

Kerala now woos Indian middle-class tourists

Having attracted a large number of foreign tourists year after year, Kerala is now wooing Indian middle-class tourists and holding roadshows to promote the coastal state in several places.

"We realise that Kerala has got an image that it is an expensive destination to go to within India. We are now focusing on a special campaign with a 'Dream Season' for domestic middle-class tourists to bring Kerala within their reach," Kerala tourism director M. Sivasankar said here Friday.

The state's tourism authority has chosen Chandigarh as one of the seven cities where it is putting up roadshows to attract domestic tourists.

Sivasankar said that Kerala, which has been rated by National Geographic as one of the Top 10 'must-visit' destinations in the world, offered a wide variety to tourists from its beaches, backwaters, eco-tourism and wildlife to adventure, boat racing and rural tourism.

Kerala, marketed successfully as 'God's Own Country', got over 20 percent more foreign tourists in 2007 compared to the previous year. Domestic tourists increased by just under six percent.

Foreign exchange earnings were nearly over Rs.25 billion - a record growth of nearly 33 percent. The total revenue from tourism in 2007 was Rs.114.33 billion.

Sivasankar added that Kochi city had been included in the premier offshore yacht race - the Volvo Ocean Race - which would be held there in December. He said that the grand Kerala shopping festival introduced last year had given another reason to tourists to visit the state.

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