Kerala

# A treasure trove of heritage, diversity

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*President to launch Muziris phase one today*

ebruary 27. President Pranab Mukherjee will throw open over two dozen heritage museums, places of worship and other sites conserved at a cost of Rs.104 crore in Muziris, a port that is believed to have fallen off the map in the 13th century due to a massive flood, an earthquake – or both.

The hoary port that played a key role in maritime trade is said to have been spread along North Paravur and Kodungalloor bordering Ernakulam and Thrissur districts. Excavation works here yielded innumerable pottery, ceramic, metal and other relics from across the seas. The heritage footprints in the region, spread over 125 sq km, are so many that a discerning visitor may take at least a week to get a fair idea of the region's history and cultural diversity.

Muziris, whose legacy goes back to 3,000 years ago, is said to have been the largest port of the ancient times in the East and traded in everything from precious

stones to spices. It also served as doorway for various cultures and races to India, says T.V. Anupama, Director of Kerala Tourism, whose department spearheaded the conservation efforts.

**First phase**

Mr. Mukherjee would launch the first phase of Muziris Heritage Project following which Kerala Tourism plans a slew of initiatives to showcase the locale before the whole world, she said. The second phase of conservation efforts have begun and a few components are over. The work on the project was initiated in 2009 with Kerala Tourism initiating a proposal. The Centre approved it within a year and thus began a Centre-State joint conservation effort to launch phase one by 2013. Ms. Anupama attributed the delay in launching the project to the laborious process involved in planning and implementing the components of the massive project.

**Getting around**

On getting around the heritage locales, she said that this can be done by foot, bicycle, boat and road. “Air conditioned hop on, hop off boats and (the smaller water taxis) offer circuit packages. We will bring in more boats when demand increases. Trained guides too are available. Food courts will shortly be opened in the locale.”

The conservation works were supervised by the Planning Division of Kerala Tourism and supported by Benny Kuriakose, a conservation consultant. A company, Muziris Project Ltd., has been formed to oversee the operation and maintenance of all components of the Muziris heritage project.

Next in the pipeline is a huge maritime museum for which land acquisition is underway, Ms. Anupama said. The ongoing works will get over by 2017.