



## When a 'yes' led to global recognition for Kerala tourism

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Topic | Travel

It was a novel idea - protect the water bodies and provide the tourists with entertainment. Kerala tourism took a historic step when the authorities said "yes" to this idea, casting behind the ways of the past.

Tourism Minister P S Mohammed Riyas accepted the Global Award for Responsible Tourism for the Water Street project of the tourism department, at the World Travel Market in London. Tourism Director P B Nooh and Responsible Tourism Mission coordinator K Rupesh Kumar took part in the function.

The Water Street project of Maravanthuruthu panchayat in Kottayam district drew special praise from the jury constituted by the International Centre for Responsible Tourism that coordinates tourism operations at the global level, to pick the winner from the Indian sub-continent.

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### People's initiative

The recognition for Kerala came in the field of tourism connected to water body protection. Kerala's project was a democratic initiative, the jury said.

The project envisages cleaning up canals and other water bodies and dredging them up to deepen them and using them as tourism spots.

Geotextiles were laid to protect the water bodies and tourism activities such as kayaking were introduced in them. The jury made a special mention of the Water Street project implemented in Maravanthuruthu panchayat.



Kerala Tourism Minister P S Mohammed Riyas accepted the Global Award for Responsible Tourism for the Water Street project of the tourism department, at the World Travel Market in London.

When the 18 water bodies of Maravanthuruthu became part of the tourism project, its uniqueness drew the attention of not only local tourists but even foreign visitors. Soon, the local residents became stakeholders in the tourism project. The people took upon themselves the responsibility of maintaining the project.

The street project aims at developing one tourism destination in each place with people's participation. Besides Maravanthuruthu, street projects are thriving at Kadalundi, Thrithala, Pattithara, Valiyaparamba, Pinarayi, Anjarakandy, Kanthalloor, Manchira, and Chekadi.

Riyas said that the award was a recognition for the tourism activities of Kerala that were launched after the COVID-19 crisis.

### Twin objectives

The award jury came to the conclusion that the Maravanthuruthu project was a shining example of how water bodies could be protected through tourism activities. Under the project, the panchayat cleaned up 18 canals and deepened them with the participation of the local people. Clusters of people were entrusted with the responsibility of protecting them.

Units formed as part of the responsible tourism project began service packages such as kayaking, shikara boat travels and canoe tours. The jury also took note of the constitution of a responsible tourism club to coordinate the activities of the units.



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### Job guarantee scheme

The Maravanthuruthu project began by ensuring that all the water bodies were navigable by taking up the work under the employment guarantee scheme.

The people living near the rivers, lakes, and canals took up the responsibility of planting and maintaining flower plants on the banks.

Local clubs will facilitate kayaking by tourists in the rivers and canals with the help of trained kayaking experts. Besides Water Street, projects such as Green Street, Art Street, Village Life Experience Street, Food Street, and Agri Street are also in the pipeline.

### Houses turn into art centres

Every house in the area sports pictures of the art, culture and festivals of Maravanthuruthu. It was through people's participation that these pictures became a reality, turning the area into an enchanting one.

Maravanthuruthu is surrounded by the tributaries of the Muvattupuzha river and Vembanad lake.