

Business News > Industry > After beaches and forests, Kerala to showcase heritage

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Synopsis

Tourism in Kerala, which has so far targeted mainly beaches, forests and backwaters, will soon showcase the glory of the 3000-year old Muziris port, unveiling three millennia of heritage to the world.

KOCHI: **Tourism in Kerala**, which has so far targeted mainly beaches, forests and backwaters, will soon showcase the glory of the 3000-year old Muziris port, unveiling three millennia of **heritage** to the world.

The **Muziris Heritage Project**, claimed to be the first of its kind in the country, when completed is expected to turn Muziris into a major destination for cultural tourism, chief project consultant Benny Kuriakose said.

Muziris, 27 kms from Kochi, was a port city that was among the earliest of its kind in the world. It is also unique as home to India's first church Mar Thoma church, first mosque Cheraman Juma Masjid and the oldest European monument Portuguese fort.

Situated on India's south-western coast, Muziris was a spice city where the traders of the world -- Greeks, Romans, Arabs and Chinese -- thronged to buy and sell a variety of wares, mainly spices and clothes. As they did business, they became partners in promoting an early model of cosmopolitanism with Muziris as its global nucleus.

Recent and ongoing excavations by archaeologists have yielded evidence of the ancient glory of the place as a hub of commercial activity, including a jetty whose wood was carbon dated to 2500 years by scientists.

The state had so far marketed its beaches and backwaters but not so much its heritage and history. The Muziris project was an endeavour to bring to visitor's mindscape a culture of 3,000 years or more in all its plentitude and complexity.

There was a good deal of it in the state to be conserved and protected as monuments -- shrines, palaces, forts, seminaries, cemeteries, boat yards, markets and so on.

These old human conclaves, whatever is left of them, were being showcased so as to make the voyage into history a supreme excitement.

"It's been two years since we started the project and in another two to three months, it would be opened for tourists," Kuriakose said. Nineteen departments and agencies were working for the project and many more coordinating.

The project, which includes a central aid of Rs 40 crore, "is a walk through 3,000 years of Kerala history. Buddhists, Arabs, Chinese, Jews, Romans, Portuguese, Dutch and British came here. Jews have left two synagogues. We are trying to link all these.. the existing muziris and the sites," he said.

A series of 27 museums, spread over the heritage region displaying maritime trade, life style, barter system and handicrafts, were being planned and five would be opened next year, Kuriakose said.