



## 500 INTERNATIONAL DELEGATES CONVERGE AT RESPONSIBLE TOURISM CONFERENCE IN KOCHI

More than 500 delegates from the Travel and Tourism industry, governments, academia and the media gathered at the Incredible India 2nd International Conference in Kochi today.

Minister for Home, Vigilance and Tourism, Shri. Kodyeri Balakrishnan inaugurated the event at the Le Meridien Convention Centre. His address was followed by the presidential address by Mr. Shilabhadra Banerjee, Secretary -Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

Also present were Dr Harsh Varma, Director Development Assistance -UNWTO, Ms Fiona Jeffery, Chairman - World Travel Mart and Mr. Hiran Cooray Secretary/Treasurer, PATA. Under the theme Responsible Tourism in Destinations the Conference provides an excellent platform for experts of the industry to share their expertise.

Dr Venu V, Secretary Kerala Tourism said the Conference brings together experts at the local, national and global level from over 25 countries for open dialogue on issues and opportunities crucial to shaping the future of the tourism industry. Speakers at the conference are united by their aim to raise awareness of the need to develop effective and sustainable responses which might minimize negative impacts on the environment.

"Kerala is a fitting host to the event and it is recognition for the enormous progress made by the tourism industry in the state. This is a great opportunity for us to tap into ideas and learn from the international experts to advance responsible tourism growth and unlock the full potential of our industry in Kerala", he added.

Over the next 4 day 65 speakers will engage and discuss candidly on topics as wide ranging as; local economic development and poverty reduction; taking responsibility for destination sustainability; travel philanthropy and the role of government-national and local.

Several issues and themes will emerge the next few days and these will be open for panel discussion on the final day of the Conference on Monday, 24th March. Delegates' conclusions and summations will be followed by the drafting of the Kerala Declaration on Responsible Tourism 2008.

Tourism is one of the largest industries in the world today, responsible for employing more than 200 million people and generating over 10% of the global GDP. Travel and tourism provides a gateway to economic progress particularly in the areas where there are opportunities for sustainable development.