



Floating Conferences

Kerala, symbolic of the bounty and benevolence of God, offers to the travellers unexpected beauty and serenity. The enchanting backwaters of Kerala need no introduction and cruising through the backwaters on houseboats, traditionally known as 'kettuvallam', has always been a wonderful experience for those who have had the opportunity to use them. Spending an entire day for business meetings on the houseboats, while enjoying the fascinating beauty of Kerala's backwaters would be an inimitable experience for corporate travellers. With scores of captivating and innovative MICE destinations expanding all over the world, the idea of MICE events on multi-deck conference houseboat that allow executives to enjoy the scenic backwaters, is grandiose. Be a witness to the network of canals, estuaries, lakes, lagoons and deltas linking towns along the Arabian Sea and inland.

"There are some 15 houseboats of different styles with conference facilities. Most of the bigger boats have around 5-6 rooms in addition to a hall on the top which can be used for conferences or meetings. These houseboats can accommodate up to 70 (non-air conditioned deck) and 50 (air conditioned hall) delegates in theatre style on the upper deck. Houseboats with an upper deck are usually non-air conditioned but are suitable for day cruises; only 3-4 houseboats are air conditioned," informs Anish Kumar, CEO, The Incentive Planners.

Even as the capacity of each houseboat varies, those meant for conferences can accommodate between 150-300 people, depending on the client's needs. "An alternative, for your convenience, is to conduct the event in backwater resorts, where better preparations, for example internet connectivity can be facilitated and lodging arrangements can be made on the houseboats. For this purpose there are approximately 500 houseboats available in Alleppey with two rooms in each boat, therefore a supply of 1000 rooms on the houseboats," he added.

The houseboats have very basic technical equipment installed in them and therefore it is best to inform your operator of the specific needs such as electrical equipment, extension boards, projectors, internet facility, etc. "There may not be any professional support on the houseboat thus it is better to let a trained team manage the MICE event with a proper back up. We have an event management team which can handle the equipment," stressed Kumar. Also arrange for a trained technician to ensure hassle-free and smooth functioning conferences.

"One can customise the route of the houseboat as per the wish of the group - but bigger houseboats face obstacles, like bridges etc. on the way. Therefore, it is better to select the route in advance so as to avoid any problems later," he informed. Enjoy the pristine beauty of the villages, acquaint the group to the aquatic scenery of water lilies and palm trees and enjoy a



Anish Kumar
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party in remote areas. The group can also try the local cuisines. Often the cuisine is whipped up by the on-board chef, from ingredients purchased en route. However, for larger groups, a fixed menu is prepared as per their preference. During meal hours the houseboat is anchored at a scenic spot in the ‘Venice of the East’, thereby the group on board can have their meal while enjoying the cool breeze and panoramic view of the lush green expanse of Alleppey.

“In the evening each boat caters to their in-house guests,” said Kumar. While on the houseboat, the groups are entertained with programmes that enlighten

and enrich them with Kerala’s magnificent culture and heritage. Theme dinners, like fisherman village or the ambience of the local Kuttanadu Village can be created for the group to get the feel of the local village environment. “At the end of the day, programmes such as a DJ night, Cocktail dinner or traditional dance shows like ‘Kathakali’ and ‘Mohiniyattam’ can also be arranged.” he added.

“Conducting programmes together with backwater resorts is another option, since they have better outdoor facilities and a better equipped kitchen,” he further added. The best part about backwater conferences is that they are feasible throughout the year. “Both winters and summers are suitable for the incentive programmes as well as for conferences,” he said. However in monsoons, though the conferences can be scheduled on the houseboats, but for the incentive programmes that follow, one may have to depend on indoor resorts. If you are planning a MICE event in August, ensure that it clashes with the Nehru Trophy boat race that takes place on the second Saturday of August every year. Although the houseboats, due to their huge size, cannot be accommodated in the race area, provisions can be made so that the corporate travellers can watch this prestigious event. The operator can make arrangements for the travellers to enjoy the elaborate festival from a pavilion.

Backwaters of Alleppey have developed into a convention hub after the emergence of luxury houseboats that offer special packages for on-board meetings. “We have about 10-12 conferences taking place on the houseboats every year,” said Kumar. 🏠