

Accessible Beaches in Kerala



Impact

A total of 38 beaches now have barrier-free facilities as a result of our "Beach for All" campaign. This means the 33,820 people living with disabilities in Kerala can now visit the beaches in the State. We added gender-neutral and accessible toilets, tactile walkways and ramps, braille signage, open gymnasiums, interactive touch-screen kiosks, and beach wheelchairs. ESAF also helped improve the capacities of various Municipalities and Municipal Corporations in decision-making for future investments in accessibility.

Background

Along the southwestern coast of India, the state of Kerala has countless beaches that are frequented by residents and tourists. Open public spaces like beaches are an important part of every community. Public spaces are beneficial to the health of community members, can contribute to gender equality and decent work, and are also important for climate action. Given that public spaces can positively impact the residents that live near them, it is important to ensure that they are accessible to all community members.

In 2015, ESAF conducted research across 25 beaches in Kerala to determine the facilities available to visitors and the quality of those facilities. It was found that beaches were the least-used public spaces in Kerala and that no beach destinations had facilities for people living with disabilities to support them to access the beaches.

The Livable Cities India project, implemented by the ESAF Foundation, acts as a platform to address the accessibility issues of beaches in the state of Kerala. Beginning in 2015 ESAF began working with the Urban Local Bodies (ULB), the Local Self Government Institutions (LSGIs) and the Department of Tourism of the Government of Kerala. Together we conducted research studies to convert beaches across the state into accessible and barrier-free spaces.

'Beach for All' Campaign

After establishing that beaches in Kerala were inaccessible for people living with disabilities, the 'Beach for All' campaign was launched in 2017. The goal of the 'Beach for All' campaigns was to demonstrate to policymakers the challenges that are faced by persons with disabilities, and ultimately, advocate for accessible infrastructure to be established at the beaches. More specifically, the campaign involved redesigning the beaches to be more accessible, demonstrating its potential for becoming more inclusive, particularly for persons with disabilities.

The 'Beach for All' campaigns were featured in major news outlets to gain the attention of the public, as well as policymakers. Following advocacy, the number of newspaper articles and media coverage demanding accessible and barrier-free infrastructure on beaches has increased dramatically. In 2019, 35 newspaper articles were published about accessibility in parks and beaches, whereas previously, only 16 articles were featured between 2013 and 2016. In total, there have been 89 newspaper reports with a total circulation reach of 2,451,349 households.

In total 23 'Beach for All' campaigns have been organized since 2017. Approximately 7820 people attended the campaigns in total, since 2017, including 3795 people living with disabilities. These campaigns played a significant role in raising awareness about the need for accessible beaches among policymakers, resulting in the eventual establishment of accessible beaches by the State through their "Barrier-free and Accessible Kerala Tourism" project. ESAF provided technical support to the Department of Tourism to make 38 beach destinations barrier-free. In terms of enhancing an accessible environment, the 'Beach for All' campaigns undoubtedly helped Kerala's beaches, and the state was included in the New York Times yearly list of 52 places to visit in 2023.





Pilot Projects

In 2018 ESAF received funding from the ‘UN-Habitat Global Public Space Programme’ to establish an accessible beach walkway at Munambam Muziris Beach in Ernakulam. As a result of creating a barrier-free ramp at the beach, ESAF created accessibility for those living with disabilities. Prior to the pilot project, only 52 people were observed to be using the beach and no one living with a disability. After the pilot, 397 people were observed to be using the beach including 50 children and adults living with disabilities.

The impact of this project was increased understanding among decision-makers of the importance of building inclusive spaces for people living with disabilities resulting in government commitment to create more inclusive spaces through both design and budget.

Barrier-Free Handbook

The success of the ‘Beach for All’ campaign and the pilot projects led to the development of a ‘Barrier-free Handbook’ that outlined the types of facilities and infrastructure that would help people living with disabilities to use the beaches and other public spaces safely and comfortably. Developed in 2020, the Department of Tourism of the Government of Kerala, encourages architects, government engineering colleges, municipal corporations, and implementation agencies to use this handbook as a reference guide to successfully establish accessible public spaces.

The Government of Kerala’s ‘Barrier-free and Accessible Kerala Tourism Project’

In 2018, ESAF began providing technical support to the District Tourism Promotion Councils (DTPC) of five districts to establish accessible infrastructure in beaches. Some of the changes included the following:

- Unisex accessible toilets
- Accessible rain shelters
- Braille pamphlets to help people locate different play and other recreational facilities at the beach
- Tactile walkway to the beach
- Accessible walkways with tactile tiles
- Accessible drinking water fountains
- Ramps with handrails, inclusive play equipment
- Motorized and manual wheelchairs, beach wheelchairs, and amphibious beach wheelchairs
- Interactive touch screen kiosks (Wheelchair accessible with screen reader and magnifiers)
- Braille signages
- Audio guides
- Accessible children’s play areas

ESAF’s technical support was an important component of the program. Overall, ESAF provided technical support to implement barrier-free and accessible features for the 38 beach destinations across the state of Kerala.

As a result of all of ESAF’s efforts including the events and campaigns, pilot projects, handbook, consultation support and overall advocacy, the State of Kerala has endorsed the concept of building accessible public spaces. In total, 38 beaches in five districts of Kerala, including Ernakulam, Trivandrum, Kozhikode, Thrissur, and Malappuram, were made accessible and barrier-free. In addition, Kappad Beach in Kerala received the coveted blue flag certification.

In total the State invested \$ 6,320,144.25 (USD) in their 'Barrier-free and Accessible Kerala Tourism Project' and 'Green Carpet Scheme' and accessible beaches can now be found throughout the state. The beaches have gone from being one of the least used spaces in the State to a popular destination with over 3,040,000 people using the beaches including 33,820 people living with disabilities.

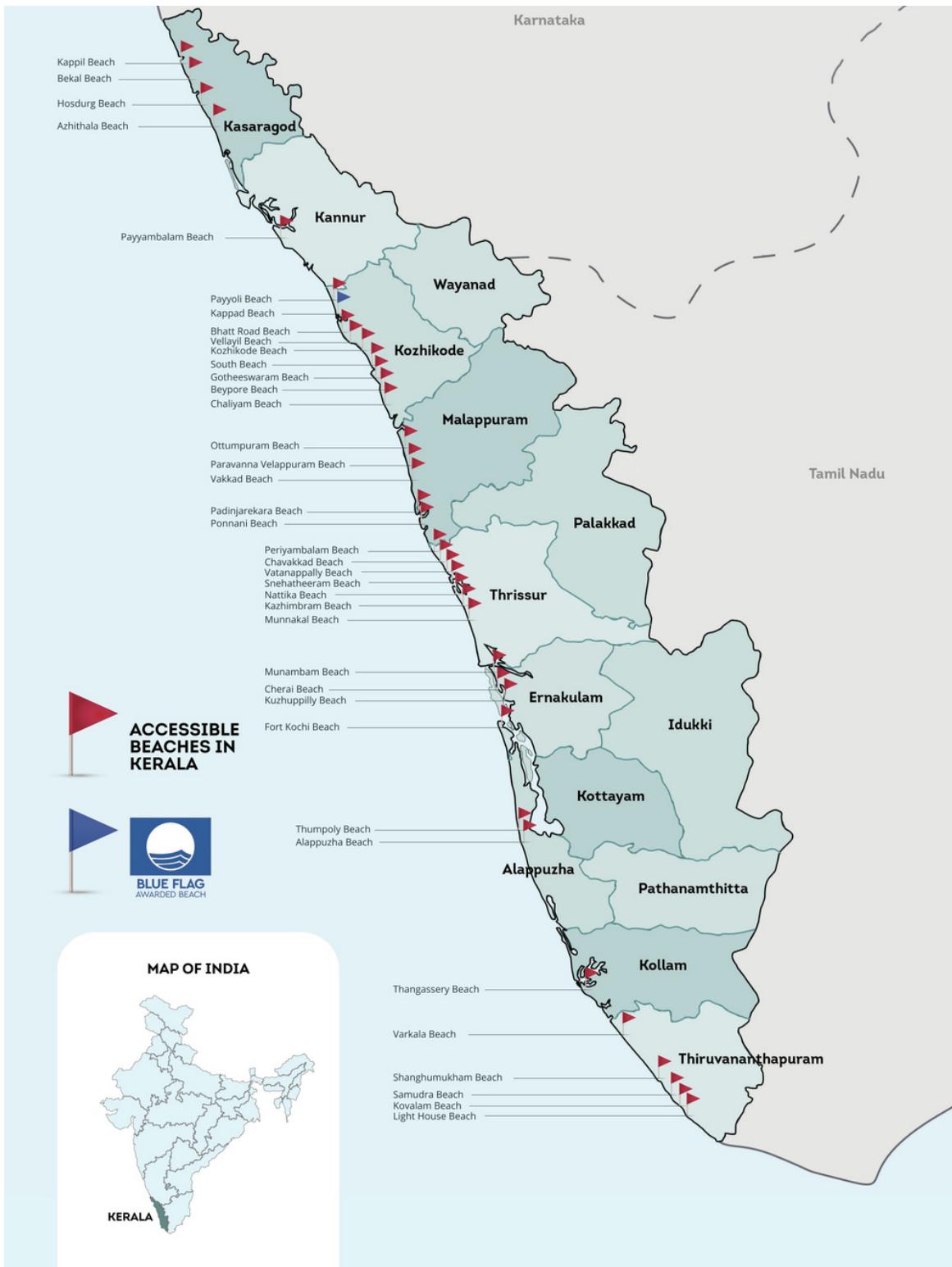
In 2019, the United Nations World Tourism Organization and Fundación Once recognized the project by naming the barrier-free model supported by ESAF and implemented by the Thrissur DTPC the 'Accessible Tourism Destination 2019 Special Mention'.

Conclusion

Beginning in 2015, ESAF's efforts resulted in 38 beaches now having facilities for people living with disabilities. The handbook developed by ESAF is now being used as a reference document by the urban local bodies, the Department of Tourism of Kerala, and the state-level implementing agencies to create inclusive public spaces across India. Moving forward, we plan to continue promoting "Beach for All Campaigns" with the local government bodies. In addition, ESAF is a stakeholder in the team giving design recommendations to the Government of Kerala's Draft Design Policy. The policy aims to make all tourism destinations, including beaches across the state, women, children, and pedestrian-friendly. This policy will contribute to creating standardized signage and lighting and will integrate technology into communication and public spaces. This will increase adherence to a universal design by raising design awareness among all levels of government and the private sector.



Map of Accessible Beaches in Kerala



'Beach for All' Campaign in Kerala



2015

ESAF Conducted Research Across 25 Beaches

- To identify accessibility issues in beaches across Kerala.
- Shared finding with District Tourism Promotion Councils (DTPCs)



2017

Started 'Beach for All' Campaign

- First campaign was held at Fort Kochi beach
- Purpose was to illustrate the lack of accessible infrastructure on beaches and the need for resource allocation



Provided Technical Support to DTPCs to Implement "Barrier-Free Kerala Tourism Project"

- Provided support to construct infrastructure such as accessible walkways and toilets.



2018

ESAF Received Funding

- Received funding from the *UN Habitat Global Public Space Program* to construct accessible beach walkways at Munambam Muziris Beach in Ernakulam and an inclusive children's park at Mananchira Square in Kozhikode



2019

Accessible Tourism Destination Special Mention

- The barrier-free model implemented by the Thrissur DTPC won the *Accessible Tourism Destination Special Mention* in 2019 by the UN World Tourism Organization and Foundation Once



2020

Developed 'Barrier-Free Handbook'

- Developed handbook for the Department of Tourism of Kerala
- It is now used as a reference guide by various government actors to construct accessible public spaces.

