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## Kerala Tourism to use mobile as media tool

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THIRUVANANTHAPURAM: Kerala Tourism has found just the right media tool that will help it draw the maximum number of domestic tourists to the state. It is not the radio, or the television or even the computer. It is the mobile phone.

The Tourism Department will soon unveil its two-phase mobile strategy, the first-of-its-kind for any tourism destination. In phase-I, the launch of which will coincide with the commencement of the monsoon, the Department will run a three-month 'Discover Unseen Kerala' contest on GPRS-enabled mobile phones. Users have to identify the unseen locations featured on the 'mobsite' and also answer questions about Kerala.

The winner will get a fully paid trip to some of the finest destinations in the state. Mobile users will be led to Kerala Tourism's 'mobsite' through advertisements parked strategically in various mobile ad networks. The database of mobile users collected during phase-I will be the capital of phase-II. The mobile group formed from the database of phase-I will charge phase-II. During this phase, the members of the Kerala Tourism mobile group will be fed with regular mobile alerts about Kerala Tourism, especially about its new packages.

"But that's not the exciting part. Once the group achieves a certain critical mass the members will be encouraged to upload their photos and comments on the Kerala Tourism mobile site," said Sanjay Vijayakumar, the CEO of MobME Wireless Solutions, the start-up that supports Kerala Tourism's mobile strategy.

This interactive approach is in line with the Tourism Department's objective to make content related to Kerala Tourism participatory. "A tourist's first-hand experience carries more authenticity than the polished words in a travel brochure. And because these first-person accounts are believable, they are infinitely more compelling too," Tourism Director M Shivshankar said. The participatory aspect of the strategy, however, will be implemented only after a proper database is collected.

Kerala Tourism's mobile strategy has been inspired by the following facts. One, currently there are over 350 million mobile users in the country. Two, over 10 million users are added to this number every month. And three, there are more people accessing the internet through the mobile than the computer.

The Department, in fact, had tested the potency of mobile phones as a media tool four months ago, to boost its 'Dream Season' campaign. "Then we had done an SMS ShortCode-based campaign for Dream Season. The objective was limited, just to generate leads. The response was overwhelming. So we thought of scaling up the operation," Shivshankar said.

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