might even be lucky enough to see a mesmerizing display of fireflies.

If you are on the lookout for lush greenery and a quieter experience, reach Munnar between September and March, which is considered the shoulder season in Munnar, with slightly pleasant weather. Temperatures at this time of the year range from 20°C to 35°C.

Although it's the peak tourist season, you can expect slightly fewer crowds compared to the winter months. The monsoon rains also bring a touch of magic to Munnar, transforming the landscape into a vibrant tapestry of lush green foliage.

Unlike Munnar, Marayoor retains an air of mystique -- as its Malayalam name suggests, its wealth and ancient secrets refuse easy access.



Unlike Munnar, Marayoor retains an air of mystique -- as its Malayalam name might suggest, its wealth and ancient secrets refuse easy access. Yet, the adventurous drive from Munnar holds its own rewards. The freshly paved road, though narrow at times, winds through captivating landscapes dotted with charming farm scenes, cascading waterfalls, and playful rivulets. As the day unfolds, a gentle warmth fills the wind, offering a stark contrast to the cool evening breeze that descends with the setting sun.

A Hidden Gem

It's a well-known pastime of the itinerant traveller and the history enthusiast to trace the etymology of place names. Marayoor too has been subjected to close etymological analysis to unravel its meaning, resulting in two interpretations; both, surprisingly,

suggesting an element of elusiveness.

Thus, Marayoor could either be the homeland of Maravar, the warrior tribe, mostly expert bowmen, who inhabited the area during the turn of Christian Era, or a land that remained hidden from the outside world—Mara (Hidden) + Oor (Land).

Marayoor is a valley surrounded on its different sides by the Kanthalloor hills, the Anamudi ranges and the hills forming part of the Eravikulam National Park and the Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary, hiding it from the outside world. This land is known locally as Anchunadu, a one-time federation of five villages, namely Marayoor, Karayoor, Keezhanthoor, Kanthalloor and Kottakkudi. Only the first four villages are now part of Kerala.

Barely a few decades ago, villages of Marayoor, Kanthalloor and

Vattavada were known only for vegetable cultivation. Tourists seldom ventured into these villages for two reasons: one, it did not fit the bill of a tourist destination; and two, it hardly had the basic facilities for anyone to stay overnight and enjoy the riches of the land. But, with changing times, a journey beyond Munnar into Marayoor has become the new normal.

The farmers of Anchunadu are said to have a much deeper connect with the land than the later migrants. It is believed that ancestors of the present generation in the five villages had migrated to this part of Kerala during the times of the Chera, Chola and Pandya dynasties, living all their life here with little contact with the outside world.

For the record, settlers from the plains of Kerala began arriving here only during the first half of the last century. Despite the arrival of the new generation of settlers, the original population of Anchunadu Valley have been following their own social practices for centuries, the vestiges of which are still evident in some aspects of their social life.

For long, the population here consisted mainly of Malapulayar and Muthuva communities, who worshipped their own deities Thanyasi Appan and Eruma Nachiyappan. The latter-day settlers have now replaced these deities with Thenkashinathan (Lord Siva) and Arunakshiyamma (Goddess Durga).

Still, the non-Malayali lineage of the population is evident from the Tamil accent of the people and their style of living. Even today, farmers of Anchunadu move around barefoot in keeping with the traditional belief that using footwear while working in the farm would hurt Mother Earth.

The cave paintings, dolmens and the 'Hero Stones' scattered all over Marayoor perhaps suggest that the ancestors of the present-day Anchunadu farmers were a warrior community who also excelled in cultivation practices.



But, for all the rustic characteristics of the people who live here, there are evidences galore pointing to an evolved culture that dates back to pre-historic times. The cave paintings, dolmens and the 'Hero Stones' scattered all over the place perhaps suggest that the ancestors of the present-day Anchunadu farmers were a warrior community who also excelled in cultivation practices.

Marayoor enjoys a unique climate due to its position as a rain shadow region. Here, the weather bears a closer resemblance to neighbouring Tamil Nadu. Therefore, the weather here can be a little traveller-unfriendly during the summer months. Farmers here rely heavily on the annual northeast monsoon, arriving between October and December.

During this period, the cascading rivulets from the surrounding hills transform into a captivating spectacle for visitors, and farm ponds reach capacity. Since the monsoon's bounty isn't sufficient to sustain year-round cultivation, farmers are careful to conserve

every drop of rain that skies bless them with.

Kanthalloor, aptly nicknamed the "fruit bowl of Kerala", is easily the best place to be during any time of the year. Unlike the lush greenery typical of Kerala, this valley's unique rain shadow climate allows a wider variety of fruits to flourish here. From apples and apricots to plums, oranges, pomegranates, guava, gooseberries, peaches and passion fruit, Kanthalloor boasts a remarkable abundance.

These aren't just any fruits, though. Farmers here embrace sustainable practices, cultivating their land with care and respect for the environment. The result? Fresh, wholesome produce bursting with flavour, available throughout the year. So, no matter when you visit Marayoor farms, you're sure to find a delightful and delicious fruit to savour.

This also presents an ideal opportunity to connect with the local people. Explore their farms, engage in conversation, and learn about their time-honoured cultivation practices. Savour the



fruits of their labour, both literally and figuratively, as you immerse yourself in the essence of village life. Today, these welcoming farmers are happy to open their arms and homesteads to curious visitors.

Even better, you can directly support the farmers by picking your own fruits! This ensures they receive a fair price for their produce, bypassing middlemen who often eat into their profits. As Valiyaveetil Chandran, a local fruit farmer, explains, it's not just about acquiring organic fruits, but also experiencing a unique facet of rural culture.

Foreign tourists are particularly drawn to observing and learning about these indigenous farming practices. Domestic tourists, often traveling in groups, appreciate the opportunity to purchase large quantities of fresh fruits and vegetables directly from the source.

This experiential dimension of farming in the Marayoor valley has led to the rise of several homestays in the Anchunadu villages. Marayoor is thus transforming into a captivating hub of village tourism, offering visitors a chance to not only savour the bounty of the land but also immerse themselves in the heart of Kerala's rural life.

Marayoor's magic seizes you even before you arrive. As you wind your way through the scenic hills, the aroma of simmering jaggery fills the air, a sweet and enticing introduction to this unique destination.



Liquid Gold

Marayoor's magic seizes you even before you arrive. As you wind your way through the scenic hills, the aroma of simmering jaggery fills the air, a sweet and enticing introduction to this unique destination. Marayoor has become synonymous with its "liquid gold" - the GI-tagged Marayoor Jaggery, a testament to the region's rich agricultural heritage.

This intoxicating fragrance intensifies as you navigate Marayoor's narrow roads. Whether venturing towards a farm or scaling a hill to encounter a dolmen standing in silent contemplation, the air is alive with the sweet symphony of tradition and taste emanating from thatched sheds scattered across the landscape. It's a truly captivating sensory experience.

This sweet treasure, coveted long before tourists ever graced the valley, has captivated not only taste buds but also the silver screen, its beauty immortalized in countless films portraying the essence of rural life. But, unlike the fleeting beauty of a movie scene, the production of jaggery is a year-round dance with nature. As one field is harvested, its neighbour ripens, ensuring a continuous flow of this golden nectar.

Unlike mass-produced alternatives, here, time and tradition are the key ingredients. The unique weather patterns and fertile soil of Anchunadu, according to local researcher C.K. Preman, work their magic,

imbuing the jaggery with an unmatched flavour and a wealth of minerals.

Imagine the difference between a store-bought jackfruit and one plucked fresh from the fertile soil of Marayoor. That's the experience awaiting visitors who succumb to the charm of Marayoor's jaggery. Its distinct sweetness, devoid of any salty aftertaste, speaks volumes of the meticulous hand-crafted process, free from chemicals and preservatives. No wonder it has won the Geographical Indication (GI) tag.

"Sugarcane juice would turn brown or blackish if kept in the open. If there is no oxidation, it would be yellow in colour. My attempt has been to keep it free from oxidation without adding any chemical preservatives so that it retains its original colour and taste and becomes more popular with the people," Preman says.

For Preman, it's not just a product, but a passion. He champions the cause of sugarcane juice, educating visitors about its medicinal properties and relentlessly seeking ways to extend its shelf life, all while preserving its original golden hue and taste. His efforts have borne fruit (quite literally!), with Marayoor's packaged sugarcane juice now available to a wider audience.

So, when exploring Marayoor, don't just be a spectator. Immerse yourself in the sweet symphony

of tradition and taste. Witness the age-old process, savour the unique flavour of Marayoor jaggery, and allow its sweetness to linger long after you leave this captivating valley.

Silent Sentinels

Scattered across its rolling hills like silent sentinels stand hundreds of dolmens—enigmatic megalithic structures that serve as windows to a bygone era. These mysterious rudimentary structures, harking back to both the Stone and Iron Ages, are crafted with four upright stones, capped with a fifth.

Referred variously in Malayalam as Pazhuthara and Muniyara and in Tamil as Pandyan Peru, these captivating remnants of human history dot the landscape around the Pambar River, their weathered forms evoking a sense of awe and wonder.

These names could mean different things: Pazhuthara could be a blend of the words Pazhuth (Hole) + Ara (Room), perhaps indicating the hole dug into the rocky hill or referring to holes that are said to be drilled into one of the four supporting granite slabs through which souls of the departed are said to communicate with the world.

Muniyara could be a possible reference to the belief that these were places where religious mendicants observed penance. But the State Department of Archaeology would tell you that these are the secondary burial sites of tribal chieftains and other important people who lived in this area. Some would rather go by the Tamil title Pandian Peru, which probably means a place that was assigned to an important personage for his afterlife.

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The Anchunadu Valley hosts the largest number of dolmens in the State and they are spread over a wide area on the banks of the Pambar and in the forest. The main areas of large-scale concentration of dolmen are Murugan Hills and Pius Nagar in the Kovilkadavu Village. The Department of Archaeology had at one point of time counted over 1350 dolmens in the area, but only around 600 remain now.

Adding to the mystique of Marayoor are the prehistoric dolmens - massive stone structures believed to be secondary burial chambers. These enigmatic monuments, estimated to be over 5,000 years old, bear an uncanny resemblance to megalithic structures found across the globe, from Stonehenge in England to Gobekli Tepe in Turkey, Atlit Yam in Israel, Carnac Stones in France, and even the Pyramids of Egypt.

Standing amidst these ancient dolmens, caressed by the gentle breeze, one can't help but ponder the ingenuity of these bygone people. How did these isolated communities develop megalithic construction techniques seemingly mirroring practices employed by civilizations thousands of miles away? The answer remains an intriguing puzzle, adding another layer of wonder to the captivating landscape of Marayoor.

Marayoor's dolmens come in various forms. Some have multiple burial chambers, while others feature a rectangular pit carved into the laterite (a reddish-brown rock) and lined with granite slabs



for support. All are capped with massive stones, creating a sense of permanence and mystery.

Dozens of these fascinating structures can be found near the historic Siva temple (Thenkasinathan Temple) at Kovilkadavu, lining the banks of the Pambar River, and dotting the landscape around Pius Nagar.

Marayoor's dolmens aren't limited to just the Stone Age. Evidence suggests settlements thrived here well into the Iron Age, reflected in the presence of several Iron Age dolmens, particularly on the left bank of the Pambar River.

These Iron Age dolmens showcase a more refined construction technique, utilizing neatly cut granite slabs. One such dolmen holds a captivating mystery - a perfectly circular hole measuring 28 centimetres in diameter within its underground chamber. The purpose of this hole remains a subject of debate, with some suggesting that it might have been meticulously crafted to ensure a

perfect fit for the burial urns.

Exploring these dolmens, spanning different eras, offers a fascinating glimpse into the evolution of burial practices and the enduring ingenuity of Marayoor's inhabitants throughout history.

The significance of Marayoor's dolmens is undeniable. However, ensuring their preservation for future generations remains an ongoing effort. The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has taken commendable steps by installing signage to raise awareness about the historical importance of these sites. However, vandals and irresponsible tourists have done much to cause serious damage to several of the dolmens.

As a visitor, you can play a crucial role in protecting these irreplaceable treasures. Respect the dolmens, avoid climbing on them, and report any suspicious activity to the authorities. Together, we can ensure these silent sentinels of the past continue to captivate visitors for years to come.

The recent discovery of cave paintings at Manala in Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary, near the Alampetty tribal settlement, underscores the potential for unearthing further treasures in the region.



However, a note of caution is necessary. These remarkable artworks, much like the dolmens, face the threat of damage due to a lack of comprehensive scientific protection measures. Increased awareness and ongoing efforts are crucial to safeguard this legacy for future generations.

Explore Responsibly

As a visitor to Marayoor, you can be part of the solution. By following designated trails, respecting the natural environment, and advocating for the protection of these cultural treasures, you can help ensure that Marayoor's magic continues to captivate visitors for years to come.

Marayoor's wonders extend far beyond its historical sites. Situated within the verdant folds of the Anchunadu Valley lies the world's only natural sandalwood reserve. The sandalwood trees have value way beyond their humble appearance. The annual

sandalwood auction, a major source of revenue for the state, is a testament to the economic significance of this precious resource.

As you explore the Marayoor Sandalwood Division, don't miss the awe-inspiring banyan tree standing tall in the compound of the Forest Division Office. Its sprawling canopy can offer refuge to hundreds of people seeking shade from the warm Kerala sun.

Nature enthusiasts will also delight in the Forest Department's outlet, showcasing a bounty of local produce. Here, you can find honey, fragrant sandalwood oil, and lemongrass oil, all extracted using traditional methods. The outlet also features handcrafted items made by the Muthuvan tribe, the indigenous inhabitants of the forest. Witnessing the traditional processing of lemongrass oil adds another layer of cultural immersion to your Marayoor experience.

Marayoor's rich heritage is safeguarded by dedicated individuals like K. Dhanushkodi and Benny Kurien. Their tireless efforts, including the documentation of dolmens and cave paintings, have been instrumental in drawing attention to the vast historical significance of this region.



Marayoor's rich heritage is safeguarded by dedicated individuals like K. Dhanushkodi and Benny Kurien. Their tireless efforts, including the documentation of dolmens and cave paintings, have been instrumental in drawing attention to the vast historical significance of this region. In 2011, their work led to the discovery of new cave paintings in the forest areas of Anchunadu Valley. Thanks to the dedication of such passionate advocates, Marayoor's past continues to be unearthed and preserved for all to appreciate.

K. Dhanushkodi, who has meticulously explored every inch of the Anchunadu Valley, believes the mysteries surrounding its history are far from fully unravelled. He posits that more dolmens and cave paintings might still lie hidden, waiting to be unearthed on the eastern slopes of the Western Ghats. Marayoor, therefore, beckons not just as a destination steeped in the past, but also as a place where the thrill of discovery awaits future explorers.

Windows to the Past

Adding another layer to Marayoor's allure are its ancient cave paintings, scattered like precious keepsakes across the Anchunadu Valley. These captivating artworks can be found in several locations, including Attala, Ezhuthupara, Kovilkadavu, and Manala.

The caves at Attala are particularly impressive, boasting over 90 painted motifs adorning the walls of a colossal east-facing rock shelter. While most of the Attala

paintings feature abstract designs, some depict recognizable figures of humans and animals, offering a glimpse into the lives of the valley's inhabitants centuries ago.

Located a short distance away are the Ezhuthupara rock paintings, within the Koodakavu area of the Marayoor Sandalwood Division at an elevation of 1,000 meters above sea level. Here, on a massive rock face, one encounters a particularly captivating scene - a depiction of a man and a deer. This artwork is considered one of the most beautiful cave paintings in India, attracting art enthusiasts from across the country.

These ancient treasures require a bit of planning to access. As the Ezhuthala cave paintings are located within a protected forest area, visitors must obtain permission from the Forest Department before embarking on their exploration. This measured approach helps ensure the preservation of these irreplaceable pieces of human heritage for generations to come.

The recent discovery of cave paintings at Manala in Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary, near the Alampetty tribal settlement, underscores the ongoing potential for unearthing further treasures in the region. Ten painted motifs adorn the southwestern slope of the plateau, overlooking the Pambar River.





For a truly unique experience, be sure to visit the 'Chilla', a market held every week on the premises of the Forest Department. This vibrant market is more than just a place to shop – it's a celebration of community and women's empowerment.

For a truly unique experience, be sure to visit the 'Chilla', a market held every week on the premises of the Forest Department. This vibrant market is more than just a place to shop – it's a celebration of community and women's empowerment. Here, women from the 12 surrounding tribal colonies come together to sell their handcrafted goods and forest produce collected sustainably.

This innovative initiative by the Forest Department isn't just a hit not just with local visitors; it's attracting national attention. Researchers, planners, and administrators from across India are taking note of Chilla's success as a model for empowering tribal women and fostering sustainable economic development within tribal communities.

There is no exact count of tourists who visit Marayoor, or Munnar for that matter, but one striking aspect of tourist arrivals is that those who come to Munnar also make it a point to visit the farms and hills of Marayoor, where heritage and experiential tourism potential abound. For, this is one of those



quaint places in Kerala where the visitor can drink in the aroma of jaggery boiling in hundreds of massive urulis, stand in awe of the giant sandalwood trees, try to piece together the puzzle of the past standing before the dolmens, or simply stand witness to sustainable farming practices in the Marayoor villages.

Whether you're a domestic traveller seeking an authentic experience or a foreign visitor longing for an escape from the ordinary, Marayoor beckons you with open arms. Its charm extends beyond the bustling tourist hubs, offering a glimpse into the heart of a community

deeply connected to its land and traditions.

So, come and explore the hidden treasures of Marayoor, let nature's symphony enthrall your senses, and discover a place where time seems to slow down, allowing you to reconnect with the past even as you enjoy the simple joys of life. ■

Giji K. Raman is former Correspondent, The Hindu, Idukki

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EMPOWERING ENCOUNTERS

MARAYOOR'S TRANSFORMATIVE 'CHILLA' INITIATIVE

Harisankar

A visit to Marayoor is no longer just about historical exploration; it's an experiential journey that allows visitors to witness first-hand the power of collaboration and community upliftment.



The loveliest discoveries often lie beyond the confines of the itinerary, waiting to be unearthed by those who seek them. These discoveries, like brushstrokes on a canvas, enrich the travel experience, adding vibrant layers of memory. They may come in the form of natural wonders, cultural encounters, or even inspiring stories of human resilience.

Imagine spotting a sturdy wild plant that has emerged from within a hard rock, almost ready to break its host into two. Or picture the majesty of a cloud formation, its cotton-like form suddenly appearing on the horizon as you gaze out at the dawn's first light. These fleeting encounters, captured not by a camera but by the mind's eye, become treasured souvenirs of your travels.

These unplanned moments remind us of the inherent beauty and wonder that exists in the world, waiting to be stumbled upon by the curious traveller. Take, for instance, the 'Chilla' movement currently underway at the Marayoor Forest Division Office premises in Idukki, a development initiative that has brought about great changes in the lives of tribal women, mainly belonging to the Mutbuvan community.

To the casual visitor, Chilla is just a weekly market where a variety of forest produce are auctioned in bulk and where one can pick up quite a few organic products that have been cultivated or collected by men and women living in the 12 tribal colonies under the Marayoor Forest Division. But for the tribal women and their families, it has proved to be a life-changing experiment.

Prior to 'Chilla,' many of these women remained within their homes. When it was launched about a decade ago by the then Idukki DFO Sabi Varghese and Range Officer M.G. Vinod Kumar, only 20 of the women in Marayoor tribal colonies had bank accounts. The initiative empowered the tribal women to step outside their comfort zones and become income earners.

This newfound economic independence is reflected in the rise of bank accounts held by these women. Now there are around 300 bank account holders and about 200 women from various tribal colonies actively participate in 'Chilla,' taking charge of selling the forest produce they collect themselves.

To the casual visitor, Chilla is just a weekly market where a variety of forest produce are auctioned in bulk or sold to the visiting tourists, but for the tribal women and their families, it has proved to be a life-changing experiment.

The financial security it provides has allowed these women to invest in their families' futures and transformed decision-making within the families. Previously, when money was solely controlled by men, a significant portion often went towards alcohol and intoxicants, creating financial insecurity. Now, women participating in 'Chilla' have a say in how their earnings are spent.

Today, with the money they earn, they educate their children, build houses to replace their old huts, and improve their quality of life and fostered a stronger sense of community. This newfound agency has also led to a shift in their outlook on life. They are no longer confined by tradition; they are empowered to dream bigger and build a brighter future for themselves and their families.

On the ground, 'Chilla' has revitalized the agricultural sector within the tribal communities. Discouraged by unfair prices for their produce, many had abandoned farming altogether. However, 'Chilla's' fair auction system has incentivized a return to agriculture.

With the assurance of fair compensation, tribal families have resumed cultivating crops and expanding their agricultural lands. This resurgence in agricultural activity has resulted in a staggering increase of cultivated land – from a mere 17.5 hectares across 12 tribal colonies at the start of 'Chilla' to a remarkable 87.5 hectares today.

Perhaps the most significant impact of 'Chilla' lies in its contribution to forest conservation.



Perhaps the most significant impact of 'Chilla' lies in its contribution to forest conservation. Prior to 'Chilla,' some members of the community, faced with limited livelihood options, used to work for sandalwood poachers. However, 'Chilla's' economic empowerment has provided them with a sustainable alternative income source. Today, these same tribal groups stand shoulder-to-shoulder with forest guards, actively protecting the sandalwood trees – a testament to the transformative power of 'Chilla.'

The success of 'Chilla' has not gone unnoticed. In recent years, representatives of NGOs, Panchayats, Banks, Agricultural Co-operative Societies, Forest Development Agencies (FDA) etc., have been making a beeline for Marayoor to study the model developed by the Marayoor Forest

Division. The Vegetable and Fruit Promotion Council under the Department of Agriculture has also joined hands with 'Chilla,' helping expand market access for the tribal produce.

'Chilla's' journey itself is an inspiring story. It began modestly, in the courtyard of the Marayoor Division Office. However, the dedication of its founders and the positive impact it has had on the community have led to a dedicated building being constructed to house the market. In 2015, the hard work of these tribal women received due recognition when the Forest Development Agency honoured 'Chilla' with an award for the best marketing model.

'Chilla' has even sprouted its own 'leaf,' a stationery store named 'Ila' that opened in May 2022. This initiative, housed in the same building as 'Chilla,' is another

testament to the project's lasting impact. 'Ila' serves as a grocery store specifically designed to support the tribal community by providing a platform to sell their everyday necessities. The Forest Development Agency recognized the importance of this venture and provided a grant of Rs 10 lakh to get it off the ground.

The success of 'Chilla' cannot be viewed in isolation. It likely owes much to the broader movement of Participatory Forest Management (PFM) that began in Kerala in 1998. PFM initiatives aim to involve local communities in forest conservation efforts. The presence of Forest Protection Committees (FPCs) and Eco Development Committees (EDCs) in Kerala suggests a collaborative framework that has fostered trust and cooperation between the Forest Department and local communities.



With a clear set of objectives in mind, 'Chilla' has transformed the lives of the tribal communities in the region. These objectives included:

Ensuring fair prices for tribal products: Prior to 'Chilla,' tribal communities often received unfair prices for their produce from middlemen. 'Chilla's' transparent auction system ensures that they receive a fair return for their hard work.

Preventing exploitation by middlemen: By eliminating middlemen from the equation, 'Chilla' empowers tribal communities to directly connect with buyers and retain a greater share of the profits.

Making price determination transparent: The auction system provides complete transparency in price determination, allowing tribal participants to understand the market value of their products.

Promoting food farming: 'Chilla' incentivizes the cultivation of food crops by offering a reliable market for agricultural produce. This initiative aims to not only improve the economic well-being of the community but also enhance its food security.

Teaching money exchange through banks: 'Chilla' plays a vital role in financial literacy by



'Chilla' and 'Ila' stand as testaments to the power of community-driven initiatives.

encouraging participants to use banks for transactions. The rise in bank accounts held by tribal women is a testament to this initiative's success in promoting financial inclusion.

Empowering tribal women: 'Chilla' has transformed the lives of tribal women by providing them with a platform to participate in the market, manage their earnings, and gain greater economic independence.

Increasing tribal income: Through fair prices and a transparent market system, 'Chilla' has significantly increased the income of tribal families, uplifting their overall standard of living.

Reducing deforestation: By providing a sustainable source of income, 'Chilla' has disincentivized

practices like illegal logging. With economic empowerment, tribal communities are becoming active partners in forest conservation efforts.

'Chilla' and 'Ila' stand as testaments to the power of community-driven initiatives. A visit to Marayoor is no longer just about historical exploration; it's an experiential journey that allows visitors to witness first-hand the power of collaboration and community upliftment.

New Paradigm: 'Chilla' and 'Ila' serve as inspiring models for sustainable development, showcasing how economic progress and environmental conservation can go hand-in-hand. On your next trip to Marayoor, be sure to factor in a visit to 'Chilla' and 'Ila' – you might just discover a new paradigm for responsible travel, one that leaves a lasting positive impact. ■



പഠനം, പരിശീലനം, തൊഴിൽ പുതിയ തലമുറ ആത്മവിശ്വാസത്തോടെ സ്റ്റാർ ഹോട്ടലുകളിലേക്ക്

സ്പോൺസർ ചെയ്ത കെ.ബി. പത്മദാസ് (റിട്ട.)

ജനറൽ സെക്രട്ടറി, ഫെഡറേഷൻ ഓഫ് കേരള ഹോട്ടൽസ് അസോസിയേഷൻ



എഫ്കെഎച്ച്എ-ഐഎച്ച്എം 2023 ബാച്ച് കോൺവൊക്കേഷൻ ടുറിസം-പൊതുമരാമത്ത് മന്ത്രി പി.എ. മുഹമ്മദ് റിയാസ് നിലവിലുള്ള കൊളുത്തി ഉദ്ഘാടനം ചെയ്യുന്നു. എഫ്കെഎച്ച്എ പ്രസിഡന്റ് വി. സുനിൽ കുമാർ, ജനറൽ സെക്രട്ടറി കെ.ബി. പത്മദാസ്, ട്രിവാൻഡ്രം ചോബർ ഓഫ് കോമേഴ്സ് പ്രസിഡന്റ് എസ്.എൻ. രാജചന്ദ്രൻ നായർ മറ്റ് അസോസിയേഷൻ ഭാരവാഹികൾ എന്നിവർ സമീപം.



ടൂറിസം മേഖലയിൽ സ്വകാര്യ നിക്ഷേപം പ്രോത്സാഹിപ്പിക്കാൻ ഏറെ നടപടികൾ : ടൂറിസം മന്ത്രി മുഹമ്മദ് റിയാസ്



ടൂറിസം മേഖലയിൽ സ്വകാര്യ നിക്ഷേപം പ്രോത്സാഹിപ്പിക്കുമെന്ന് ടൂറിസം മന്ത്രി മുഹമ്മദ് റിയാസ് പറഞ്ഞു. ഇതിനായി സംഘടിപ്പിച്ച ടൂറിസം ഇൻവെസ്റ്റ്മെന്റ് മീറ്റ് വലിയ വിജയമായിരുന്നു എന്നും അദ്ദേഹം പറഞ്ഞു. ഫെഡറേഷൻ ഓഫ് കേരള ഹോട്ടൽസ് അസോസിയേഷന്റെ ഇൻസ്റ്റിറ്റ്യൂട്ട് ഓഫ് ഹോട്ടൽ മാനേജ്മെന്റിൽ നിന്നും പഠനം പൂർത്തിയാക്കി ഡിപ്ലോമ നേടിയ വരുടെ കോൺവക്കേഷൻ ചടങ്ങ് ഉദ്ഘാടനം ചെയ്തു സംസാരിക്കുകയായിരുന്നു മന്ത്രി.

“സ്വകാര്യ നിക്ഷേപം ആകർഷിക്കുകയും, പ്രോത്സാഹിപ്പിക്കുകയും മാത്രമല്ല നിക്ഷേപം നടത്തുന്നവരുടെ ആത്മവിശ്വാസം വർദ്ധിപ്പിക്കുക എന്നത് കൂടിയായിരുന്നു ടൂറിസം ഇൻവെസ്റ്റ്മെന്റ് മീറ്റിന്റെ മുഖ്യ ലക്ഷ്യം. വലിയ നിക്ഷേപമോ, ഓഫറോ വരുമെന്ന പ്രതീക്ഷയോടെയല്ല മീറ്റ് സംഘടിപ്പിച്ചത്. ടൂറിസം മേഖലയിൽ

നിക്ഷേപത്തിന് തയ്യാറാകുന്നവരുടെ ആത്മവിശ്വാസം വർദ്ധിപ്പിക്കുന്നതിന് സർക്കാരിന് എന്തെല്ലാം ചെയ്യാനാകാമെന്നും കഴിയും, ഒരു ഫെസിലിറ്റേറ്റർ എന്ന നിലയിൽ സർക്കാരിന് എങ്ങനെ ഇടപെടാൻ പറ്റും എന്നിവ ചർച്ച ചെയ്യുകയായിരുന്നു മീറ്റ് കൊണ്ട് ഉദ്ദേശിച്ചത്. എന്നാൽ ഞങ്ങളെ അത്ഭുതപ്പെടുത്തി കൊണ്ട് പതിനയ്യായിരം കോടിയിലധികം രൂപയുടെ നിക്ഷേപ ഓഫറാണ് ലഭിച്ചത്. ഈ ഓഫറുകളെ മുന്നോട്ടുകൊണ്ടു പോകുന്നതിന് ഒരു ഫെസിലിറ്റേഷൻ സെന്റർ ഉടനെ പ്രവർത്തനമാരംഭിക്കും. ഇവിടെ ലഭിച്ച ഓഫറുകൾ നമ്മുടെ ടൂറിസം മേഖലയെ കൂടുതൽ ശക്തിപ്പെടുത്താൻ സഹായിക്കും. ഹോസ്പിറ്റാലിറ്റി മേഖലയിലെ എല്ലാ സ്വകാര്യ സംരംഭകരെയും സർക്കാർ പ്രോത്സാഹിപ്പിക്കും. രാജ്യത്തെ പ്രധാന ടൂറിസ്റ്റ് സ്റ്റേറ്റായി കേരളത്തെ ശക്തിപ്പെടുത്തി മുന്നോട്ടു പോകാനുള്ള തീരുമാനങ്ങൾ സർക്കാർ കൈക്കൊണ്ടിട്ടുണ്ട്” മന്ത്രി പറഞ്ഞു.

കോവിഡിനെ തുടർന്ന് ടൂറിസം മേഖല വെന്റിലേറ്റിലായിരുന്ന ഘട്ടത്തിലാണ് ഈ സർക്കാർ അധികാരത്തിൽ വന്നത്. പ്രതിസന്ധി എന്ന് പറഞ്ഞ് ഞങ്ങൾ നിലവിളിച്ച് കരയുകയായിരുന്നില്ല. കോവിഡിന്റെ രൂക്ഷത കുറയുന്ന സമയത്ത് എന്ത് ചെയ്യണമെന്ന് നേരത്തെ തന്നെ ആലോചിച്ച് പദ്ധതികൾ ആവിഷ്കരിച്ചു. ലോകത്തെ പൊതു ട്രെൻഡുകൾ മനസ്സിലാക്കി ഈ രംഗത്ത് ഇടപെടാനുള്ള വലിയ ശ്രമമാണ് നടത്തിയത്. എല്ലാ

പുതിയ ട്രെൻഡുകളും സംസ്ഥാനത്ത് നടപ്പാക്കാനുള്ള ശ്രമം വിജയകരമായി മുന്നോട്ട് പോവുകയാണ്. അതിന്റെ ഏറ്റവും അവസാനത്തെ ശ്രമമായിരുന്നു ടൂറിസ്റ്റ് ഇൻവെസ്റ്റ്മെന്റ് മീറ്റ്. ടൂറിസത്തിന്റെ സമഗ്ര വികസനത്തിന് എല്ലാ മേഖലകളെയും കുട്ടിച്ചേർത്തുള്ള ഇടപെടലിനാണ് ശ്രമിച്ചത്.

ബീച്ച് ടൂറിസത്തിന്റെ സാധ്യത, മലയോര ടൂറിസത്തിന്റെ സാധ്യത, കേരളത്തെ ആകെ ഒരു ടൂറിസ്റ്റ് സ്റ്റേറ്റാക്കി മാറ്റാനുള്ള ഇടപെടൽ, ടൂറിസത്തെ കൂടുതൽ ജനകീയമാക്കി മാറ്റാനുള്ള ശ്രമം, ടൂറിസം ജനങ്ങൾക്കും ജനങ്ങൾ ടൂറിസത്തിനും വേണ്ടി ഇടപെടുക തുടങ്ങി വ്യത്യസ്തമായ നിലപാടുകൾ സ്വീകരിച്ചുകൊണ്ടാണ് സർക്കാർ മുന്നോട്ടു പോയത്. ലോകപ്രശസ്തമായ ന്യൂയോർക്ക് ടൈംസ് കോവിഡാനന്തര കാലം സർക്കാരുകളുടെ ഇടപെടലിന്റെ ഭാഗമായി ലോകത്ത് കണ്ടിരിക്കേണ്ട 52 ടൂറിസ്റ്റ് കേന്ദ്രങ്ങളെ മാസങ്ങളോളം പഠനം നടത്തി തെരഞ്ഞെടുത്തതിൽ ഇന്ത്യയിൽ നിന്നും ഒരു സ്ഥലം മാത്രമേ ഇടംപിടിച്ചുള്ളൂ, അത് നമ്മുടെ കേരളമാണ്.

ടൂറിസം രംഗത്തെ ഈ മാറ്റത്തിനു പിന്നിൽ എല്ലാവരുടെയും കൂട്ടായ ശ്രമമുണ്ട്. നമ്മുടെ രാജ്യത്തേക്ക് വരുന്നവരെ സ്വാഗതം ചെയ്യുന്നതിൽ ആതിഥ്യമധ്യായുടെ പര്യായമായി സംസ്ഥാനം മാറിയതും ഇത്തരം ഇടപെടലിലൂടെയെന്നും ടൂറിസം മന്ത്രി പറഞ്ഞു. ■

ടൂറിസം രംഗത്ത് ശ്രദ്ധേയമായ പുരോഗതി: ദക്ഷിണമന്ത്രി ജി.ആർ. അനിൽ



കോവിഡിന് ശേഷം ടൂറിസം രംഗത്ത് ശ്രദ്ധേയമായ പുരോഗതി കൈവരിക്കാൻ നമ്മുടെ സംസ്ഥാനത്തിന് കഴിഞ്ഞതായി ചടങ്ങിൽ ഡിപ്ലോമ വിതരണം ഉദ്ഘാടനം ചെയ്ത മന്ത്രി ജി.ആർ അനിൽ പറഞ്ഞു. ആഭ്യന്തര ടൂറിസ്റ്റുകളുടെ കണക്കെടുത്താലും, വിദേശ ടൂറിസ്റ്റുകളുടെ കണക്കെടുത്താലും കേരളം വളരെ മെച്ചപ്പെട്ട നിലയിലേക്ക് മാറിക്കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുകയാണ്. ടൂറിസ്റ്റുകളുടെ വരവിന് അനുകൂലമായ അന്തരീക്ഷം സംസ്ഥാന സർക്കാർ ഒരുക്കുന്നുണ്ട്. ഭാവി കേരളത്തിന്റെ വികസന സപ്തങ്ങളിൽ ഏറ്റവും ശ്രദ്ധേയമാകുന്നത് ടൂറിസം രംഗത്തെ വികസനമാണ്. അതിനു വേണ്ടിയുള്ള അടിസ്ഥാന സൗകര്യങ്ങൾ ഒരുക്കുന്നതിൽ സംസ്ഥാന സർക്കാർ ഏറ്റവും നല്ല ഇടപെടലുകളാണ് നടത്തുന്നത്. പൊതുമരാമത്ത് റോഡുകളുടെ മെയിന്റനൻസിന്റെ കാര്യത്തിലായാലും

പുതിയ റോഡുകളുടെയും ദേശീയപാതയുടെയും നിർമ്മാണത്തിലായാലും വലിയ പുരോഗതി കൈവരിക്കാൻ സംസ്ഥാനത്തിന് കഴിഞ്ഞിട്ടുണ്ട്. അടിസ്ഥാന സൗകര്യ വികസനത്തിലെ ഈ ഊന്നൽ ടൂറിസത്തിന്റെ പുരോഗതിക്ക് സഹായകരമാകും.

ഓരോ പഞ്ചായത്തിലും ടൂറിസ്റ്റ് സെന്ററുകൾ രൂപം കൊള്ളുകയാണ്. അതിലൂടെ ടൂറിസം മേഖല വികസിക്കുമ്പോൾ ഹോട്ടൽ വ്യവസായത്തിൽ മുതൽമുടക്കി യവർക്കും മെച്ചപ്പെട്ട നിലയിലേക്ക് മാറാനുള്ള അവസരമുണ്ട്. അതോടൊപ്പം പുതിയ തലമുറയ്ക്ക് കൂടുതൽ തൊഴിൽ സാധ്യതകളും വരികയാണ്. കൂടുതൽ പേർക്ക് തൊഴിൽ നൽകാൻ കഴിയുന്ന ഒരു മേഖലയായി ടൂറിസം മേഖല ഭാവിയിൽ മാറുമെന്നാണ് പ്രതീക്ഷിക്കുന്നതെന്നും മന്ത്രി പറഞ്ഞു. ■

ഫെഡറേഷൻ ഓഫ് കേരള ഹോട്ടൽസ് അസോസിയേഷന്റെ പ്രവർത്തനത്തിന് വ്യാപക പ്രശംസ

റിപ്പോർട്ട് : അശോകൻ പള്ളിക്കൽ

സാമൂഹിക രംഗത്തും, നൈപുണ്യ പരിശീലന രംഗത്തും സാമൂഹിക പ്രതിബദ്ധതയോടെ പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്ന ഫെഡറേഷൻ ഓഫ് കേരള ഹോട്ടൽസ് അസോസിയേഷൻ സംസ്ഥാന മന്ത്രിമാരുടെയും, ടൂറിസം സെക്രട്ടറിയുടെയും അഭിനന്ദനം. ടൂറിസം മന്ത്രി പി.എ. മുഹമ്മദ് റിയാസും, ഭക്ഷ്യ-സിവിൽ സപ്ലൈ മന്ത്രി, ജി.ആർ അനീലും, ടൂറിസം സെക്രട്ടറി കെ.ബിജു ഐ.എ.എസും അസോസിയേഷന്റെ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളെ മാതൃകാ പരമെന്ന് വീശേഷിപ്പിച്ചു. അസോസിയേഷന്റെ ആഭിമുഖ്യത്തിലുള്ള ഇൻസ്റ്റിറ്റ്യൂട്ട് ഓഫ് ഹോട്ടൽ മാനേജ്മെന്റിൽ നിന്നും 2023 ൽ പഠനം പൂർത്തിയാക്കി ഡിപ്ലോമ നേടിയവരുടെ കോൺവക്കേഷൻ ചടങ്ങിൽ സംസാരിക്കുകയായിരുന്നു മന്ത്രിമാരും, ടൂറിസം സെക്രട്ടറിയും.

കേരളത്തിന്റെ സമ്പദ്ഘടനയിൽ ഒഴിച്ചുകൂടാനാവാത്ത ടൂറിസം മേഖലയോട് ചേർന്നു നിൽക്കുന്ന സുപ്രധാന വ്യവസായമാണ് ഹോട്ടൽ വ്യവസായം. ഈ വ്യവസായത്തിന്റെ പുരോഗതിക്കും, നിലനിൽപ്പിനുമായി സാമൂഹിക പ്രതിബദ്ധതയോടെ പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്ന ഈ സംഘടനയ്ക്ക് നേതൃത്വം നൽകുന്നവരെ പ്രത്യേകം അഭിനന്ദിക്കുന്നതായി മന്ത്രി മുഹമ്മദ് റിയാസ് പറഞ്ഞു. മൂന്ന് പതിറ്റാണ്ടായി കേരളത്തിൽ പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്ന ഈ

സംഘടന, ഹോട്ടൽ വ്യവസായത്തിൽ തൊഴിൽ അന്വേഷകരായി കടന്നു വരാൻ ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്ന പുതിയ തലമുറയെ കൈ പിടിച്ചുയർത്തുവാനും, പ്രൊഫഷണലുകളായി വാർത്തെടുക്കാനും നടത്തുന്ന പ്രവർത്തനം ശ്രദ്ധേയമാണ്. സംഘടനയുടെ ആഭിമുഖ്യത്തിലുള്ള ഇൻസ്റ്റിറ്റ്യൂട്ട് ഓഫ് ഹോട്ടൽ മാനേജ്മെന്റ് നടത്തുന്ന ഡിപ്ലോമ ഇൻ ഹോട്ടൽ മാനേജ്മെന്റ് കോഴ്സും, ഹോട്ടലുകളിൽ ജോലി ചെയ്തുകൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്നവരുടെ നൈപുണ്യ ശാക്തീകരണത്തിന് ഊന്നൽ നൽകുന്ന സ്റ്റാഫ് എംപവർമെന്റ് കോഴ്സും മാതൃകാപരമാണെന്നും അദ്ദേഹം പറഞ്ഞു.

തൊഴിൽ ഇടങ്ങളിൽ പ്രൊഫഷണലിസം ഉറപ്പു വരുത്തുക എന്നത് സമൂഹം പൊതുവെ ആഗ്രഹിക്കുന്നതാണ് പ്രത്യേകിച്ചും ടൂറിസം മേഖലയിൽ. രാജ്യത്തിന് അകത്തു നിന്നും, പുറത്തു നിന്നും എത്തുന്നവരെ ആതിഥ്യ മര്യാദയോടെ സ്വീകരിക്കാനും അവരവരുടെ നാടുകളിൽ പോയി കേരളത്തിന്റെ ടൂറിസം അംബാസിഡർമാരായി അവർ മാറാനും, ഹോസ്‌പിറ്റാലിറ്റി രംഗത്തും, ഹോട്ടൽ മേഖലയിലും പ്രൊഫഷണൽ പരിശീലനം നേടിയവരുടെ സേവനം അനിവാര്യമാണ്. ഹോട്ടൽ വ്യവസായത്തിലെ തൊഴിലാളികൾക്കും, ജീവനക്കാർക്കും കാലാനുസൃതമായ മാറ്റം ഉൾക്കൊള്ളാനും, ഈ മേഖലയിൽ കഴിവ് തെളിയിക്കാനും അസോസിയേഷൻ നടത്തുന്ന

നൈപുണ്യ പരിശീലന കോഴ്സിലൂടെ സാധിക്കുമെന്ന് വിചാരിക്കുന്നു. സ്വന്തം ജീവനക്കാരുടെയും, തൊഴിലാളികളുടെയും നൈപുണ്യ വികസനത്തിന് സംഘടന കൂടുതൽ പ്രാധാന്യം നൽകുന്നു എന്നത് അഭിനന്ദനാർഹമായ കാര്യമാണ്. ഹോട്ടൽ മാനേജ്മെന്റ് കോഴ്സിന് പ്രത്യേക പുസ്തകം തയ്യാറാക്കി നൽകുന്നതും, ടൂറിസം, ആർട്ട്, കൾച്ചർ എന്നവയുടെ പ്രചാരണത്തിനായി സ്വാഗത്ത് മാസിക ആരംഭിച്ചതും സംഘടനയുടെ മാതൃകാപ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളാണെന്ന് മന്ത്രി പറഞ്ഞു. മറ്റു മേഖലകളിൽ പഠിച്ചിറങ്ങുന്നവർ തൊഴിൽ തേടി അലയുമ്പോൾ അസോസിയേഷന്റെ ഇൻസ്റ്റിറ്റ്യൂട്ട് ഓഫ് ഹോട്ടൽ മാനേജ്മെന്റിൽ നിന്നും ഡിപ്ലോമ നേടുന്നവർ തൊഴിൽ അന്വേഷകരായി അലയേണ്ടതില്ല. അവർക്ക് തൊഴിലും ഉറപ്പ് വരുത്താൻ ഫെഡറേഷൻ ഓഫ് കേരള ഹോട്ടൽസ് അസോസിയേഷനു കഴിയുന്നു. ഹോട്ടൽ മേഖലയുടെ വളർച്ചയ്ക്ക് അനുസരിച്ച് തൊഴിൽ സാധ്യതകളും കൂടുന്നു. ഇത്തരം ഒരു കോഴ്സ് സാജനുമായി പഠിപ്പിക്കുവാനും, ജോലി ഉറപ്പ് നൽകാനും സംഘടന എടുത്ത തീരുമാനം അഭിനന്ദനാർഹമാണെന്ന് ഭക്ഷ്യ സിവിൽ സപ്ലൈ മന്ത്രി ജി.ആർ അനീൽ പറഞ്ഞു.

ഏറ്റവും കൂടുതൽ തൊഴിലവസരങ്ങളുള്ള ഒരു മേഖലയാണ് ടൂറിസമെന്നും എന്നാൽ ഈ രംഗത്ത് നൈപുണ്യ പരിശീലനം നേടിയവർ കുറവാണെന്നും സംസ്ഥാന ടൂറിസം സെക്രട്ടറി കെ.ബിജു ഐ.എ.എസ് പറഞ്ഞു. പ്രൊഫഷണൽ പരിശീലനം നേടിയവർ കൂടുതലായി ഈ മേഖലയിലേക്ക് കടന്നുവന്നാൽ മാത്രമേ കസ്റ്റമർ എക്സ്പീരിയൻസ് അല്ലെങ്കിൽ കസ്റ്റമർ സാറ്റിസ്ഫാക്ഷൻ സാധ്യമാക്കാൻ കഴിയൂ. എത് വ്യവസായത്തിലും അതിന്റെ പ്രധാനപ്പെട്ട ഘടകം, അതിന്റെ കസ്റ്റമർ എക്സ്പീരിയൻസ് ആണ്. കസ്റ്റമർ എക്സ്പീരിയൻസ് വരുമ്പോൾ സ്കിൽഡ് പ്രൊഫഷണൽസ് ഈ രംഗത്തേക്ക് വരുന്നതോടെയാണ്. അതിന് രാജ്യത്തു തന്നെ മാതൃകാപരമായ സ്ഥാപനമാണ് ഫെഡറേഷൻ ഓഫ് കേരള ഹോട്ടൽസ് അസോസിയേഷന്റെ ആഭിമുഖ്യത്തിലുള്ള ഇൻസ്റ്റിറ്റ്യൂട്ട് ഓഫ് ഹോട്ടൽ മാനേജ്മെന്റ്. പരിശീലനം നേടിയ നാനൂറോളം പേർ ഒരു ദിവസം ടൂറിസത്തിന്റെ അംബാസിഡർമാരായി മാറുന്നത് ഏറ്റവും സന്തോഷകരമായ കാര്യമാണെന്നും അതിന് നേതൃത്വം നൽകിയ അസോസിയേഷനെ അഭിനന്ദിക്കുന്നതായും ടൂറിസം സെക്രട്ടറി പറഞ്ഞു. ■

ഡെസ്റ്റിനേഷൻ ടൂറിസം പ്രൊത്സാഹിപ്പിക്കും: ടൂറിസം സെക്രട്ടറി കെ. ബിജു ഐഎഎസ്



കേരളത്തെ സംബന്ധിച്ചിടത്തോളം ടൂറിസമാണ് ജി.ഡി.പിയുടെ പത്ത് ശതമാനത്തോളം നേ

ടിത്തരുന്നത്. അതിന് മുഖ്യ സംഭാവന നൽകുന്നത് ഹോട്ടലുകളാണ്. ഫൈവ് സ്റ്റാറും, സ്റ്റാർ ക്ലാസ്സിഫിക്കേഷനുള്ള ഹോട്ടലുകൾ ഏറ്റവും കൂടുതൽ ഇന്ന് കേരളത്തിലാണ്. അതിലൂടെ ടൂറിസം ഒരു കസ്റ്റമർ എക്സ്പീരിയൻസ് അല്ലെങ്കിൽ എക്സ്പീരിയൻസ് ടൂറിസം എന്ന നിലയിലേക്ക് മാറിക്കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുകയാണ്. വിവിധ മേഖലകളിൽ ടൂറിസ്റ്റ് ഡെസ്റ്റിനേഷനുകൾ, ഡെസ്റ്റിനേഷൻ ടൂറിസം മേഖലകൾ എന്നിവ വളർത്തിക്കൊണ്ടു വരികയും പ്രൊത്സാഹിപ്പിക്കുകയുമാണ് സർക്കാരിന്റെ നയമെന്ന് ചടങ്ങിൽ സംബന്ധിച്ച ടൂറിസം സെക്രട്ടറി കെ.ബിജു ഐ.എ.എസ് പറഞ്ഞു. ■



K.R. Rejeesh

A tourist bus from an engineering college in Kerala with a group of students and teachers on board was moving swiftly through the National Highway-766 (NH) in Karnataka.

The rear seats were occupied by a few savvy chaps, who eagerly waited for the right time to uncork liquor bottles on the sly. Apparently, they wanted to hide it from the girls and the faculty members who were engaged in deep conversation, empty chat or the movie that played on the TV.

When the boys began their 'hush-hush party,' Shreeshna and her friends saw it but only nodded their heads. Looking back, Ms Shreeshna, now working at IBS Software, Technopark, Thiruvananthapuram, feels that the scenario of boys tensely consuming alcohol in the backseat of buses during tours reflected an unhealthy attitude towards drinking at the time.

A responsible society would have clear lines drawn on when a young person can purchase or consume liquor and, once a person attains



Present generation defies the obsolete notion that visiting bars or pubs is a taboo. For them, these spaces are more of a meeting place than a dungeon like space for guzzling one's favourite liquor brand. "It's a place that helps us socialise and network. We'll visit pubs and bars during Friday and Saturday nights for our get together," says 28-year-old Ms Gayathri, a HR Consultant based in Technopark.

the age of 21, they should be able to do so without being squeamish about it.

According to her, it's no holds barred for both girls and boys when it comes to their preference of alcoholic beverages. "In our office tours, my colleagues would come and ask us about our favourite brand. Normally, I avoid hot drinks but choose beer to join friends despite my fear that a puke is on the cards," she laughs.

Gone are the days when visiting a bar or pub was frowned upon, at least in Kerala. The bars/pubs in the State have undergone a major transformation from the trite milieu where hues of dim lights and insanely loud music in the background ruled the roost. Hotels owe this the paradigm shift in the concept of a bar to the younger generation's completely fresh perspective on celebrations. Since liquor has become a staple of all celebrations, including marriages,

the ostensibly orthodox society has had no other option but to approve it.

Present generation defies the obsolete notion that visiting bars or pubs is a taboo. For them, these spaces are more of a meeting place than a dungeon-like space for guzzling one's favourite liquor brand. "It's a place that helps us socialise and network. We'll visit pubs and bars during Friday and Saturday nights for our get together," says 28-year-old Ms Gayathri, a HR Consultant based in Technopark.

They unwind themselves by enjoying activities like music, karaoke and games, besides watching football and cricket matches on a big screen. Gayathri is not against setting up pubs and bars at workplaces. "Making bars accessible to employees near their workplace depends on many factors. It's fine if each one knows their limit and doesn't allow it to intrude into their professional and personal life," she says.



Room for debates and networking

Shahid, 32, Premier Holidays, Tours and Travels, Malappuram, says that bars and pubs can provide the much-needed thrust for the tourism industry. He also feels that people's attitude towards them is changing significantly. Personally, he finds the ambience of these outlets perfect for fruitful discussions and networking sessions.

What makes bars a favourite spot for youngsters and adults alike is that they set a platform for fun and socialising among people from all walks of life. The vibrant youngsters have redefined the purpose of visiting bars. Of late, they have started to derive and discover many things from a jamboree.

23-year-old Sreelekshmy, who is pursuing Visual Communication at Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham, Kochi, mainly visits pubs to enjoy and have fun with friends. She observes that unlike in the past, many people have turned out to be patrons of their favourite beverage outlets.

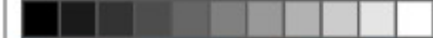


Apart from relishing her favourite drink, Sreelekshmy prefers the dance floor that would alter all the regular vibes. She feels that it would be fun if bars or pubs are accessible to people near their workplaces.

For Kiren P, Senior Designer, Infohash, Technopark, his meetings with friends take place in pubs or bars where they will have freewheeling chats about daily lives and other topics. The 34-year-old professional likes mild music and ample lighting so that he can see and listen to others in the group. He also wants access to basic amenities like tissue papers, cutlery and bins etc. near the table.

According to Nidhish George, Head, Digital, MD Niche Media Consultants, Thiruvananthapuram, there is nothing abnormal or taboo in visiting bars nowadays. "As long as you can handle the drinks you consume and not turn into a public nuisance, boozing is not something that should be looked down upon," he feels.

George strongly supports the idea of setting up beverage outlets near



offices and institutions as it reduces the time spent on commuting. "After a long day at work, or even otherwise, it is good to have a quality space to unwind with friends and colleagues near your work place. It would also help build team bonding," he adds.

Pradeep Kumar, photographer, Surabhi Studio, Kottayam, goes to bars during weekends as he gets relaxation and relief from all the stressful days.

"The current generation seems to be more open-minded in matters like these and I don't think it's a taboo but rather a way of having fun and socialising."

Kumar holds the view that bars and pubs should come up with good vegetarian options. He feels that location of beverage outlets doesn't matter as long as it doesn't affect one's productivity and pose a

distraction to their job.

Tailpiece: A slice of childhood autobiography

I remember my visits to Hotel Classic opposite Ayurveda College in Thiruvananthapuram as a teen during the 90s. My father was the cashier of the bar at the hotel where I used to visit him from my village quite often to get money. While sitting outside, I was amazed to see the scenes inside the bar when the door opened and closed at regular intervals.

As a 15-year-old, the dim-lit and music-filled interior was a fascinating view from the outside. I was so curious about the world inside where conversations faded away with the light music. Some people would just sit looking at each other searching for words that seemed to escape them the moment they wanted to say

something.

The whole experience is so deeply imprinted in my mind that I can recall every little shift in light inside the bar as the door opened at different times of the day, the music played there and the voices, some hushed, others loud. Strangely, I also began to have the notion that one has to follow a special kind of etiquette inside a bar.

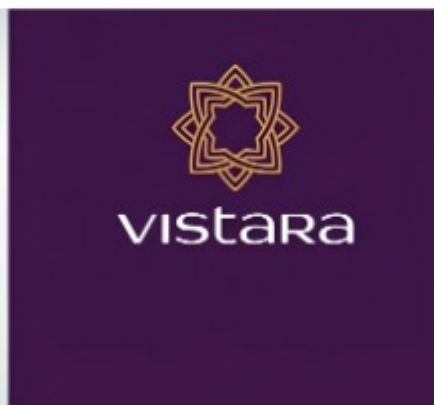
Even today, despite being a teetotaler, I would like to accompany my friends to a pub or bar just to take myself down memory lane and keep my memories afresh. Now, that is a different high, isn't it? ■

K.R. Rejeesh is a freelance writer and PR professional based in Thiruvananthapuram



Singapore

Singapore Competition Commission nod for Air India-Vistara merger



With Singapore's anti-trust regulator Competition and Consumer Commission (CCCS) granting its approval for the merger between Air India and Vistara, decks have been cleared for the creation of India's second-largest airline.

The Competition and Consumer Commission gave the green signal for the merger based on assurances from both the airlines that they would maintain capacity as of 2019 on both sides of Singapore to Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai and Trichy routes.

Tata Sons, who now owns Air India, and holds controlling stake (51%)

in Vistara, had been working on the merger of the two airlines for long. Tata Sons and Singapore Airlines, which holds 49% stake in the airline, will merge Vistara with Air India to create India's second-biggest carrier. SIA will hold a 25.1% stake in the merged entity with an equity infusion of Rs 2,058.50 crore. Tata Sons will hold the rest of the stake.

The CCCS found that the commitments made by the two sides were sufficient to address the competition concerns arising from the merger. The CCCS had reached out to the market to see if the commitments were sufficient

and found that the majority of stakeholders did not raise any concern.

In September last year, the Competition Commission of India (CCI) had given its nod for Vistara's merger with Air India after similar commitments from the two airlines to adhere to their existing capacity on certain other routes. The two airlines are also in the process of taking approval from regulators of other countries where both operate.

The Tata group expects to receive regulatory clearances, which include those from the National Company Law Tribunal, Ministry of Civil Aviation and Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) by mid-2024, after which they will be able to start commercial integration like having network synergies.

Vistara CEO Vinod Kannan was on record earlier that the Tata group is aiming to complete the merger by 2025. A total merger of operations will take time as merging networks and operations is a complex process, Mr. Kannan had said.

South Africa

South Africa looking at 1 lakh Indian tourists in 2024



South Africa is looking towards crossing the 1 lakh mark in tourist arrivals from India during 2024.

The country hosted over 79,000 Indian travellers during 2023, representing 82 per cent of pre-COVID levels. Tourism South Africa hopes to achieve its target by focusing on tier II cities. Neliswa Nkani, Hub Head of Middle East, India and Southeast Asia, was quoted as saying by PTI.

In 2023, Tourism Minister of South Africa Patricia de Lille had sought visa waiver for tourists from India and China. South Africa's Tourism Minister is pushing for visa requirements to be eased or waived for Chinese and Indian nationals to boost visitor numbers from the world's most populous countries.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia sees massive tourism growth in 2023: Report



Saudi Arabia experienced the largest growth in international tourist arrivals in 2023 compared to 2019 among major tourism destinations, the Saudi Press Agency reported citing the United Nations World Tourism (now UN Tourism) Barometer report.

The kingdom welcomed 56 percent more tourists last year over the total number of tourist arrivals in 2019. Several top Saudi destinations saw significant increases in both foreign and domestic visitors last year.

Tourism spending in the country also set a new record, topping

SAR100 billion for the first three quarters of 2023, data from the Saudi Central Bank (SAMA) revealed.

Congratulating Saudi Arabia for its achievement in a X message, United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) said: "The UN Tourism congratulates Saudi Arabia as the destination among countries receiving over 5 million international tourists with the highest growth (+56%) in 2023 compared to 2019 (countries with data for 10 or more months)," the message said.

This strong tourism performance helped Saudi Arabia become a leader in tourism growth within the Middle East, a region that was the only one to surpass pre-COVID arrival levels at 122 percent recovery.

India is Nepal's top inbound tourist market



India emerged as Nepal's top inbound tourist market in February, according to the Nepal Tourism Board (NTB).

Of the total 97,426 tourists arriving in the country by air route last month, 25,578 were from India, followed by China with 9,180 and the US with 9,089 visitors, according to data published by NTB.

Thailand is in fourth place with 4,799 inbound visitors, while the UK and Bangladesh ranked fifth and sixth in the list with 4,571 and 4,099 tourists respectively.

According to NTB Director Mani Lamichhane, though the data showed over 25,000 Indians visiting Nepal in February, the actual number is much higher as a large

number of tourists from India visited the country via land route.

In January, Nepal received 18,041 visitors from India. The number of tourists arriving via air route in Nepal in February is 33 per cent up from February 2023, which witnessed the arrival of 73,255 visitors.

As compared to 2019, the pre-Covid 19 period, this marked 95.12 per cent recovery. The number of tourist arrivals in Nepal in February 2019 was 1,02,423, the NTB said.

Nepal's tourism sector, which was badly affected by COVID-19, is expected to revive in 2024, and the February data is a positive indication, NTB Director said.

The country's tourism season starts after March and the NTB is hoping for a significant increase in numbers from next month, he said.

UAE

Dubai announces 2024 edition of Esports & Games Festival



The Dubai Esports & Games Festival will run from April 19 to May 5, with the promise to surpass the benchmarks set by previous editions.

The festival would feature over 50 games played on 200 machines, including 11 unreleased titles and 4 world-first showings. Central to DEF 2024 is the GameExpo, held at the Dubai World Trade Centre from May 3 to 5.

Attendees at the GameExpo can expect to explore cutting-edge gaming products, witness esports competitions, and engage in diverse activities such as cosplay and coding workshops.

Additionally, Play Beyond will host thrilling gaming contests where top regional and global stars will go head-to-head, providing spectators with the ultimate gaming showdown experience.

The festival would take place under the patronage of Sheikh Ahmed bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Second Deputy Ruler of Dubai and Chairman of the Dubai Media Council.

The Dubai Esports & Games Festival 2024 is more than an event; it's a celebration of the skill, strategy, and the dedication of gamers and esports professionals across the city, the region and wider global landscape.

In a city committed to the digital economy's growth and transformation, this year's festival is set to be the leader of the region's gaming industry, solidifying Dubai's position as a year-round global hub for esports and gaming.

This year, DEF will go above and beyond, venturing into new innovative areas of gaming and esports experiences as evidenced by the decision to include 11 unreleased titles and 4 world-first showings.

DEF 2024 will bring together players, enthusiasts, and industry experts worldwide over their love of gaming and esports, while empowering these communities to thrive not just in Dubai, but across the wider GCC and beyond, Ahmed Al Khaja, CEO of Dubai Festivals and Retail Establishment said.

DEF 2023 attracted a remarkable 48,200 esports participants and attendees from 91 different nationalities, showcasing the global appeal of the event.

The festival will also feature Ramadan online tournaments, igniting excitement among the gaming community during the holy month.

Moreover, DEF 2024 is committed to nurturing young talent through initiatives like the Microsoft MakeCode Competition and the Minecraft Education Challenge.

Students will have the opportunity to enhance their digital skills and gain insider insights into the gaming industry through various educational programmes offered during the festival.

For gaming industry professionals, the GameExpo Summit powered by Pocket Gamer Connects will provide a platform for networking and knowledge-sharing, featuring talks, panels, and opportunities to connect with industry leaders.



Surfing Festival

Dates: 29-31 March 2024

Venue: Varkala Beach, Thiruvananthapuram

The beach destination of Varkala near Thiruvananthapuram will host the International Surfing Festival, the first national surfing championship of the 2024 calendar, from March 29 to 31.

Surfers from the country's eastern and western coasts will compete in various categories at the festival, aimed at turning Kerala into a prominent surfing destination. Both amateurs and experts will attend the event, which will help develop Varkala beach further.



MTB Kerala

Dates: 26-28 April 2024

Venue: Priyadarshini Tea Plantation, Mananthavady, Wayanad

The seventh edition of the mega mountain biking event MTB Kerala 2024 will be held at the Priyadarshini Tea Plantation in Mananthavady, Wayanad, from April 26 to 28.

The cycling track where the event would be held stretches for 5 km through the plantation at an altitude of 3,000 ft. The cross-country contest includes terrain such as mud, rocks, and water.

Cyclists from 25 countries are expected for the event. Amateur competitions will be held for cyclists from India, and the winners will get an opportunity to compete with international cyclists.



HICSA 2024

19th Hotel Investment Conference - South Asia

Dates: 3-4 April 2024

Venue: JW Marriott Bengaluru Prestige Golfshire Resort & Spa

Hotel Investment Conference-South Asia (HICSA) has established itself as an unparalleled gathering platform for the global hospitality industry. Renowned for its content-rich sessions and exceptional networking opportunities, HICSA consistently draws top brands, hotel owners, financiers, developers, and professional advisors from all corners of the world. With a typical annual attendance ranging from 500 to 600 participants, HICSA 2024 anticipates welcoming over 700 delegates under one roof. This is the second that HICSA is being in Bengaluru, the first being in 2023.



Hotelpoint 2024

Dates: 14-17 April 2024

Venue: Tholurpatti, Tamil Nadu

HotelPoint is a trade forum connecting hotel executives responsible for architecture, construction, renovation, and engineering with innovative suppliers. It is a strategic event where business gets done in a casual setting that fosters new relationships and opportunities.



HotelTech Kerala 2024

Dates: 15-17 May 2024

Venue: Bolgatty Palace and Island Resort, Kochi, India

Kerala's premier trade expo for the HORECA sector, the expo receives support and endorsement from multiple associations, such as the Association of Approved & Classified Hotels of Kerala, SICA-Kerala Chapter and the Kerala Professional Housekeepers Association. The expo expected 65 exhibitors and around 4,000 visitors.



മുറം
നൂറ്റാണ്ടി
തീർപ്പ്

ഇന്ത്യൻ നഗരവികസന ചരിത്രത്തിലെ പ്രാധാന്യമായ ഒരു നാഴികക്കല്ലാവാകയാണ് തീസ്തി മുൻമൈ എന്ന മൂന്നാം മുൻമൈ നഗരം.

ഉമാശങ്കർ ജി.

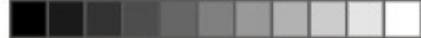


മുറംബൈ നഗരം ഇപ്പോൾ തന്നെ ലോകത്തെ വൻ നഗരങ്ങളിലൊന്നാണ്. ലോകത്തെ ഏറ്റവും വലിയ വ്യാപാര കേന്ദ്രങ്ങളിൽ ഒന്നാണീ നഗരം. ഇന്ത്യയുടെ മൊത്തം ആഭ്യന്തര ഉത്പാദനത്തിന്റെ 6.6 ശതമാനം ഉത്പാദിക്കുന്നത് ഈ നഗരത്തിലാണ്. ഭാജ്യത്തിൻറെ മൊത്തം വ്യാവസായിക ഉത്പാദനത്തിന്റെ 25 ശതമാനവും ഇവിടെ നിന്ന് തന്നെ. ഇന്ത്യയുടെ മൊത്തം സമുദ്രവ്യാപാരത്തിന്റെ 70 ശതമാനവും മുലധന വിനിമയത്തിന്റെ 70 ശതമാനവും നടക്കുന്നതും ഇവിടെ തന്നെ.

ഇപ്പോൾ തന്നെ മുറംബൈ നഗരം ഒന്നല്ല, രണ്ടാണ്. മുറംബെയും നവീ മുറംബെയും. പക്ഷെ, നഗരത്തിൻറെ വളർച്ച അതുകൊണ്ടുവസാനിക്കുന്നില്ല. ഒരു മൂന്നാം മുറംബൈ നഗരം കൂടെ സൃഷ്ടിക്കപ്പെടാൻ

പോകുകയാണ്. മെച്ചപ്പെട്ട താമസ സൗകര്യങ്ങൾ, യാത്രാ സൗകര്യങ്ങൾ, പശ്ചാത്തല സൗകര്യങ്ങൾ എന്നിവയൊക്കെ ലക്ഷ്യമിട്ട് 'തേർഡ് മുറംബൈ' എന്ന് തത്കാലം പേരിട്ട് ആരംഭിച്ചിരിക്കുന്ന പദ്ധതിക്ക് മഹാരാഷ്ട്ര സർക്കാർ അനുമതി നൽകിക്കഴിഞ്ഞു.

മുറംബൈ എന്നറിയപ്പെടുന്ന പഴയ മുറംബൈ നഗരം കൊളോണിയൽ കാലത്ത് ഉയർന്നുവന്നതാണ്. നവീ മുറംബൈ എന്നറിയപ്പെടുന്ന 1970കളിൽ ആസൂത്രണം ചെയ്ത് നിർമ്മിച്ചെടുത്ത പുതിയ മുറംബൈ നഗരമാണ്. ഈ രണ്ട് നഗരങ്ങളും അതിദൂരം വളരുന്നതാണ് നാം ഇക്കാലമത്രയും കണ്ടിട്ടുള്ളത്. ഈ നഗരങ്ങൾക്ക് തന്നെത്താൻ ഉൾക്കൊള്ളാൻ കഴിയാത്ത തരത്തിൽ വീണ്ടും അവ വളരുക തന്നെയാണ്. ഇവിടെയാണ് മൂന്നാമതൊരു നഗരം എന്ന ആലോചന വരുന്നത്.



മുംബൈയിൽ ആസൂത്രിതമായി സൃഷ്ടിക്കപ്പെട്ട ഒരു ബിസിനസ് കേന്ദ്രമാണ് ബാഗ്ര കുർള കോംപ്ലക്സ്. മുംബൈ നഗരത്തിന്റെ അടിമാനമായ നിരവധി സ്ഥാപനങ്ങളാണ് ഇവിടെ സ്ഥിതി ചെയ്യുന്നത്. മൂന്നാം മുംബൈയുടെ വളർച്ചയ്ക്ക് സഹായകമാകുന്ന വിധത്തിൽ നവി മുംബൈയിലെ ഖർഹലിൽ സമാനമായ ഒരു കോംപ്ലക്സ് നിർമ്മിക്കപ്പെടും. ബിസിനസ് കേന്ദ്രങ്ങളും ധനികർക്കായുള്ള റസിഡൻഷ്യൽ കേന്ദ്രങ്ങളും ചേരുന്നതായിരിക്കും ഈ പ്രദേശം.

നവി മുംബൈ അന്താരാഷ്ട്ര വിമാനത്താവളത്തിന് ചുറ്റുമായിട്ടായിരിക്കും 'തേർഡ് മുംബൈ' നിർമ്മിക്കുക. 2024ൽ ഉദ്ഘാടനം ചെയ്യപ്പെടാനിരിക്കുന്ന ഈ വിമാനത്താവളം പുതിയ നഗരത്തിലേക്കുള്ള വാതായനമായി മാറും. നിലവിൽ നിർമ്മാണം നടന്നു കൊണ്ടിരിക്കുന്ന മുംബൈ ട്രാൻസ് ഹാർബർ ലിങ്ക് എന്ന, കടലിലൂടെയുള്ള ആറുവരി എക്സ്പ്രസ് വേയായിരിക്കും ഈ പുതിയ നഗരത്തെ നിലവിലെ മുംബൈ നഗരവുമായി ബന്ധിപ്പിക്കുന്ന പ്രധാന പാത.

പുഷ്പറിസ്റ്റിക് ആയ അടിസ്ഥാന സൗകര്യങ്ങളൊരുക്കി ആസൂത്രിതമായി മറ്റൊരു നഗരം കൂടി പണിതാൽ അത് മുംബൈയുടെയും മഹാരാഷ്ട്രയുടെയും വളർച്ച ദ്രുതഗതിയിലാക്കും. മുംബൈ മെട്രോപൊളിറ്റൻ റീജിയൻ ഡെവലപ്മെന്റ് അതോറിറ്റി (എംഎംആർഡിഎ)യ്ക്ക് കീഴിൽ ന്യൂ ടൗൺ ഡെവലപ്മെന്റ് അതോറിറ്റി (എൻടിഡിഎ) എന്ന പുതിയ ഒരു സംവിധാനത്തിന് രൂപം നൽകി അത് വഴിയകും പുതിയ നഗരത്തിന്റെ നിർമ്മിതി.

ഏകദേശം 200 പഞ്ചായത്തുകൾ ചേർത്താണ് പുതിയ നഗരം നിർമ്മിക്കുക.

മുംബൈയിൽ ആസൂത്രിതമായി സൃഷ്ടിക്കപ്പെട്ട ഒരു ബിസിനസ് കേന്ദ്രമാണ് ബാഗ്ര കുർള കോംപ്ലക്സ്. മുംബൈ നഗരത്തിന്റെ അടിമാനമായ നിരവധി സ്ഥാപനങ്ങളാണ് ഇവിടെ സ്ഥിതി ചെയ്യുന്നത്. മൂന്നാം മുംബൈയുടെ വളർച്ചയ്ക്ക് സഹായകമാകുന്ന വിധത്തിൽ നവി മുംബൈയിലെ ഖർഹലിൽ സമാനമായ ഒരു കോംപ്ലക്സ് നിർമ്മിക്കപ്പെടും. ബിസിനസ് കേന്ദ്രങ്ങളും ധനികർക്കായുള്ള റസിഡൻഷ്യൽ കേന്ദ്രങ്ങളും ചേരുന്നതായിരിക്കും ഈ പ്രദേശം.

പുതിയ ഭാവനസമുച്ചയങ്ങൾക്കും ബിസിനസ് കേന്ദ്രങ്ങൾക്കുമായി 150 ഹെക്ടറോളം സ്ഥലം കണ്ടെത്തിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. നവി മുംബൈയിലെ പൻവേലിൽ നിന്ന് കർജത്തിലേക്ക് ഒരു പുതിയ സബർബൻ റെയിൽ കോറിഡോർ നിർമ്മിക്കുക എന്നതാണ് മറ്റൊരു പദ്ധതി. 812 കോടി രൂപയാണ് ഇതിനായി മാറ്റിവെച്ചിരിക്കുന്നത്.

മുംബൈ റെയിൽ വികാസ് കോർപ്പറേഷനാണ് ചുമതല. മൂന്ന് ടൗണുകളും രണ്ട് ഫ്ലൈഓവറുകളും അഞ്ച് റെയിൽവേ സ്റ്റേഷനുകളും ഉൾക്കൊള്ളുന്ന ഈ സബർബൻ റെയിൽ സംവിധാനം നവി മുംബൈയെയും മൂന്നാം മുംബൈയെയും മികച്ച രീതിയിൽ കണക്ട് ചെയ്യും. കർജാത്ത് അടക്കമുള്ള നിരവധി പ്രദേശങ്ങളടങ്ങുന്ന ഇരുനൂറോളം വില്ലേജുകളെ നഗരവൽക്കരിക്കാനായിട്ടാണ് ന്യൂ ടൗൺ ഡെവലപ്മെന്റ് അതോറിറ്റി എന്ന സംവിധാനം സൃഷ്ടിച്ചിട്ടുള്ളത്.

നിലവിൽ മുംബൈ നഗരത്തിന് 600 സ്ക്വയർ കിലോമീറ്റർ വലിപ്പമുണ്ട്. നവി മുംബൈയുടെ വലിപ്പം 344 സ്ക്വയർ കിലോമീറ്റർ വരും. ഉൽവേ, പെൻ, ഉറാൻ, കർജാത്ത് തുടങ്ങിയ പ്രദേശങ്ങളെ നഗരവൽക്കരിച്ചെടുക്കാനുള്ള പരിപാടികൾ എൻ.ഡി.ടിഎ നീക്കും. ഇരുനൂറോളം ഗ്രാമങ്ങളിൽ നിന്നായി വൻതോതിലുള്ള ഭൂമി ഏറ്റെടുക്കലുകൾ വേണ്ടിവരുമെന്ന് ഉറപ്പാണ്.

ആഡംബര ഭവനങ്ങളും, ഇടത്തരം ഭവനങ്ങളുമെല്ലാം ഈ പുതിയ നഗരത്തിൽ നിർമ്മിക്കപ്പെടും. ഡോറ്റാ സെന്ററുകൾ, ബഹുരാഷ്ട്ര കമ്പനികളുടെ കേന്ദ്രങ്ങൾ, ബാങ്കുകൾ, സാമ്പത്തികസ്ഥാപനങ്ങൾ, നോളജ് പാർക്കുകൾ തുടങ്ങി വൻ സ്ഥാപനങ്ങൾ ഇവിടെ ഉയരും. നഗരത്തിന് അനുയോജ്യമായ പൊതുഗതാഗത സംവിധാനങ്ങളും നിലവിൽ വരും. ഇപ്പോൾ ഒരു സബർഡബൻ ട്രെയിൻ മാത്രമാണ് പദ്ധതിയിലുള്ളത്. ഭാവിയിലിത് മെട്രോ റെയിൽവേ അടക്കമുള്ള സംവിധാനമായി മാറും.

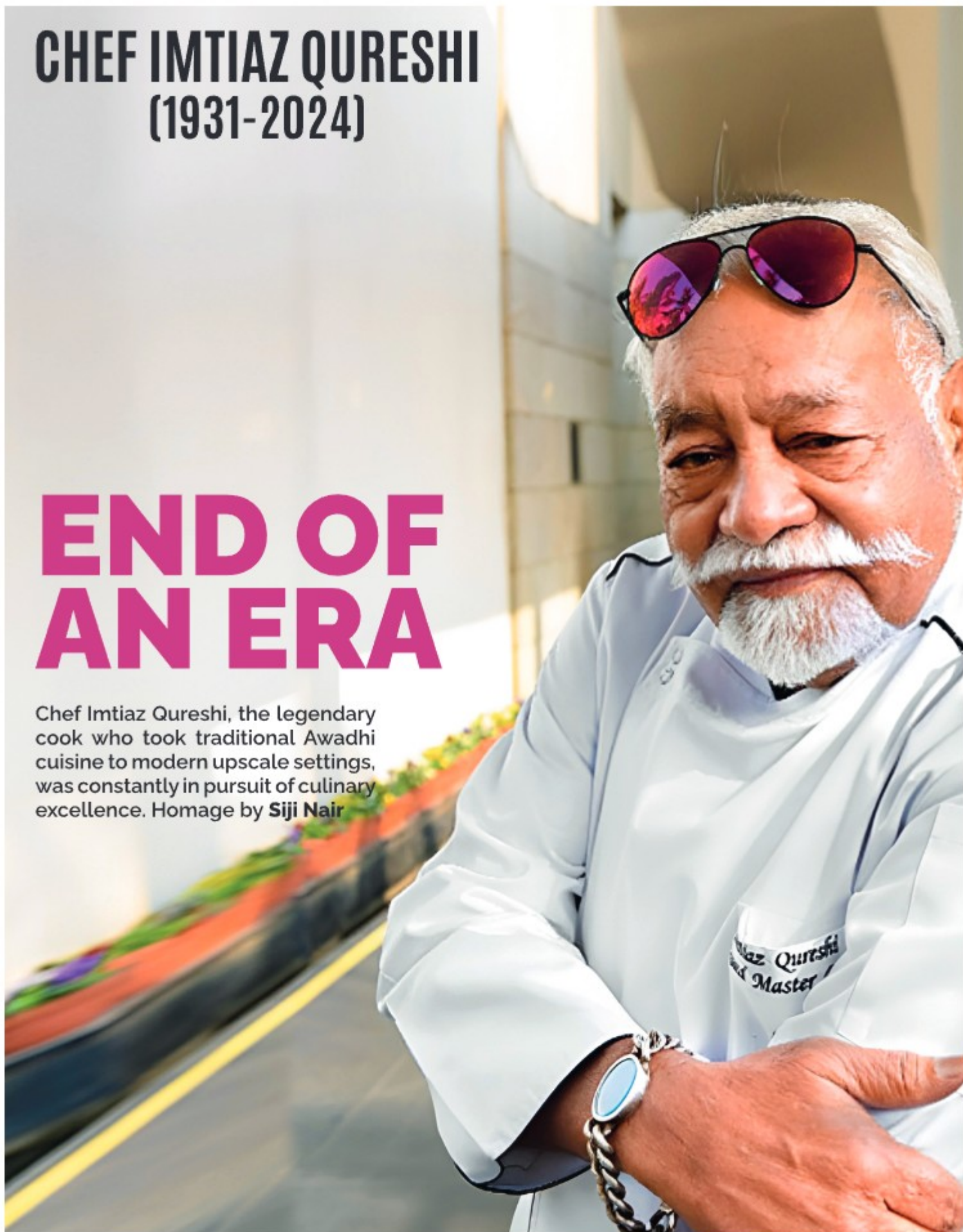
മുംബൈ നഗരത്തെയാണാകെ 0.25 ട്രില്യൺ ഡോളർ സാമ്പത്തിക വ്യവസ്ഥയായി മാറ്റുക എന്ന ലക്ഷ്യമാണ് പുതിയ നഗരസൂത്രണത്തിനു പിന്നിൽ. ഇന്ത്യയെ 5 ട്രില്യൺ സാമ്പത്തിക വ്യവസ്ഥയാക്കി മാറ്റുമെന്ന് നിലവിലെ കേന്ദ്ര സർക്കാരിന്റെ പ്രധാനപ്പെട്ട വാഗ്ദാനങ്ങളിലൊന്നാണ്. അതിലേക്ക് വലിയ സംഭാവന നൽകാൻ മുംബൈ നഗരത്തിന് ശേഷിയുണ്ട് എന്നാണ് നീതി ആയോഗിന്റെ കണ്ടെത്തൽ. ഇക്കാരണത്താൽ നീതി ആയോഗിന്റെ അകമഴിഞ്ഞ സഹായഹസ്തവും പുതിയ നഗരനിർമ്മാണ പദ്ധതിക്കുണ്ട്.

ഇന്ന് മുംബൈ നഗരത്തിന്റെ മൊത്ത ആഭ്യന്തര ഉൽപ്പാദനം 140 ബില്യൺ ഡോളറാണ്. ഇത് 2030ഓടെ 300 ബില്യൺ ഡോളറാക്കി ഉയർത്താൻ കഴിയണമെന്ന് കേന്ദ്ര സർക്കാർ കരുതുന്നു. ഇതിന് മൂന്നാം മുംബൈ നഗരത്തിന്റെ വളർച്ച അനിവാര്യമാണ്. ■

CHEF IMTIAZ QURESHI (1931-2024)

END OF AN ERA

Chef Imtiaz Qureshi, the legendary cook who took traditional Awadhi cuisine to modern upscale settings, was constantly in pursuit of culinary excellence. Homage by **Siji Nair**





Chef Imtiaz Qureshi, a culinary maestro and recipient of the Padma Shri, who passed away on February 16, has left an indelible mark on Indian cuisine through his remarkable life journey.

Born on February 2, 1931, in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, Chef Imtiaz Qureshi inherited his passion for cooking from his family lineage of chefs. His culinary voyage commenced under the tutelage of his uncle, and he honed his skills at Krishna Caterers, serving the Indian Army during the Sino-Indian War of 1962.

Qureshi's talent soon garnered attention, leading him to pivotal roles in various local restaurants before being discovered by Ajit Narain Haksar, the first Indian chairman of ITC Limited, who invited him to join ITC-Welcomgroup in 1979.

It was at ITC Maurya Sheraton that Qureshi found his true calling, revolutionizing the presentation of authentic Awadhi cuisine in a modern, upscale setting. Backed by unstinted institutional patronage, he showcased his expertise in the Dum Pukht style of cooking, characterized by slow-cooking techniques and distinctive flavours.

His culinary prowess extended beyond the kitchen, as he had the privilege of curating official banquets for distinguished dignitaries, including the Prime Minister and the President of India.

Qureshi's culinary repertoire featured iconic dishes such as Kakori Kebab, Dum Pukht Biryani, and Koh-e-Awadhi, earning acclaim from Heads of State, royalty, and corporate luminaries. Notably, his innovative interpretation of vegetarian dishes, ingeniously crafted to mimic meat, impressed even Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru at a State banquet.

Throughout his illustrious career, Qureshi played a pivotal role in revitalizing Awadhi cuisine,

Throughout his illustrious career, Qureshi played a pivotal role in revitalizing Awadhi cuisine, popularizing traditional cooking methods such as Dum Pukht, characterized by slow-cooking in sealed containers to preserve flavours. His creations, including the renowned Bukhara and Dum Pukht restaurant brands, became synonymous with culinary excellence.

popularizing traditional cooking methods such as Dum Pukht, characterized by slow-cooking in sealed containers to preserve flavours. His creations, including the renowned Bukhara and Dum Pukht restaurant brands, became synonymous with culinary excellence.

His culinary philosophy, rooted in intuition rather than strict measures, underscored his mastery and creativity in the kitchen.

Despite health challenges, Qureshi's dedication to his craft remained unwavering even during his advanced years. He famously conceptualized the menu for Bukhara amidst a high fever, a testament to his passion and commitment to perfection. His culinary philosophy, rooted in intuition rather than strict measures, underscored his mastery and creativity in the kitchen.

Beyond his culinary achievements, Qureshi's legacy is embodied by his family, including his children who have carved out their niches in the culinary world. Aisha, Ishtiaque, Ashfaq, Irfan, Yasmin, Imran, and Muhammad Ahsan Ali Qureshi carry forward his legacy, perpetuating his culinary ethos

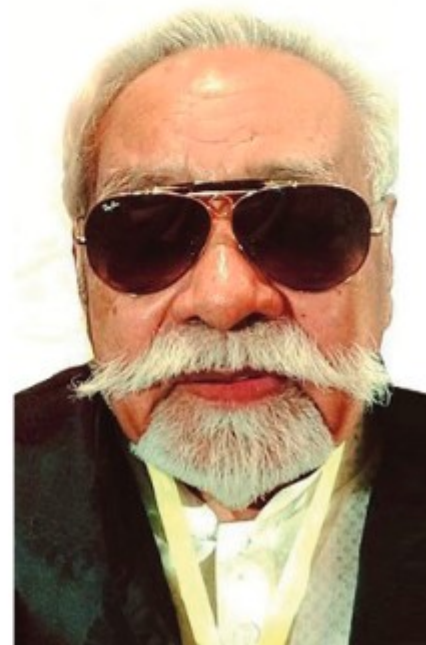
and his abiding penchant for innovation.

In recognition of his unparalleled contributions, Chef Imtiaz Qureshi was bestowed with the Padma Shri in 2016, becoming the first chef to receive this prestigious honour. His memory will forever be intertwined with the rich tapestry of Indian cuisine, Dimpukth tradition, and the legacy of ITC Hotels.

As we bid farewell to a culinary legend, Chef Imtiaz Qureshi's spirit lives on through the flavours, traditions, and artistry he imparted, inspiring generations of chefs to come.

Chef Imtiaz Qureshi's journey is not just a tale of culinary excellence but also one of resilience, innovation, and dedication. From his humble beginnings in Lucknow to the pinnacle of gastronomic achievement, Qureshi's life story resonates with passion and perseverance. His early experiences

in cooking for a British regiment and later serving the Indian Army during a time of conflict instilled in him a sense of duty and commitment to his craft.



Under his leadership, traditional Awadhi cuisine was elevated to new heights, marrying age-old recipes with contemporary presentation and style.

Qureshi's tenure at ITC Hotels marked a transformative period in the Indian culinary landscape. Under his leadership, traditional Awadhi cuisine was elevated to new heights, marrying age-old recipes with contemporary presentation and style. The introduction of Dumpukth cooking techniques, characterized by slow-cooking in sealed containers, added depth and richness to his dishes, captivating the palates of dignitaries and patrons alike.

Beyond his culinary innovations, Qureshi's influence extended to the cultural and social fabric of India. His collaborations with renowned personalities such as Jiggs Kalra not only popularized Awadhi cuisine but also served as a bridge between tradition and modernity. Through his culinary creations, Qureshi not only satisfied appetites but also fostered a deeper appreciation for Indian culinary heritage.

One of Qureshi's enduring legacies is his commitment to excellence. Despite facing health challenges, he remained steadfast in his pursuit of culinary perfection, often relying on intuition and instinct rather than rigid measures. His dedication to his craft, exemplified by his tireless efforts and unwavering passion, continues to inspire aspiring chefs around the world.

In honouring Chef Imtiaz Qureshi, we not only celebrate his culinary achievements but also pay tribute to a visionary whose legacy transcends the boundaries of time and geography. His memory will forever be cherished in the kitchens of ITC Hotels, where his spirit lives on through the aromas, flavours, and traditions he so masterfully preserved and elevated.



As we reflect on Chef Imtiaz Qureshi's remarkable journey, we are reminded of the power of food to unite, inspire, and transcend. His culinary legacy serves as a beacon of hope and inspiration for future

generations, guiding them on a path of creativity, innovation, and excellence. Though he may no longer be with us, his spirit lives on through the timeless flavours and traditions he shared with the world. ■

KERALA UNVEILS COUNTRY'S FIRST-EVER PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE DESIGN POLICY



In a landmark move, Kerala has unveiled India's first-ever Public Infrastructure Design Policy. This comprehensive policy marks a significant shift in the State's approach to public works and tourism infrastructure.

The policy's formulation involved extensive deliberations and collaborative work by prominent design professionals from across the country. The exercise began with a workshop held in January 2023.

The draft was subjected to detailed evaluation and analysis by a six-member expert committee, which solicited further expert opinions and conducted site visits to fine-tune the draft. Finally, the Kerala Cabinet approved the policy, marking a historic step for Indian infrastructure development.

Holistic approach

The Design Policy encompasses a wide range of elements, including design standards for buildings, bridges, roads, and signage across the state. Notably, it empowers the designation of specific areas as 'Special Tourism Zones' and 'Special Heritage Zones', allowing for tailored design considerations.

Local identity

The policy goes beyond mere infrastructure. It incorporates strategies for upgrading signage, developing design manuals for signage and lighting, and creating dedicated spaces for showcasing traditional art forms. Further, it encourages the establishment of craft design centres and the creation of a distinct brand identity for Kerala's renowned handicrafts and artwork.

Sustainability

Environmental considerations are central to the Design Policy. Public infrastructure projects are expected to prioritize eco-friendly construction methods. This commitment to sustainability

aligns with global trends and positions Kerala as a leader in responsible infrastructure development.

The policy also recognizes the economic potential of design. By fostering a brand for Kerala's crafts and prioritizing the well-being of the handicraft community, it aims to stimulate the State's economy. Additionally, the policy emphasizes the creation of a centralized data management system, ensuring integration between public works and tourism initiatives.

Embracing the Future

The Design Policy is a crucial step towards strengthening Kerala's economy. It paves the way for the implementation of innovative construction methods that address pressing challenges like climate change. With a focus on aesthetics, sustainability, and economic empowerment, Kerala's Design Policy positions the State as a frontrunner in shaping the future of public infrastructure in India. ■



PROTEIN AND YOU

SUPERCHARGE YOUR DIET WITH DESI POWERHOUSES
UMASANKAR G.



Let's face it, we Indians love our carbs. From fluffy rotis to steaming bowls of rice, they're the backbone of our delicious cuisine. But what about those days when you want to feel energised, build those muscles? That's where protein comes in, the mighty macronutrient that keeps you feeling full and functioning at your best.

Including protein-rich foods in your diet is vital for maintaining overall health and well-being. But how much protein do you need and what are the best sources of this essential macronutrient?

Proteins are
building blocks





in the body. They make up bones, cartilage, muscle, blood, skin, enzymes, hormones, and vitamins. They're essential for growth and development, they repair and build your cells and tissues such as muscle, and play an important role in body processes such as blood clotting, fluid balance, and the immune response.

Proteins are made from amino acids. There are some amino acids that our bodies can make on their own. These are called non-essential amino acids. But there are nine amino acids that our bodies must get by consuming foods that contain them. These are called essential amino acids, and they are necessary for normal body functioning.

Lean meats such as chicken, beef and pork are excellent sources of high-quality protein as well as important nutrients like iron and zinc. To avoid unhealthy saturated fat, opt for lean or low-fat meat options such as lean ground beef, pork loin, or skinless chicken breasts. Fish like salmon, tuna, and mackerel are not only rich in protein but also contain omega-3 fatty acids, which are beneficial for heart health.

You can also get essential amino acids from plant-based foods. However, most plant-based proteins do not contain all of the needed essential amino acids, and so are called incomplete proteins. If you avoid animal proteins, the best way to ensure you are consuming a healthy mix of amino acids is to enjoy a variety of plant-based proteins throughout the day.

Dairy products like milk, cheese, and yogurt are rich in protein, calcium, and other essential nutrients. Dairy products can be high in saturated fat, so choose low-fat dairy options and limit the amount of cheese you eat.

Beans, peas, and lentils include kidney beans, white beans, black beans, soybeans, chickpeas, black-



eyed peas and lentils. These plant-based foods are excellent sources of protein as well as fibre, folate, potassium, iron, and zinc.

Nuts and seeds include almonds, hazelnuts, walnuts, peanuts, chia seeds, pumpkin seeds, sunflower seeds, and peanut butter. They are not only rich in protein but also provide healthy fats, vitamins, and minerals. Nuts are high in fat and calories, so be mindful of portion sizes.

Eggs contain all of the essential amino acids, making them a complete protein source. Eggs are also a source of vitamins, minerals, healthy fats, and antioxidants.

Try to eat a variety of protein-rich foods to ensure you are meeting your daily protein needs as well as getting the vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients needed for optimal health. Proteins that come from animal sources, such as meat, eggs, and milk, as well as soy, are called complete proteins. This means they contain all the essential amino acids the body needs and are the highest-quality protein sources.

How much protein?

For the average adult, the Recommended Dietary Allowance (RDA) for protein, or the amount you need to meet your basic nutritional requirements and not

get sick, is 0.8 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight, or 0.36 grams per pound. For a person who weighs 75 kg (165 pounds), that comes to 60 grams of protein per day. To determine your target daily protein intake, you can multiply your weight in pounds by 0.36.

It's important to keep in mind that your daily protein need is not a fixed number. For example, your protein needs will fluctuate depending on your level of physical activity, and whether you are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Over time, nutritional guidelines have shifted away from specific amounts of daily protein, and toward the importance of eating healthier, protein-rich foods.

It's important to think about the protein "package" when making protein choices because food containing protein also includes fats, carbohydrates, vitamins, minerals, sugar, sodium, additives, and other components.

While meat provides high-quality protein, some meats also provide unhealthy amounts of saturated fats and sodium. If you eat meat, it's important to choose leaner meats and poultry.

Meats that are high in saturated fat include: fatty cuts of beef, pork, etc. (75% to 85% lean), processed meats such as sausages, hot dogs and bacon, and some poultry such as duck. A high-protein diet that is predominantly made up of red meat or processed meat is a cause for concern.

Research has consistently found that both unprocessed and processed red meat are linked to higher risks of cardiovascular disease and diabetes. One meta-analysis has found that replacing red meat with healthy plant proteins decreased the risk of cardiovascular disease.

For optimal health and nutrition, you should emphasize plant-based protein and protein from a variety of sources. The Mediterranean style of eating is one approach that emphasizes healthy protein sources.

Benefits

If you are over age 50, you should increase protein intake to one gram per kilogram of your body weight just to maintain muscle mass, which declines with age. If you're trying to gain muscle mass, a higher-protein diet can help support muscle repair and growth. When you exercise, muscle cells break down. Protein from food helps to repair the damage, ultimately strengthening muscles.

The value of high-protein diets for weight loss remains controversial. However, one meta-analysis has found that a high-protein diet could lead to weight loss and prevent weight regain after weight loss. The authors note the need for future studies that follow patients for longer than one year for more insight into this issue.

One study has found that eating plant-based protein was associated with lower odds of developing cognitive decline later in life. For every 5% of calories that came from plant protein instead of

carbohydrates, researchers observed a 26% lower risk for developing dementia in study participants.

How much is too much?

The idea of an upper limit of protein intake is controversial. Some experts believe the recommended amounts are too low. Others believe we are overconsuming protein. In general, the average person (not a bodybuilder or an elite athlete) does not need high levels of protein and should not exceed 2 grams per kilogram; or about 125 grams per day for a 140-pound person.

A main concern with taking in too much protein is an overall dietary imbalance. Consuming excessive protein may lead to inadequate intake of carbohydrates and fats. It's important to maintain a well-rounded diet that includes a

balance of all three macronutrients for overall health.

In addition, if you increase your protein intake without increasing physical activity, you may be taking in too many calories without expending enough, which could result in weight gain.

There is also some evidence that eating a relatively high-protein diet can be problematic for individuals with pre-existing kidney conditions. A diet high in animal protein may pose a higher risk of kidney stones.

So, where are we in India, when it comes to protein intake? Where are we to look for the right mix of ingredients to meet our overall protein needs? The beauty of Indian cuisine is that it's a treasure trove of protein-rich vegetarian and non-vegetarian options.

We can't talk about Indian protein ensembles without mentioning the variety of dals that are available out there. Lentils come in a variety of colours and textures, each a powerhouse of protein and fibre.

Moong dal (green gram) is a champion for easy digestion, while Masoor dal (red lentils) packs a punch with iron. Turn them into hearty dals, toss them into salads, or even whip up a protein-rich Indian pancake, for breakfast. Remember, variety is the spice of life (and your diet)!



Dahi Vada

Dahi (curd) isn't just for cooling down after a spicy meal. This creamy delight is loaded with protein and calcium, making it perfect for building strong bones and keeping you feeling full. Enjoy it with your meals, go for a dahi-vada, whip up a refreshing raita, or even go all out with a protein-packed lassi.



Eggs-cellence

Eggs are a fantastic, affordable source of complete protein. Omelettes for breakfast, scrambled eggs for lunch, or a hard-boiled egg snack - they're convenient and incredibly versatile. Plus, don't forget the mighty egg curry, a protein-rich comfort food that warms the soul.



Paneer Power

Paneer, the fresh cottage cheese of India, is a protein superstar. It's low in fat and carbs, making it a dieter's dream. Palak paneer for a veggie fix, a paneer bhurji scramble for breakfast, or even a paneer tikka masala with a lighter touch on the cream - the options are endless!



Chicken Boost

Chicken, a regular at the dining table these days, hits the spot. It could be the humble chicken curry. The trick is to cut back on the cream, and add a generous helping of protein-rich vegetables to go with it.



Nuts and Seeds

Almonds, cashews, peanuts, and flaxseeds are all protein powerhouses packed with healthy fats and essential nutrients. Snack on them raw, add them to curries and salads, or even make your own desi trail mix for a protein-rich on-the-go option.



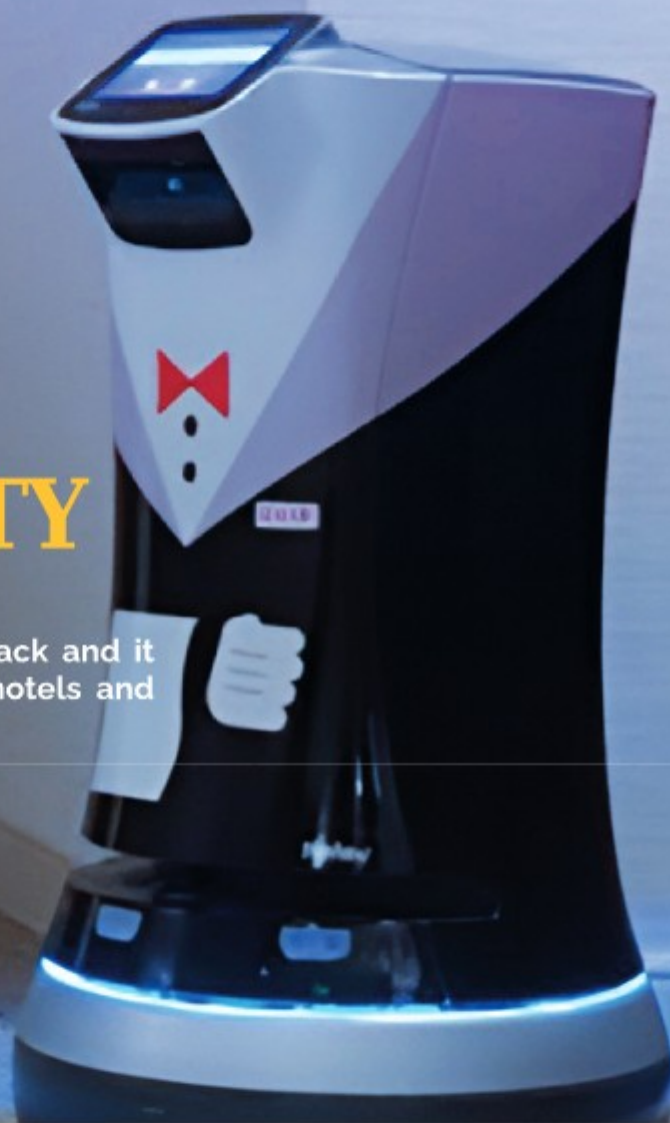
Remember: Protein is essential, but it's not the only player in the healthy diet game. Make sure you're getting enough fruits, vegetables, and whole grains for a well-rounded approach. So, ditch the fad diets and embrace the desi protein powerhouses! With a little creativity, you can fuel your body and tantalize your taste buds, all while staying true to your Indian food heritage. (With inputs from Harvard Health) ■



Kiran Kumar

DAWN OF AI IN HOSPITALITY

The adoption of AI is on the fast track and it holds huge potential for both the hotels and the new generation guests.

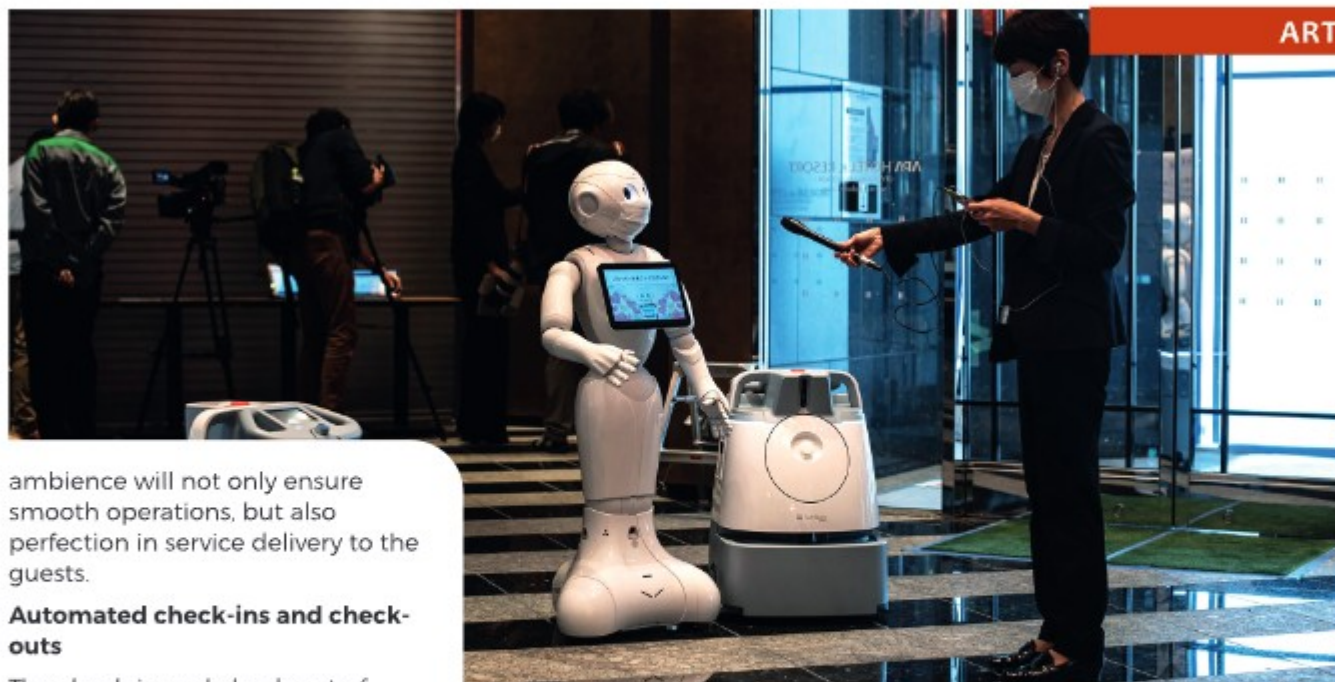


The entry of artificial intelligence in hotels has ushered a new level of sophistication in efficiency, innovativeness and personalization in the hotel industry. This transformative technology is revolutionizing the way guest requirements are being met in terms of experiences and desires.

AI has its own roles whether in luxury hotels or budget hotels, performing a range of roles—from

being the invisible concierge to a management tool with access to the vast database of guest preferences.

Imagine the situation where the guests check into the suite and the air-conditioning adjusts itself to the ambient temperature as per their preference, lights dim to their liking and their favourite music starts to play by itself. The smart management of energy to predictive maintenance of room



ambience will not only ensure smooth operations, but also perfection in service delivery to the guests.

Automated check-ins and check-outs

The check-in and check-out of guests through interactive self-service kiosks that can even be lined with smartphones and keyless entry will do away with the need for extensive front office staff, thereby reducing cost, saving time and streamlining operations.

Virtual concierges and chatbots

The virtual AI powered chatbots will be able to answer your questions instantly anytime without you waiting in the queue or looking for availability of staff. It could be as simple a matter as a local enquiry to restaurant recommendations. This will allow the staff to deliver face-to-face service with more efficiency, saving on time and effort otherwise time spent on such enquiries.

Smart rooms

Intelligent hotel rooms can be powered by the internet with AI—from lighting to temperature to entertainment and privacy. The level of customization is not merely about luxury, it's about creating a deep sense of comfort and belonging. It includes voice activated controls and sensors by which the guest can make a hands free request of room service or get the air-conditioning to high mode or put off the lights and TV. In all these features, the essence of AI is to create a seamless and delightfully personalized hotel experience.

Decoding guest data

AI will meticulously collect data on the guest choices from room temperature to culinary choices, birthdays, anniversaries, tap into preferences given during the previous stay at the same group hotel anywhere across the world and help the hotels with insights on what the guest needs are, what he/she yearns for, and elevate the stay from being pleasant to memorable. The power of AI lies in its ability to dissect the information and transform the raw data into action points.

Robotics

AI powered robots can challenge the knowledge of any human handler and hotels worldwide are slowly starting to embrace the possibilities of what robotics and AI can offer. These tireless mechanical aides are used to cater to all needs from welcoming, concierge, room service. They can work round-the-clock tirelessly.

We expect the adoption of such technologies to become widespread, serving diverse functions from back-end operations to guest facing services.

Sustainability efforts

Sustainability is a critical focus today in the hotel industry. Hotels these days are looked upon to demonstrate environment-friendly

practices. AI will play the role of a crucial partner in this initiative by intricately analysing large datasets and informing the managers how to adjust operations best to achieve sustainability results.

For example, intelligent systems can monitor and optimize energy usage throughout the property, ensuring that the rooms are climate-controlled efficiently based on occupancy. Similarly, AI can predict inventory needs, thereby reducing food waste in hotel kitchens by precisely forecasting the food required for guests. The use of AI goes beyond just conserving energy or reducing waste. It includes the capacity to manage a hotel's complete environmental footprint.

These upcoming trends promise a future where AI enhances the guest experience and ensures that sustainability is integrated into the core philosophy of hospitality. Luxury hotels will embrace AI to provide personalized and extraordinary services, while budget hotels will focus on efficiency and cost savings.

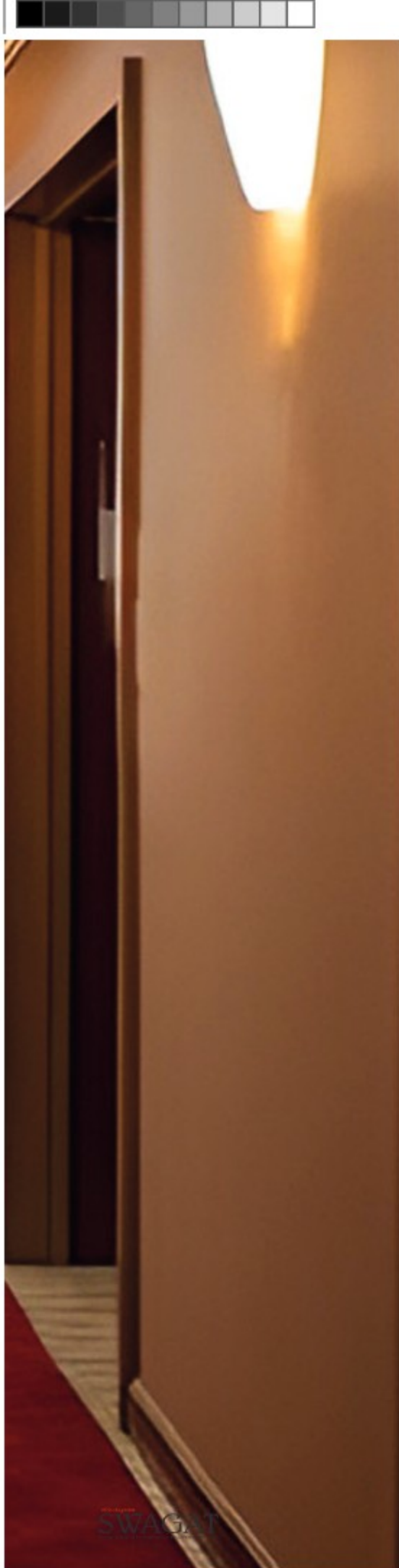
The adoption of AI is on the fast track and it holds huge potential for both the hotels and the new generation guests. ■

Kiran Kumar is Principal FKHA-Institute of Hotel Management.



Hospitality **ICRA FORESEES DECADAL HIGHS**

Hospitality Industry's occupancy will be at decadal highs in 2025 financial year, says professional investment information and credit rating agency ICRA in its February report.



It looks like the blues are wearing off and the hotel industry is on the cusp of fulsome revival. Or, at least, that is what the professional investment information and credit rating agency ICRA predicts for the industry beginning April 1. ICRA expects the Indian hotel industry to report a 7-9% revenue growth in FY2025, over the 14-16% growth expected in FY2024.

Sustenance of domestic leisure travel, demand from meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE), including weddings and business travel (despite a possible temporary lull during the election period), are likely to drive demand in FY2025.

ICRA estimates that premium hotel occupancy in India will be at

a decadal high of around 70-72% in 2024 and 2025. This is after recovering from 68-70% occupancy in 2023. ICRA also expects the average room rates (ARRs) in premium hotels to be around Rs. 7,200-7,400 in 2024 and 7,800-8,000 in 2025.

Spiritual tourism and Tier-II cities are also expected to contribute meaningfully to the growth of the industry during FY2025. Domestic tourism has been the prime demand driver in FY2024 and is likely to remain so in the near term. However, Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTA) are yet to recover to pre-Covid levels and any improvement in the situation would depend on the global macroeconomic environment.

Some reasons for demand spike in FY2025 include:

- Sustenance of domestic leisure travel
- Demand from meetings, incentives, conferences, and exhibitions (MICE)
- Demand from weddings and business travel
- Healthy demand amid relatively lower supply
- Several hotels are undergoing renovation, refurbishment, and upgradation
- Spiritual tourism and Tier II cities to help
- On the flip side, foreign tourist arrivals are yet to pick up

Spiritual tourism and Tier-II cities are also expected to contribute meaningfully to the growth of the industry during FY2025.

Although the Revenue Per Available Room (RevPAR) during FY 2024 would remain at an 8-12% discount as compared to that during the peaks seen in FY2008, it would converge towards the FY2008 peak in FY2025. The spike in ARR in some hotels and specific pockets has been higher than the average levels, with a few outliers even crossing the FY2008 peak in FY2024 itself.

The demand outlook over the medium term remains healthy, supported by a confluence of factors, including improvement in infrastructure and air connectivity, favourable demographics, and anticipated growth in large-scale MICE events with the opening of multiple new convention centres over the last few years.

Healthy demand amid relatively

lower supply would lead to higher ARRs. Several hotels are also undergoing renovation, refurbishment, and upgrade, and these are likely to support the ARRs further, going forward. Larger players would also benefit from revenues/share of profits generated from hotel expansions through management contracts and operating leases.

Explaining the findings of ICRA's survey of the hotel industry, Vinutaa S., Vice President and Sector Head – Corporate Ratings, ICRA Limited, says: "Demand is expected to remain strong across markets in FY2025 as consumer sentiments continue to be healthy and corporate performance stable. Hotel-specific demand would, however, depend on location, competition, and other property-related dynamics. Further, domestic tourism would be the prime driver, with FTA improvement depending on the global macroeconomic environment."

"Demand is expected to remain strong across markets in FY2025 as consumer sentiments continue to be healthy and corporate performance stable"

Vinutaa S., Vice President and Sector Head – Corporate Ratings, ICRA Limited.

She pointed out that Mumbai and NCR, being gateway cities, are likely to report occupancy north of 75% in FY2024 and FY2025, benefitting from transient passengers, business travellers and MICE events. The ARRs would witness a healthy YoY increase in FY2024 and FY2025 across markets. This sharp rise in ARRs of premium hotels would also result in the spillover of demand to mid-scale hotels, she says.

Sustenance of a large part of the cost-rationalisation measures undertaken during the Covid period, along with operating leverage benefits, has resulted in the sharp expansion in margins compared to pre-Covid levels. The





staff-to-room ratio remains ~15-20% lower than the pre-Covid levels. Companies have increased their usage of renewable power while pass-through of the cost inflation and strict control on fixed cost increase have also supported margins.

Asset-light expansions have been margin-accretive for larger hotel chains. ICRA's sample comprising 12 large hotel companies is expected to report strong operating margins of 31-33% for FY2024 and FY2025, against 33% for FY2023 and 20-22% pre-Covid. However, within the sample, it is likely to be a mixed bag, depending to a certain extent on renovations and increase in employee expenses amidst growing demand. De-leveraging of balance sheets has led to lower interest costs and would support net margins.

ICRA expects the uptick in earnings and cash flows to support the capital structure, going forward. Debt metrics are expected to be better than pre-Covid levels in FY2024 and are likely to improve

further in FY2025. The extent of improvement in return on capital employed (RoCE) would, however, depend on the expansion strategy and could be constrained by the high capital cost of new properties owing to increased land and construction costs in case of asset-heavy expansion.

The healthy business accruals have led to improvement in credit profiles in several companies, resulting in upgrades significantly exceeding downgrades in FY2023 and first 10 months of FY2024. "The healthy demand uptick has resulted in a pick-up in supply announcements and commencement of deferred projects in the last 18-24 months. The premium supply pipeline for FY2024-FY2026 has increased by 25-30% compared to that anticipated for the same period a year ago because of fresh signings and announcements," Ms. Vinutaa says.

Several global brands have made their entry into India. However, supply, which is expected to grow

at a CAGR of 4.5-5% over the medium term, would lag demand. Compared to the downcycle in FY2009, which saw untimely supply increases of over 15% of the inventory at the bottom of the cycle during FY2009-2013, the current low inventory growth is expected to support the upcycle as demand improves over the medium term, she adds.

A large part of the new supply is through management contracts and operating leases. Land availability issues currently constrain supply addition in the premium micro-markets in metros and larger cities. The addition to premium hotel supply in these areas is largely on account of rebranding or property upgrade, and the greenfield projects are largely in the suburbs.

Sizeable supply announcements are seen in tier-II leisure, business, and religious destinations. There is also an increase in per room construction cost by 20-25%, with cost inflation, compared to pre-Covid levels, says the ICRA report. ■

A CROWN IN THE JEWEL FOR VELI TOURIST VILLAGE

New convention centre bolsters Kerala's MICE tourism



Veli Tourist Village, a weekend getaway for the residents of the Kerala capital under the Tourism Department, has unveiled a state-of-the-art International Convention Centre, marking a significant step forward for the state's Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions (MICE) tourism sector.

This impressive 27,000 sq. ft. facility boasts high-end features that meet global standards, solidifying Kerala's position as a fast-growing MICE tourism hub. Inaugurated by Tourism Minister P.A. Mohamed Riyas, the centre has a prime lakeside location, offering breathtaking views alongside excellent functionality.

The convention centre is quite spacious and can comfortably

accommodate up to 750 attendees, while the dedicated dining hall provides ample space for 300 guests to enjoy delectable meals. And for those traveling by car, the complex features ample parking for up to 60 vehicles.

The unveiling of the convention centre is just the latest addition to Veli Tourist Village's growing list of attractions. In recent years, the village has become a haven for families and tourists alike, offering a delightful mix of activities and experiences. A particular highlight is the immensely popular miniature train, a hit with children and a charming addition created during the first phase of infrastructure development.

It is a venue targeted at both the business and professional

community who are on the lookout for an idea MICE venue, and the family crowd who wish to have a change of scene when they wish to celebrate a wedding or an extended family gathering.

The convention centre was constructed by the Department of Tourism as part of the second phase infrastructure development activities at Veli Tourist Village.

The construction work was undertaken by the Uralunkal Labour Contract Cooperative Society (ULCCS) at an estimated cost of Rs. 20 crore.

With its stunning location, new amenities, and commitment to providing exceptional experiences, Veli Tourist Village is poised to become an even more popular destination for those near and far. ■



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Contact

H.O. FKHA House, TC.16/253/1, EVRA 371,
Eswaravilasom Road, Vazhuthacaud,
Thiruvananthapuram-695014, Ph: 0471 2334445,
Mob: 9074066693, Principal: 9846936211
Email: fkhastate@gmail.com
fkhaihm@gmail.com

Thiruvananthapuram – 9946941942, Email: fkhaihmvm@gmail.com
Kollam – 8714215600, Email: fkhaihmklm@gmail.com
Kottayam – 9447216520, Email: fkhaihmktm@gmail.com
Ernakulam – 9539446677, Email: fkhaihmekm@gmail.com
Thrissur – 8281386600, Email: fkhaihmtr@gmail.com
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