

Manali issues Strict Covid rules for tourists, Rs. 5,000 fine for not wearing masks

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Manali: COVID-19 awareness campaign has been initiated in Manali as Himachal Pradesh is witnessing a massive inflow of tourists following relaxation in COVID restrictions by the state government.

Starting from June, there has been traffic of around 6-7 lakh tourists in the Himalayan state. As Covid-19 situation started improving in the state, tourists have started thronging to the destinations like Shimla, Manali, Dharamshala, Dalhousie, Narkanda and other parts of the state, an ANI report said.

Gurudev Sharma, SP Kullu said, "We have initiated this drive to make the tourists aware. Those not wearing masks can be punished with ₹5,000 in fine or 8 days in jail."

Sharma further said, Police have recorded over 300 challans in the last 7-8 days and have recovered ₹3 lakh.

Earlier this week, Union Health Ministry warned that it can re-impose restrictions again if Covid protocols not complied with. During a press conference, Joint Secretary Lav Agarwal said that the people travelling to hill stations were not following Covid-appropriate behaviour. "We can nullify the ease in restrictions again if protocols not complied with," he said.

Referring to the massive footfall of people in hill stations, the Health Ministry stated that gross violations of Covid appropriate behaviour can nullify the gains so far.

Pictures of overcrowded tourists places went viral on social media with some slamming those violating Covid norms while travelling. Some said that if people continued to behave in such way then the third wave might not be far away.

Stressing that the pandemic was not yet over, officials described the images of large numbers of people thronging popular hill stations as "frightening".

Speaking to ANI earlier this week, Himachal Pradesh Tourism Department Director Amit Kashyap said that after the government had eased the restrictions, the tourist inflow had picked up. "Generally, we receive over 1.3 crore tourists but the pandemic since the last year hit the tourism business," he said.

Last year, Himachal received only 32 lakh tourists including foreigners. This year till May 31, the state received only 13 lakh tourists. "But now in June after the restrictions have been relaxed, we have received 6 to 7 Lakh tourists within this period," Kashyap said.

(With inputs from agencies)