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Bharananganam Entices Spiritual Tourists World over

Tourism in the modern day is an increasingly important industry. It is an integral part of economic, social and sustainable development. An estimate of



World Travel and Tourism Council(WTTC) indicated a 4.5 percent per annum increase in the total amount of travel and tourism economic activity between 2002 and 2012. Over the next ten years, tourism products and attractions will have to cater to visitors who are more demanding and discriminating, as well as more active and more purposeful in their choice of destinations. The tourism industry is forecasted to experience a paradigm shift from visual and passive enjoyment to experimental and active learning. Both the quality and genuineness of travel and hospitality services will be crucial to all tourism stakeholders for successful operation in a competitive market. Tourism has always stood as an unique vehicle for cultural propagation, which is essential to a deeper understanding of people.

As tourism industry is experiencing a boom, India is poised to go to the places in niche market segments. Health and medical tourism sector is expanding steadily and is attracting tourists from overseas. Rural Tourism, once a novelty is gaining acceptance among tourists, both domestic and foreign. It is generally perceived that India with its vast virgin territory is a traveler's delight, waiting to be explored by the discerning fractor. The upper end Indian traveler is net savvy end makes most of his holiday decisions and bookings based on resources from the internet.

SPIRITUAL TOURISM

Tourism is often associated with leisure, fun,

aesthetics economic boom and adventure. Yet, tourism can also be about the spiritual. Tourism generates a positive spiritual impact, which in the period of stress, strain and conflicts, is essentially the order of the day. Tourism is strongly linked to spiritual outlook and experiences in many ways. The magnificent ways of the sea triggers different emotions and feelings in the minds of tourists. It may be awe, excitement, or any other elated feeling. This spiritual experience helps to put the individual in touch with that which is beyond self, but, enriches that which is deep within the self. It is holistic in every sense and relates to body, mind and physical environment. Spiritual Tourism in India is probably as old as its 4000 plus years old civilization. The land is indeed gifted with an unending array of incredible attractions in the form of religion and mysticism. The birth place of yoga and meditation, in the 21st Century, the nation has become a tempting destination for spiritual tourists. The Indian exotica offer multitude of meanings and experiences and become everything to everybody. Tourists relish an entirely different spiritual flavour in places like Pondicherry, Amarnath, Goa, Pune and Kerala (Sabarimala Pilgrimage).

International Spiritual Tourism Centre

Bharananganam located in Kottayam District of Kerala, is in the limelight owing to the elevation of St. Alphonsa to Sainthood. This village is renowned globally for entombing the mortal remains of Alphonsamma. Church bells tolled Bharananganam when Pope Benedict XIV canonized Alophonsa in an open air ceremony held at St. Peter's Square in Vatican on the 12th of October, 2008. The Pope has named her St. Alphonsa of Immaculate Conception. Bharananganam used to be frequented by pilgrims since a very long time. The Alphonso Chapel in the campus of the St. Mary's Forane Church at Bharananganam used to be thronged with devotees much before canonization. Now, Bharananganam may be given the status of an International Spiritual Tourist Centre. It is noteworthy that St. Alphonsa has become the first woman from India to be conferred sainthood.

Alphonsamma born as Anna Joseph at Muttathupadom in Kudamaloor near Kottayam, on August 19, 1910 became a Francisco Clarist nun adopting the name Sr. Alphonsa. She occupied a prominent place in the heart of devotees as an em-

bodiment of unequalled simplicity, willpower, perseverance, fortitude and divinity. St. Alphonsa had been an exceptional woman, who was a model of divine love, penance and renunciation.

From the solitude of a nunnery, Alphonsamma rose to be a blessed one, a cynosure of universal spirituality. In her lifetime St. Alphonsa suffered several setbacks which did not deter her from being humane, modest and compassionate. With a strong determination to enter a convent as a nun and avert marriage, she deliberately stepped into a burning fire and disfigured her feet. St. Alphonsa was seriously affected by ailments in her relatively short time. This did not curtail her spirit to serve the people and acted with utmost devotion. She died at the age of 36 in the



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year 1946 and her burial place became a pilgrimage site especially for those seeking relief from ill health. St. Alphonsa took the sufferings of life as a challenge and dedicated herself to the supreme judgement of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Bharananganam symbolizes the spirit of service amidst difficulties. The place is poised to become a

much sought after spiritual tourism destination. Bharananganam, post Canonization of St. Alphonsa has caught the attention of devotees from all over the world. This village will be experiencing the influx of pilgrims from far and wide. Spiritual tourists to this holy land can draw inspiration and achieve self realization apart from developing virtues such as patience, tolerance and non-violence.

In the present world, tourism is not only a medium for enjoyment but also for spiritual enlightenment. Bharananganam stands out for propagating the message of love, peace and dedicated service to human beings. These qualities form the basis of spirituality and hence, Bharananganam is definitely going to become a spiritual tourists haven.

A Saint before her sainthood

“The message of St. Alphonsa’s life is in consonance with the lessons of sufferings and tolerance that many great teachers from Gautama Buddha to Kabir Das, have showcased while scripting new philosophies for future generations. But the relevance of St. Alphonsa and her life, especially at a time when religiosity is gaining priority is a significance not just to Christians but to new age spiritual leaders of all communities whose focus is on politico-economics and spiritual commerce.

A re-reading of St. Alphonsa’s life in these times of religio-politicking helps us understand that it is a kind heart and a dedicated life that gives one a



space in the heart of the community. Sr. Alphonsa, in her 36 years of life, did not build a single school or hospital; did not lead any

protest marches, but she did spread unadulterated love all around and this made each person she met pray, for sainthood.



The magic of St. Alphonsa was that she woke the sleeping saint in the hundreds of people who prayed to her. Their enduring faith in her lit candles of love in their hearts brightened their lives and those of their families. And even if the Vatican had not canonised, St. Alphonsa would’ve continued to live as one.

And there in lies the deeper message St. Alphonsa has left for all the living saints in our community. Professed saintliness without empathy and sympathy for others can only be deemed a fancy dress; service should be laced with love, compassion and sincerity.”(Editorial: The New Indian Express) ■