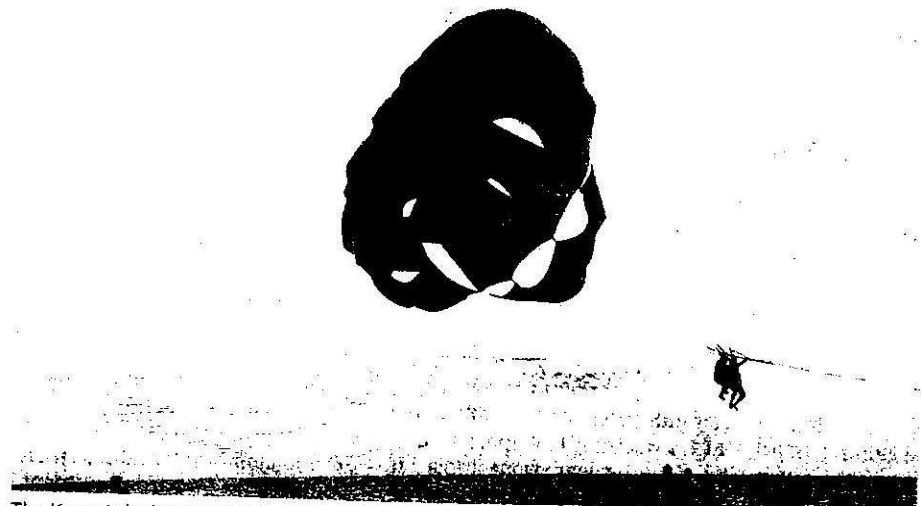


# Karnataka looks to set up 100 helipads to boost tourism

## Plans are on to introduce seaplanes in six or seven places



The Karnataka Tourism Department is looking at various activities to attract more visitors, as the sector remains hard hit by the pandemic for a second year. • FILE PHOTO

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Taking a step further on the Centre's UDAN Scheme, the Karnataka Tourism Department is looking at heli-tourism to build connectivity between important destinations and attract more visitors, as the sector remains hard hit by the COVID-19 pandemic for a second year.

Though business picked up towards the year end in some parts, a second wave of infections have threatened to derail any progress.

In an interview to *The Hindu*, Tourism Minister C.P. Yogeshwar said new concepts are being introduced to revive the sector, among which is heli-tourism.

"We are looking at establishing around 100 helipads, including setting up heliports at Jakkur in Bengaluru, near Lalit Mahal palace in Mysuru, Mangaluru, Kamplapura in Hampi, Hubballi-Dharwad, and Kalaburagi. The idea is to create scientific infrastructure, have permanent fire and water services and make it a permanent heliport after which we will enter into an understanding with private players," he said.

The Minister added that a meeting was scheduled with HAL to provide the Tourism Department with copters. "Foreign tourists who come to Goa do not come to Hampi though it is a World Heritage Site because of lack of connectivity. We will request the government to reduce GST on helicopters. A committee is looking at heli-tourism and experts' advice will be followed. Private partners will look into the logistics of operations while infrastructure will be ours," he added.

The department is also looking at introducing seaplanes in six or seven places under the UDAN scheme, and sites being looked at are Mangaluru, Udupi backwaters, KRS, Hampi, Almatti, and Tungabhadra.

**Unexplored destinations**  
Acknowledging that tourism was concentrated in a few parts of Karnataka, mainly Mysuru, Kodagu, Kabini, Hampi, and Chikkamagaluru, he said there were many historically significant sites in the State, especially in Kalyana Karnataka, that are unknown about. They have taken the help of a team from the Central University of

Karnataka in Kalaburagi to introduce a course that can yield tourism-ready professionals.

He also stressed the need for coordination between departments such as Muzrai, Archaeological Survey of India, and Forest Department to propel the sector in Karnataka. "The government will start building hotels in prime destinations such as Belur Halebidu, Hampi, Vijayapura, Kalaburagi, Badami, etc. under the KSTDC," he said. He also said those who want to set up hotels in Kalyana Karnataka will be given 25%.

As for the long coastal belt, Mr. Yogeshwar said around 30 to 35 spots have been identified for water sports wherein private players can be encouraged to step in. "There are so many spots in the 320-km coastline. Yet, most people go to Kerala and Goa," he said, pointing out to the lack of activities.

Speaking about its neighbouring competitors, he said the Karnataka government will talk to its south Indian counterparts to explore opening a South Indian circuit to mutually benefit from tourism.