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After communism, Kerala & Bengal seek unity in tourism

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: After ideology, fish curry and football, Kerala and West Bengal are on the cusp of identifying another unifying ground - tourism.

What is surprising is that for all the traffic of politburo members of the communist parties between Kolkatha and Thiruvananthapuram, there had not been a direct flight between the two states, which had been a hindrance to domestic tourism business between the two states.

Now that the efforts of the state tourism department and the tour operators in the state have got Indigo airline to connect Kolkatha and Kochi with a stopover at Bangalore, Kerala tourism is expecting to lure tourists from the eastern markets, particularly from West Bengal.

Ahmedabad, Mumbai and Bangalore have been the prime markets for Kerala's domestic tourism business so far, and the new flight connection is expected to open up a whole new market segment for Kerala tourism.

"We have already drawn up a package for tourists from West Bengal to holiday in Kerala, beginning August 1. What is special is that the destinations of Munnar, Thekkady and Kumarakom are included in the package, which should make it an appealing proposition", says Anish Kumar PK, honorary secretary of the Association of Tourism Trade Organisations of India (ATTOI).

The package offers a 5-day vacation in Kerala at Rs 7,999 per person on a twin-sharing basis, and a special Kolkatha-Kochi return fare of Rs 7,000.

ATTOI will join hands with Kerala tourism authorities to hold a roadshow in Kolkatha later this month, to promote the package and spread awareness of the new connectivity between the two states. Anish Kumar says the road show will consist of B2B and B2C segments, and detailed presentations on the different product offerings of Kerala tourism.

Tour operators in the state are betting on a healthy flow of Bengali tourists to Kerala from August. Says one Thiruvananthapuram-based tour operator: "If the Kerala fish curry is not reason enough for a Bengali to come over, there is the attraction of the Vivekananda Memorial, a veritable pilgrimage destination for Bengalis, that is only a few hours drive from the Kerala capital".

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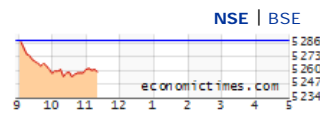
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