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Muziris to be the new tourism hub

The new heritage circuit will have a hundred destinations for tourists

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DECCAN CHRONICLE

Since childhood, we have all been told that Kerala's heritage is rich and ancient. The text books as well as literary works had it that its ports were once buzzing hubs where traders across the globe came down to do business but we lacked enough physical evidence to substantiate it. The Muziris Heritage Tourism Project by the state government, which is gaining momentum now, aims to establish the 3000-year-old legacy of Kerala and promote heritage tourism by taking visitors to historical places and monuments in the Kodungallur-North Paravur-Vypin belt.

The project

revolves around the ancient town of Muziris; how visitors representing various cultures and religions arrived at this place and how our ancestors were accommodative of such influences. As the first phase of the project is almost over and trial runs are taking place, we take a look at the possibilities of this new tourism circuit.

"The project has the potential to create a new destination, perhaps, a new region of Paravur-Kodungallur belt," says Dr Venu, civil servant and a pioneer of Kerala tourism. "So far tourism in Kochi was confined to the southern parts such as Fort Kochi. The Muziris heritage project will open up the northern parts of Kochi and a bit of Thrissur to the visitors."

Alexandra Kovacova at ancient town Muziris

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“As visitors come, new hotels and restaurants will start functioning there, providing employment to local people.”

The first phase of the project consists of a dozen destinations, including seven museums — Paliyam museum, Dutch palace museum, Kesari museum, Abdul Rahman Sahib museum, Sahodaran Ayyapan museum and two Jewish synagogues — Pattanam, Kottayail Kovilakom, Chendamangalam are a few other destinations. Construction work of eight boat jetties has got completed and recently they started hop on-hop off boat services connecting the three tourism circuits. “On

MONUMENTS UNDER MHP

- The Holy Cross Church
- Marthoma Smruthi Tharangam
- Paravur and Chendamangalam Jewish Synagogue
- Pattanam Excavation Site
- Kottayil Kovilakom
- Vypeekotta Seminary
- Paliyam Dutch Palace
- Paliyam Nalukettu
- Gothuruthu
- Kottappuram Fort
- Cheraman Parambu
- Kizhthali Siva Temple
- Thiruvanchikulam Mahadeva Temple
- Cheraman Juma Masjid
- Kodungalloor Bhagavathi Temple
- Abdul Rahman Sahib's House
- Marthoma Pontifical Shrine
- Pallippuram Fort
- The Azheekal Sree Varaha temple
- The Manjumatha church
- Kottapuram market
- Kottakkavu church
- The Kodungalloor temple

September 7, we will launch a Chavitunatakam performance centre at Gothuruthu. Soon there will be a heritage restaurant. So, after boating, visitors can take some rest there while enjoying the traditional art form. In the second phase, we will be setting up a maritime museum,” says V.D. Satheesan, MLA of Paravur constituency.

According to Alexandra Kovacova, a traveler-cum-blogger from Slovakia who visited Muziris recently, the whole journey was like finding a lost treasure. “I am a huge archaeology fan and the visit was exciting. I could feel peaceful energy all around Muziris and really enjoyed listening to its stories. In Kerala, things take usually longer and there's some disorganisation compared to Western tourism, but the smiling faces of the locals who are always willing to help make up for it,” she says.

It will surely be much more than a regular tourist spot. Dr Venu says, “It will throw light on the entry of earliest forms of various religions to this place and the tolerance and mutual trust that existed then. We have been talking about his, but had no tangible region to showcase that. That will be made available through this project.”

Agreeing with him is Benny Kuriakose, Conservation Consultant of Muziris Heritage Project. “The project was envisioned in 2006 by the then finance minister who allocated an amount for this project in the budget. Though excavation at Pattanam began in 2007, we came into the scene in 2008. We prepared a master plan, in fact a draft master plan, which can be modified later as we were carrying out studies and planning simultaneously. We selected places, which were a part of history, giving importance to monuments that have preserved the heritage.”

While designing the circuits, they were very par-

HERITAGE BOOST FOR KERALA TOURISM



Kottayail Kovilakom



Abdul Rahman Sahib museum



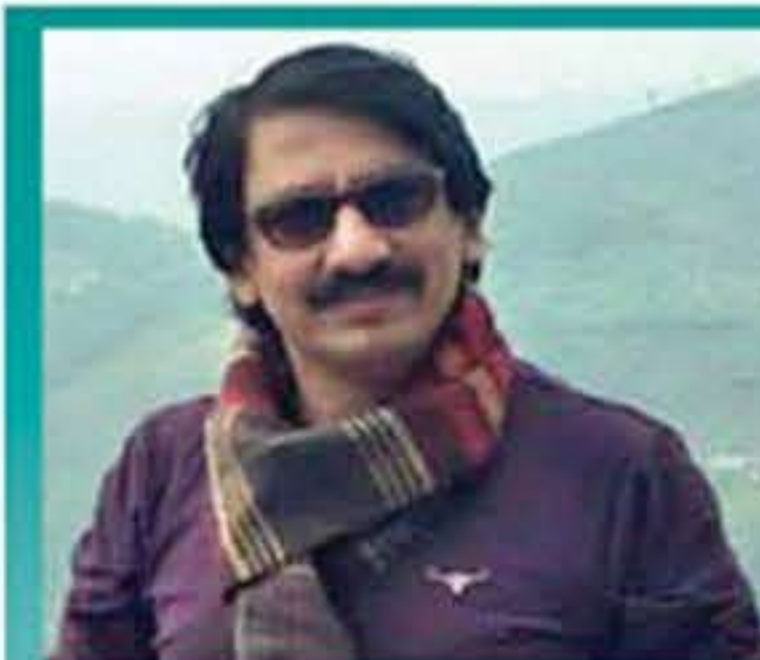
Kodungalloor backwaters



Pallipuram Fort

ticular about retaining the character of the villages where these historic sites lay. “We wanted it to be sustainable tourism. It is a community driven project and hence community has a say in it. The villages in the region are quite serene and we didn't want to disturb it. It was sure that on-road transportation would destroy the calmness of the place and would create parking issues near monuments. Hence we focused on boat services to connect the various circuits,” he says.

According to V.D. Satheesan, in future, it will be the biggest heritage project in Asia. “Then, there will be 100 destinations in the Muziris map for tourists.”



DR VENU

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