

KERALA CALLING

AUGUST 01, 2023_VOL_43_No_10

Rustic Bliss

Experience the tranquil beauty,
vibrant vibes and
age old secrets of Kerala's villages

Koode Uaa! Koode Uaa! Koode Thuzhayan Uaa!

Come with us! Come with us! Let's row together!



Let the melodies of ancient boat songs whisper tales of Kerala's tranquil backwaters. On the second Saturday of August, Punnamada Lake unveils a spectacle like no other. Witness the Nehru Trophy Boat Race, where 100 ft long snake boats gracefully slice through the waters, their oarsmen moving in harmony to time-honoured tunes. A tradition since 1952, birthed from Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru's appreciation and his cherished silver trophy gift.

But this is not merely a race – it's an enchanting journey. Watch the backwaters burst with ceremonial processions, mesmerizing floats, and the enthusiasm of the spectators.

Linger a little longer; embrace the village life, dive deep into the culture, and let the beauty of the backwaters fill your soul. Come, row with us, and be woven into a story as ageless as the songs that steer the vessels...



The Nehru Trophy Boat Race held in August 2023

Photo: **DALU PARAMESWARAN, I&PRD**

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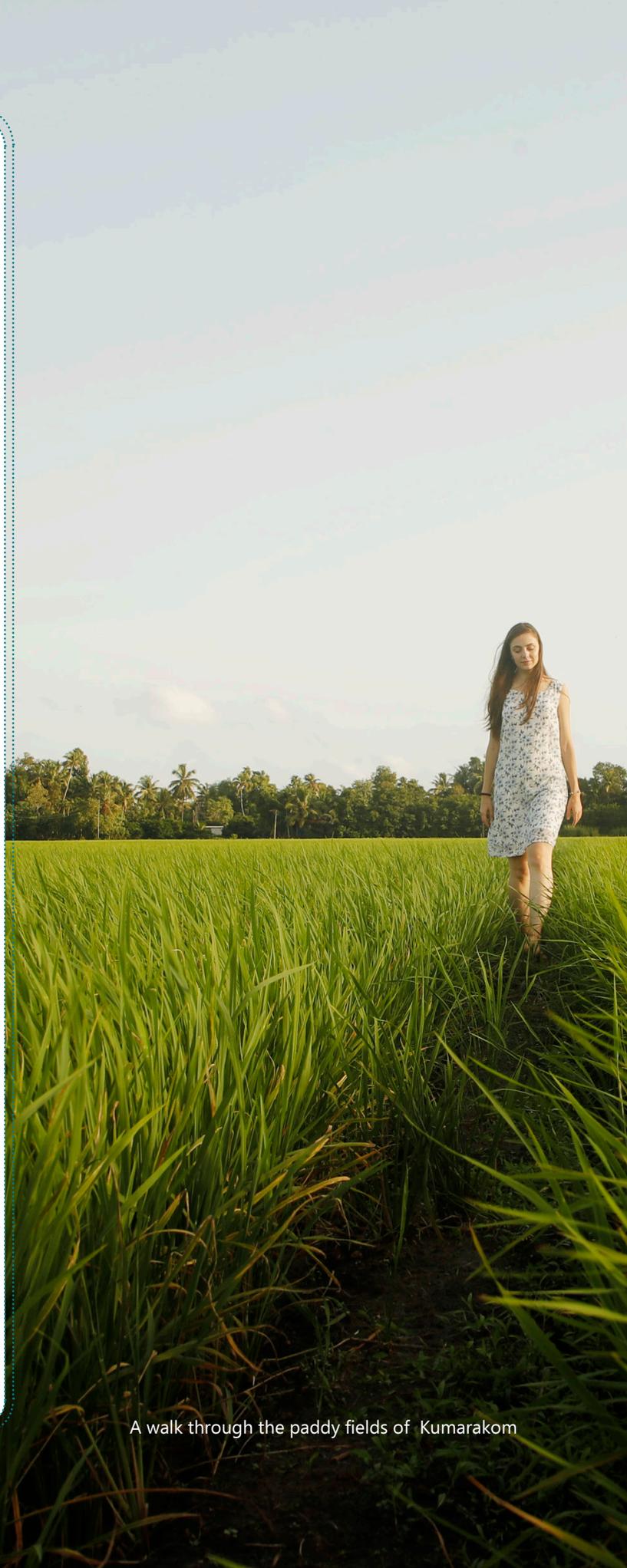
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COVER PIC

Rafting in the Tejaswini River, Kannur



A walk through the paddy fields of Kumarakom



Ente Keralam, Ethra Sundaram!

Ente Keralam, Ethra Sundaram!

Kerala whispers. Kerala sings. A land where poetry breathes.

A theme song resounds, sung by Usha Uthup, reflecting the state's allure.

In villages, it blossoms. Tradition. Culture. Magnificence. An unspoiled embrace with Earth's primal grace. Every traveller's call, an alluring invitation, leads to emerald paddy fields, serene backwaters, coconut palms' gentle sway.

Taste, touch, dance, enact. Village tourism isn't a spectator's sport; it's an experiential art, acknowledged by the global community. Kerala is among the first 52 must-see destinations in the world, where the dance of life is pure, unfiltered. The essence of humanity, woven intricately with nature's raw beauty.

People welcome you. Warm smiles. Open hearts. The richness of shared experiences; universal, timeless, deeply human. The RT mission of the government, promoting village tourism, echoes in every village's vibrant expression.

A festival here. A story there. Daily life's rhythm.

Every path, a discovery. Every sight, a new understanding. Simplicity stirs the soul. Grandeur salutes human existence in nature's harmony.

The woods, the waters, the earth, the people: all dance. A celebration. A commitment to responsible tourism, resonating in unison with the world's heartbeat.

Kerala's embrace offers more than nature's splendour. It's a journey into humanity's very soul. A bridge to deeper connections, fuelled by the government's initiative to foster village tourism.

Breathtaking beauty. Soul-stirring experiences. Waiting for you.

A journey transcending distance and time. A melody of existence. A poetry of life.

And this month, a special invitation. Onam arrives. Kerala's most celebrated festival. A blend of colour, harmony, joy. An extension of Kerala's open arms. A symbol of the government's endeavour in preserving tradition through responsible tourism. A celebration waiting to welcome you.

Welcome to Kerala. Welcome to the villages! Enjoy every inch!

Happy Onam!

T.V. SUBHASH IAS
EDITOR

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Kunhimangalam in Kannur



Let's Strive Harder For Nava Keralam

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE CHIEF MINISTER,
PINARAYI VIJAYAN ON INDEPENDENCE DAY**

Today India is celebrating the 76th year of its independence, stepping into the 77th year. For any Indian, it is a significant moment of pride that our incredibly diverse nation has sustained its independence for over seven and a half decades.

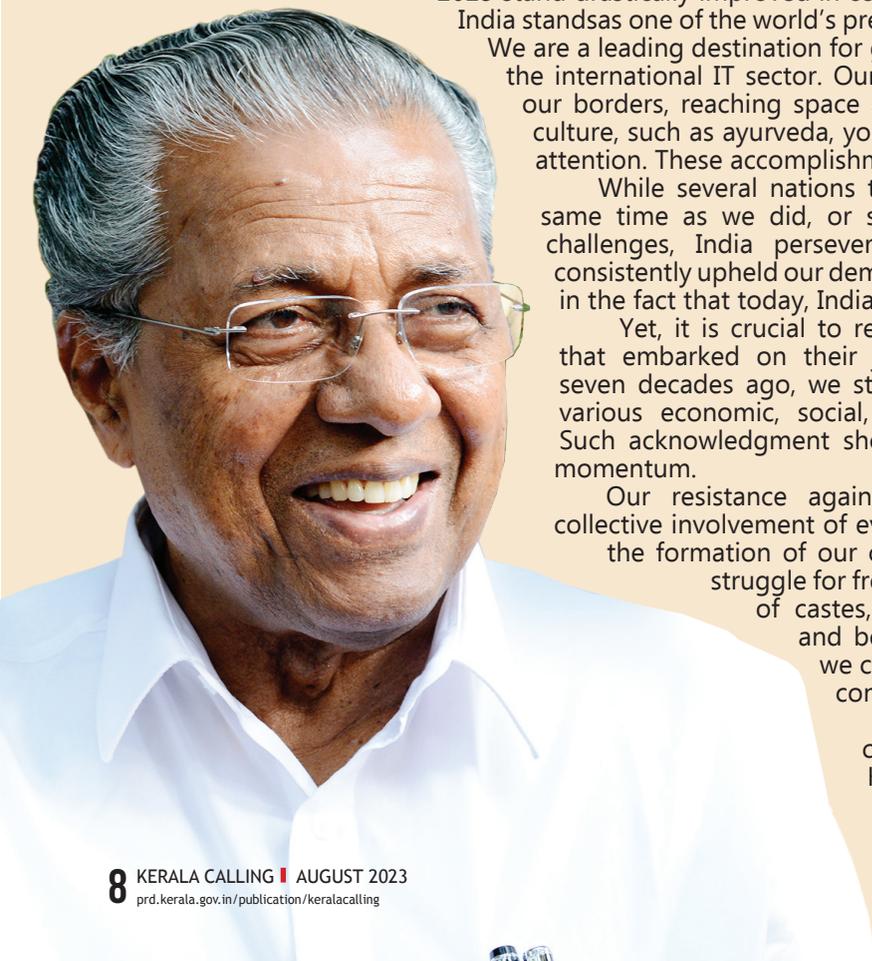
In the realms of life expectancy, literacy, and income, our indicators in 2023 stand drastically improved in comparison to our position in 1947. Today, India stands as one of the world's predominant economic and military powers. We are a leading destination for global tourism and a formidable player in the international IT sector. Our technological prowess extends beyond our borders, reaching space and the moon. Traditional facets of our culture, such as ayurveda, yoga, and millets, are now capturing global attention. These accomplishments truly are sources of immense pride.

While several nations that achieved independence around the same time as we did, or shortly thereafter, grappled with severe challenges, India persevered. Barring a brief period, we have consistently upheld our democratic values. Every Indian can take pride in the fact that today, India stands as the world's largest democracy.

Yet, it is crucial to recognise that, relative to several nations that embarked on their journey as independent states around seven decades ago, we still have considerable strides to make in various economic, social, scientific, and technological domains. Such acknowledgment should galvanise us and fuel our forward momentum.

Our resistance against colonial rule was marked by the collective involvement of every stratum of Indian society, leading to the formation of our cherished ideal, unity in diversity. In our struggle for freedom, Indians cutting across the barriers of castes, religions, regions, languages, cultures, and beliefs came together. Thus, the freedom we cherish is a shared legacy and must not be confined or attributed to any single group.

Treating everyone as equals and collaboratively addressing societal issues, Kerala has, in many respects, set a





Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan inspects the Independence Day parade at Central Stadium Thiruvananthapuram

benchmark for the entire nation. Our commitment to unity, secular values, and scientific temper has played a significant role in this achievement. Moving forward, it is imperative that we fortify these pillars. Efforts that seek to undermine them must be promptly thwarted to ensure that the essence of our freedom remains undiluted.

By the time India marks the 100th year of its independence, we are determined to elevate Kerala to the stature of a globally-recognised, developed, middle-income society, characterised by a knowledge-driven economy and an innovation-centric ethos. Our goal is to guarantee that the rewards of our progress are distributed equitably among all sections of the community.

In 2016, Kerala's Gross Domestic Product stood at approximately Rs 5.6 lakh crore. As per recent data, this figure has surged to Rs 10.17 lakh crore, marking an impressive growth of 84% over the past 7 years. Back in 2016, the State's per capita income was Rs 1.48 lakh, which has now climbed to Rs 2.28 lakh, indicating a rise of more than 54%. Moreover, we have successfully reduced Kerala's debt ratio, bringing it down from 39% of GSDP to just under 35%. Evidently, Kerala's economic ascent and our initiatives for infrastructure development are yielding positive outcomes across the spectrum.

To foster industrial growth, we launched the "Year of Enterprises" initiative with the objective of establishing one lakh enterprises within a year. Remarkably, we exceeded this goal in just the initial eight months, with approximately 1,40,000 enterprises taking root under this scheme. These ventures attracted investments exceeding Rs 8,300 crore, generating close to 3 lakh employment opportunities. Building on this success, the "Mission Thousand" project is now in effect, aiming to elevate a thousand selected enterprises to achieve a collective turnover of Rs. 1 Lakh Crore.

Kerala's IT sector is witnessing a dynamic surge. Over the past seven years, the State has reported IT exports amounting to Rs 85,540 crore. The sector has seen investments of Rs 7,304 crore and has created 62,000 jobs in the same timeframe. As for IT infrastructure, we have expanded by an impressive

75 lakh square feet. Initiatives like "Industry on Campus," "Connect Career to Campus," and the "Young Innovators Program" are in motion to enhance the employability of our young workforce.

In 2016, our ambition was to commission developmental projects worth Rs 50,000 crore via KIIIFB over a span of five years. Yet, by 2021, we had already undertaken projects valued at more than Rs 65,000 crore, outstripping our initial aim. From 2016 to 2023, a cumulative 1,057 development projects, with a combined worth of approximately Rs 81,000 crore, have been set into motion.

Beyond infrastructure, the State Government has been making significant strides in welfare initiatives. Over 400,000 homes delivered through the LIFE Mission since 2016, the distribution of 300,000 land titles state-wide, and the allocation of 350,000 priority ration cards to the underprivileged, stand as proof of our commitment to the people's welfare.

Currently, unique initiatives are underway to eradicate extreme poverty, marking a first for any Indian state. A total of 64,006 families, identified as living in extreme poverty, have now been equipped with requisite government documentation. Comprehensive micro-plans tailored to enhance their quality of life and livelihoods have also been finalised. By pooling resources from multiple departments, the Government is determined to eliminate extreme poverty from Kerala by 2025. In doing so, we are actualising the principles of inclusivity and integration.

Our aim is to build a New Kerala, further elevating the successes we are presently achieving across various sectors. Such an endeavour necessitates the genuine support and collaboration of every Keralite. During the freedom movement, our ancestors prioritised national independence above all. Similarly, at this pivotal moment, our focus should be the creation of a Nava Keralam.

We are all committed to this cause. As we mark the 77th Independence Day, let us imbue the celebrations with purpose, pledging to fortify our freedom, unity, democracy, secular ethos, and scientific temperament. ●

Pristine Villages Beckon Tourists

Kerala fosters rural
tourism Development



P. A. Mohamed Riyas
Minister for Public Works and Tourism

Indeed, slow tourism, experiential tourism, and activity-based tourism; the buzzwords in the realm of international tourism; are all tight-knit with rural tourism. As the global population is migrating faster to the urban regions, the quest for experiencing village shall also remain significant in the years to come. A report by the UN reminds us that 68 per cent of the global population will live in urban areas by

2050, and they shall contribute 85 per cent of global economic output. The more urbanization occurs, the more the scope for promoting village tourism.

Although with high socio-economic standards, Kerala retains pristine village, which is untouched by the global wave of modernization and a nauseating makeover of urban sophistication. With pristine villages and a unique traditional lifestyle, this picturesque land is ideal for rural tourism. It's already a prominent tourism segment in the state, and steps are being taken to promote it to the next level.



“

BEING A 'NICHE' FOR A LONG AND POISED TO GROW FURTHER, HOLDING VILLAGE EXPERIENCE AT THE CORE OF SOJOURNS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, VILLAGE TOURISM IS THE MANTRA OF MODERN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT.

A beauty of Kannur's rustic charm

Village tourism, at the global level, is being envisaged by UNWTO as a form of tourism activity in which the visitor's experience is related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyle/culture, angling and sightseeing, and the activities take place in non-urban (rural) areas with low population density, landscape and land-use dominated by agriculture and forestry, and with traditional social structure and lifestyle.

Indeed Village tourism is a sustainable form of tourism that aims to promote and develop tourism activities in village areas, encompassing

rural villages, farms, and natural landscapes. Tourists can get genuine and exceptional experiences while endorsing sustainable tourism practices and supporting local communities simultaneously. Across the globe, village tourism is a prominent economic activity, especially in major international destination countries like Italy, Spain, the USA, and Canada. While being considered an ideal tool for poverty alleviation in some countries, some other regions identified village tourism as essential for socio-economic growth in the non-urban regions. Rural tourism in some regions is linked to nature-based and adventure tourism.



Enjoying 'Gods Own Drink': Tender Coconut Water

The rise of village tourism is often correlated to the increasing quest for experiencing distinctive and genuine experiences, coupled with the intention to endorse sustainable tourism practices and support local communities. It is seen in diverse forms like Agri tourism, plantation tourism, village side tourism, farm tourism, etc., all derivatives of village tourism. UNWTO also specifies that it has "a high potential to stimulate local economic growth and social change because of its complementarity with other economic activities, its contribution to GDP and job creation, and its capacity to promote the dispersal of demand in time (fight seasonality) and along a wider territory." Significant economic benefits are there from village tourism as it can generate revenue

for local communities through various services such as lodging, food, transportation, and guided tours, and employment opportunities for locals, especially in industries such as hospitality, handicrafts, and community-based tourism enterprises. Moreover, there is immense potential for creating additional livelihood opportunities for local residents.

Having an inimitable way of life with indigenous traditions, customs, and folk culture; along with unrivaled natural beauty; the state offers an ideal platform for village tourism. As the human line in the world, especially in the urban regions, experiences pace in every aspect, life in the villages of Kerala moves slowly with uniqueness around. Ethnicity and indigenouness of the communities



vary from place to place, and that sets the one-off platform for experiencing the authentic features of scenic countryside.

The panoramic view of the long-stretched paddy fields, dark green plantations, hills and valleys, and the network of rivers, rivulets, and lakes is indeed alluring for anyone. Boating, Canoe Cruising, Walkthrough Paddy Fields, and the like in the villages of Kerala are captivating. As the popular novel of Thomas Hardy titled 'Far from the Madding Crowd' narrates the nuances of life in the countryside of Wessex in southwest England, the visit to villages of Kerala can offer experiences of romance with nature, unique cultural features, and authentic gastronomic varieties.

Realizing the significance of village tourism, Kerala has already introduced the village tourism concept and Village Life Experience schemes. The Responsible Tourism Mission (RTM) of Kerala Tourism has been promoting village life experience packages. The concept of Village Life Experience in the tourism sector was initiated with the aim of restoring and conserving the native crafts, traditional jobs, and the village life of Kerala. As part of village life experience packages, the travellers are taken to villages with unique features and, along with the visits, are offered stimulating activities to experience, like weaving coconut leaves, mat weaving, different types of traditional village fishing techniques, and toddy tapping. Even the visitors can climb up the coconut trees to take 'selfies', which offer them lifelong memories of incredible involvement in rural life. The rivulets around can offer them a memorable experience of fishing with a simple fish hook attached to a fishing line.

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM CENTRE OF THE STATE OFFERS PACKAGES INCORPORATING WEAVING CENTRES OF KALLIASSERI IN KANNUR, BELL METAL MAKING OF KUNHIMANGALAM, VARIOUS THEYYAMS, VISITS TO AGRICULTURAL AREAS AND TRADITIONAL FISHING TECHNIQUES, ALONG WITH CULTURAL TOUR PACKAGES, FESTIVAL PACKAGES, EXPERIENTIAL TOURISM PACKAGES, HERITAGE TOUR PACKAGES, CARBON-FREE PACKAGES, FISHING PACKAGES, FARMING & CRAFT VILLAGE PACKAGES, AND STORY TELLING PACKAGES ARE BEING PROMOTED AS PART OF RESPONSIBLE TOURISM.

Responsible Tourism centre of the state offers packages incorporating weaving centres of Kalliasseri in Kannur, bell metal making of Kunhimangalam, Various Theyyams, visits to agricultural areas and traditional fishing techniques, along with Cultural Tour Packages, Festival Packages, Experiential tourism Packages, Heritage Tour Packages, Carbon-Free Packages, Fishing Packages, Farming & Craft Village Packages, and Story Telling Packages are being promoted as part of responsible tourism.

Certain regions in the state are with ethnic communities with incredible cultural features. Ethnic tourism potential is there in those ideal locations. The tribal communities possess distinctive arts, crafts, traditions, medical systems, and the like. The souvenirs made using the traditional varieties can offer everlasting memories of visiting the countryside of Kerala.

Still, Kerala has untapped village tourism potential. Villages of Kerala are ideal for promoting rural tourism, thus generating income and employment opportunities for the people of the land. Kerala tourism is already in the process of developing village tourism across the state. ●



Village Tourism

Promising An Experience
Never Felt Before

EMBRACING THE CHARM AND DIVERSITY OF ITS RURAL LANDSCAPES, THE KERALA GOVERNMENT HAS LAUNCHED AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO PROMOTE VILLAGE TOURISM, FOCUSING ON SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT, CULTURAL IMMERSION, AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT.



P.B. Nooh IAS

Director of Tourism

With vast swathes of lush rural stretches enlivened by vibrant cultural activities, all of Kerala promises an unforgettable experience to visitors.

Realising this immense potential, Kerala Government has evolved an integrated tourism development approach, focusing on sustainable promotion of villages across the state as never-miss locales for both the domestic and foreign visitors.

Kerala is famed as God's Own Country the world over, primarily because of its panoramic landscape. But what makes the state unique is the symbiotic connect between nature and culture.

Tourism, across the world, has made a tectonic shift following the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. Now that humanity has pulled through one of the worst phases in history, tourism is back to normal. The huge disruption caused by the pandemic, however, has had its impact on the way people look at life, culture and leisure.

On the upside, there is a firm awareness that every activity should be ecologically and culturally sustainable. Tourism figures especially crucial in this understanding. That is why Kerala has made a conscious shift to promote tourism in a sustainable, inclusive and integrated manner. Village Tourism has a prominent role in this qualitative transformation. The state is fast emerging as a model for other parts of the country as well in this highly acclaimed model of tourism development.

The cultural heart of India beats in its villages, where two-thirds of India's population lives. An emblematic state in South India, Kerala offers a compelling canvas on which this rural charm is vividly painted in all diversity.

Known for a profusion of greenery, serene backwaters, diverse flora and fauna and a rich and vibrant cultural heritage, Kerala is a prime location for exploring the village experience.

Kerala has already made a deep impression through its Responsible Tourism initiatives.

Showcasing the state's eclectic culture, inclusive social traditions and tangible and intangible heritage with the active collaboration of the local community is the crux of this model. This is a holistic activity, where ecology and culture are preserved and, at the same time, economically empower the local community.

The freshness of village life and the smell of raw earth: Pottery making

Villages figure prominently in this project. Over the years, quite a few places have been turned into tourism spots, without ever harming the nature or culture. Some of these initiatives have won the state international honours, including Maruvanthuruthu in Kottayam.

Over the past decades, Kerala had largely pursued a tourism strategy that overly focused on a few prime destinations and products. The state has immensely benefited from this, and this continues to be the foundation of our tourism. But now, we are promoting all of Kerala as an all-weather experiential destination.

Within a short span, village tourism in Kerala has emerged as a niche product, offering a tranquil retreat from the conventional bustling tourist destinations. Village tourism promises an authentic encounter with the traditional lifestyle, customs and heritage of the rural communities.

Unlike conventional tourism, village tourism is not just about visiting a location; it is about experiencing a way of life and about forming a connection that transcends the typical tourist-destination relationship. Opting the village experience, a visitor can live closest to the nature, know about the local customs and practices, relish traditional cuisine, participate in folk festivals, engage with the villagers and forge enduring relationship.

Village tourism in Kerala is more than just a get-away from the city's bustle, and occupational compulsions, at least for a few days. It is a conscious choice to participate in a sustainable, responsible, and enriching travel experience.

Your day may start with a serene sunrise over the green-capped hills, you may soon set out for a long village walk, often through lush paddy fields and coconut groves, enjoy a cup of tea and a local snack from a village stall, refresh yourself with a freshly plucked tender coconut as the day wears on.

The visitor may also come across a traditional home that has survived the onslaught of time, retaining its tiled-roof and intricate wood carvings, surrounded by a verdant courtyard.

Blessed with an intricate network of rivers, backwaters, rivulets and canals, the visitor can have an angling break. If lucky, one can hook a cat fish, and get it cooked by a nearby eatery for no or a small price. You may find yourself trying your hand at weaving coir ropes, an industry that sustained Kerala's rural economy for long, or participating in a community cooking event, stirring a boiling and bubbling pot in which a dish that goes into the authentic 'sadya' (a traditional banquet) under the guidance of local women.

Village tourism in Kerala allows the traveller to enjoy every bit of this cultural diversity. Visitors can engage with local artists who sustain centuries old classical and folk arts and artisans who bring life to wood, reed or metal. They can lend a hand to the village rower at the helm of the snake boat, the ChundanVallam. Traversing in a houseboat through Kerala's stunning backwaters is a universally coveted leisure experience, which firmly positioned the state on the world tourism map decades back.

There are still many other surprises awaiting the guest. Taken all together, experiencing Kerala village will engender an intimate bond between the visitor and the host community, fostering a dialogue of cultures, an exchange of stories,



and a shared appreciation of nature's bounty.

The ethos of Kerala village tourism is rooted in the ancient Indian ideal of 'Atithi Devo Bhava,' which means 'the guest is equivalent to God.' Tourists are not merely visitors; they are revered guests, welcomed into local households, sharing

meals, stories, and partaking in the community's daily activities. This unique approach transcends the typical sightseeing model, providing an authentic, immersive, and, above all, humane travel experience.

More importantly, village tourism in Kerala contributes substantially to preserving the local culture, environment and livelihoods of rural communities. Through its Responsible Tourism initiative, it strengthens local economies by providing alternate sources of income, helps maintenance and promotion of traditional crafts, arts, and culture. Driven by its State Responsible Tourism Mission, this initiative brings about a socio-economic balance that aligns seamlessly with sustainable development goals, offering a tourism model that respects and preserves nature while supporting the community's well-being.

The State RT Mission formulated some structured rural day packages that assures some interesting activities in villages across the state. These include Village Life Experiences in Kumarakom in Kottayam district, Bekal in Kasaragod, Thekkady in Idukki, Kovalam in Thiruvananthapuram, Mananthavady, Thekkumthara and others in Wayanad and Kunhimangalam in Kannur among others.

Kerala is also a pioneer in India to launch women-friendly tourism packages as part of turning the key sector, gender inclusive. Village tourism figures prominently in this scheme as well. Taking tourists to villages is also a prime component of the state's caravan tourism initiative—Keravan Kerala.

As the world grapples with the challenges thrown up by climate change, which can be mitigated to a great extent through environmental conservation, village tourism in Kerala presents a model that intertwines responsible travel, cultural exchange, community development and sustainable growth. ●

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

Kerala's Green Hamlets

Responsible & Sustainable Practices In Rural Kerala

**THE RESPONSIBLE TOURISM MISSION (RTM) PLAYS A PIVOTAL ROLE
IN DRIVING SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN KERALA.
THE PRIMARY AIM OF THE RESPONSIBLE TOURISM MISSION IS TO
DEMOCRATISE TOURISM AND MAKE IT AN ALL-INCLUSIVE SECTOR.**

Kanthalloor: Panoramic view



T.V. Subhash IAS

Director I&PRD

Exploring the world is more than a leisure activity; it offers a unique opportunity to engage with diverse cultures, immerse oneself in varied lifestyles, and appreciate the inherent beauty of nature. Renowned for its captivating landscapes and vibrant culture, Kerala has justifiably earned the epithet, "God's Own Country." It serves as an excellent example of a destination that has successfully managed to combine tourism with sustainable development, a principle strongly advocated by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

In Kerala, the concept of responsible tourism revolves around creating a harmonious relationship between tourist satisfaction and local prosperity. These initiatives have profoundly revolutionised the perception of Kerala's tourism, both domestically and globally. They have effectively broken the conventional model of tourism monopolised by the affluent and extended its benefits to the local communities.

In 2008, responsible tourism was initiated as a pilot project in four strategic locations within the state. Following its success, the initiative was expanded in 2011 to three more sites. In 2017, a watershed decision was made to implement responsible tourism statewide, leading to the establishment of the Responsible Tourism Mission (RTM) in June 2017.



The sandy beach @ Dharmadam

The primary aim of the RTM was to democratise tourism, making it an all-inclusive sector rather than an exclusive domain of the privileged few. The mission envisaged tourism as a potent instrument to promote rural development, alleviate poverty, and empower women.

The RTM, formally established in August 2017, has since effectuated significant changes in Kerala's tourism sector. It underscores the principles of responsible and sustainable tourism, embracing various forms such as village, rural, cultural, festival, experiential, farm/agri, heritage, food, accessible tourism, and women empowerment through tourism. The mission also boosts local artists and diverse arts, including martial arts.

The RTM plays a pivotal role in driving sustainable tourism development in Kerala. It encourages the production of local handicrafts, curates storytelling packages, and conducts crucial training programmes. Recognizing its profound achievements, the government has restructured the

RTM as a government-owned society to bolster its contribution to sustainable and responsible tourism practices throughout Kerala.

The RTM's core activities comprise developing local tourism activities, bridging local communities with the tourism industry, endorsing responsible tourism initiatives, promoting diverse forms of tourism, generating local employment, engaging women in the tourism sector, advocating eco-friendly tourism practices, and fostering a symbiotic relationship between tourists, the industry, and the local community.

The RTM also organises extensive training programmes to inculcate the skills required for sustainable tourism among various societal sectors, local government bodies, and officials associated with tourism. Workshops, skill-building sessions, homestay management courses, artisanal workshops, and comprehensive training covering all necessary skills for the tourism industry are some of the key initiatives facilitated by the RTM.



Below are some activities currently spearheaded by the Responsible Tourism (RT) Mission

1. Developing and fostering tourism activities at a local level.
2. Facilitating connections between local communities and the tourism industry.
3. Advocating and endorsing responsible tourism initiatives.
4. Launching and promoting various forms of tourism such as Village Tours, Rural Tours, Cultural Tours, Festival Tours, Experiential Tours, Farm/Agri Tours, Heritage Tours, Food/Cuisine Tours, and Accessible Tour Packages.
5. Creating local employment opportunities through the tourism industry.
6. Engaging more women in the tourism sector through tourism activities designed by women for women.
7. Utilising tourism as a platform for women empowerment, poverty reduction, and upliftment of marginalised communities.
8. Advocating for and implementing eco-friendly tourism practices, establishing waste-free tourism centers in collaboration with tourism operators and local communities, and working towards green certification for selected tourism centers.

However, tourism activities should not be confined to a few selected centers. To ensure sustainable tourism, it is crucial to avoid over-crowding and unchecked construction at popular tourist sites. The RTM aims to decentralize tourists to a variety of destinations, preserving the natural beauty of Kerala, and promoting responsible tourism development.

Every region of Kerala is a mosaic of enchanting villages, panoramic landscapes, cascading waterfalls, vibrant festivals, diverse culinary traditions, serene water bodies, and a pleasant climate. The RTM's mission is to develop these resources into sustainable tourism centers, guided by the principles of responsible tourism, and with an active public engagement, thus ensuring Kerala's enduring allure. ●

VILLAGE EXPERIENCES

Experience the Villages...

Staying in villages and
with villagers makes every
journey more than ordinary



KERALA OFFERS OVER A HUNDRED IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES, EACH METICULOUSLY DESIGNED TO FACILITATE AN INTIMATE CONNECTION WITH ITS NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE. THE KERALA RESPONSIBLE TOURISM IS A PHILOSOPHY THAT FOSTERS A HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY AND THE TOURISM INDUSTRY.



Weaving great stories in palm fronds:
A scene from Aymanam



Indu Krishna

Responsible Tourism Mission
Faculty on Women Friendly Tourism

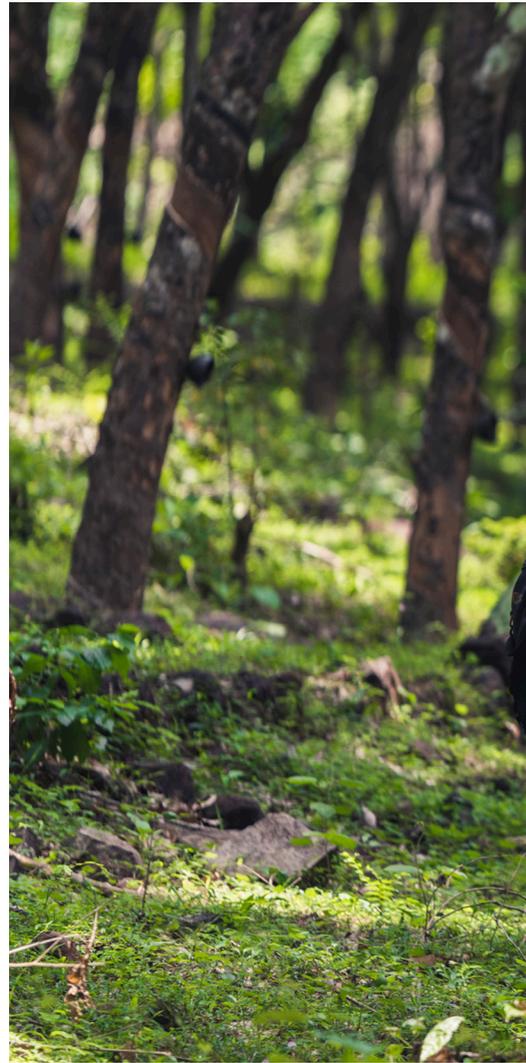
Imagine a world where the wanderer's heart and the artist's soul unite, where the spirit of adventure intertwines with a deep respect for nature and cultural heritage. Picture an enchanting realm where vibrant colours, lively traditions, and mesmerizing art forms flourish against the backdrop of lush landscapes and serene backwaters. Welcome to Kerala, a treasure trove of diverse experiences, where tourism transcends the ordinary and transforms into an immersive journey that etches itself into the heart and soul of every traveller.

In the dawn of a post-COVID era, Kerala stands tall as a beacon of sustainable and responsible tourism. It is a realm that encourages visitors to look beyond mere sightseeing, to connect deeply with its cultural vibrancy and rich traditions. Here, one doesn't just observe life but participates actively, experiencing every nuance and detail of Kerala's unique way of life.

Leading the way in this transformative journey is the innovative Village Life Experience package. Designed by the Kerala Responsible Tourism Mission, it offers a unique opportunity for visitors to integrate with local life. The beauty

The Village Life Experience

- **Hands-on Craftsmanship:** Learn to weave coconut fronds and craft earthen pots with local artisans, treasuring the precision and skill that define their daily lives.
- **Traditional Practices:** Experience the traditional ways of Kerala, from extracting fresh coconut oil to casting fishing nets into the bountiful waters.
- **Unique Adventures:** Scale tall, stately palm trees for a fun challenge that offers a breathtaking view and the perfect opportunity for a memorable selfie moment.
- **Intimate Connection:** Engage with the local community, integrating with their life and rhythms, creating a travel experience that truly touches the soul.



Experiencing the sweetness of honey



Plantation visit

lies in the smallest details - weaving through the delicate fronds of a coconut tree, crafting earthen pots with a potter's masterful precision, extracting fresh coconut oil, or casting traditional fishing nets into the bountiful Kerala waters. A special highlight, loved by many, is the chance to climb tall, stately palm trees - a unique experience and a fun challenge that often culminates in a memorable selfie moment.

Kerala offers over a hundred such immersive experiences, each meticulously designed to facilitate an intimate connection with its natural and cultural heritage. They range from exploring the unique art forms of the region and learning the ancient martial art of Kalaripayattu to trying a hand at local handicrafts and indulging in diverse and delicious ethnic cuisine. These Learning Experience Packages cater to various interests, promising an

engaging and educational journey into the cultural heart of Kerala.

Accommodations form an integral part of any travel experience. In Kerala, the range of Experiential Stays offers unique ways to live and breathe the Kerala life. Choices range from homestays with local families and tent stays beneath the blanket of stars to unique mud huts, serviced villas, and tranquil farmhouse stays. Every accommodation choice promises an authentic Kerala experience that is unique and unforgettable.

At the core of Kerala's Responsible Tourism Mission is a robust array of specifically designed travel packages. These include Village Life Experience, Native Experience, Cultural Experience, Carbon Neutral, Farm Visits, Story Telling, and Festival Tour Packages. Each one is an invitation to



Giving that Kerala fave, Dosa, a go.

And Beyond The Village...

- **Native Experience Packages:** These packages allow tourists to immerse themselves in the local customs, traditions, and way of life. From cooking traditional meals to participating in local festivals, experience the authentic Kerala way of life.
- **Cultural Experience Packages:** Be a part of the vibrant culture and arts scene in Kerala. Watch and learn traditional dance forms, take part in age-old rituals, and more.
- **Carbon Neutral Packages:** Committed to sustainable tourism, these packages are designed to leave minimal carbon footprint. They involve eco-friendly stays, using public transport or electric vehicles for sightseeing, and more.
- **Farm Visit Packages:** Discover the joy of farm life. Participate in sowing, harvesting, or simply enjoy the peaceful ambience of rural Kerala.
- **Story Telling Packages:** Explore Kerala's rich history and mythology through enthralling storytelling sessions. Delve into the past and learn about the state's royal heritage, ancient myths, and legendary folk tales.
- **Festival Tour Packages:** Experience the vibrant colours, thrilling performances, and religious fervour of Kerala's numerous festivals. Be it the grandeur of Onam or the spectacular performances during Theyyam, these festivals offer a cultural extravaganza unlike any other.

dive deeper into the heart of Kerala, to be a part of its rhythm and its flow, to form connections that enrich the travel experience, and to leave behind footprints that are green and sustainable.

The Kerala Responsible Tourism Mission is more than just a tourism initiative; it is a philosophy that fosters a harmonious relationship between the local community and the tourism industry. It is a successful model of sustainable tourism that encourages cooperation and mutual benefit, ensuring that the beauty and heritage of Kerala are preserved for generations to come.

The invitation is open to uncover the wonders of Kerala, to immerse oneself in its diverse communities, to savour its rich, vibrant culture, and to let its tranquil landscapes soothe the soul. Embark on this immersive journey that redefines travel and promises to leave behind memories that last a lifetime. The Kerala Responsible Tourism Mission awaits, offering not just a journey, but an enriching experience that touches the soul. ●



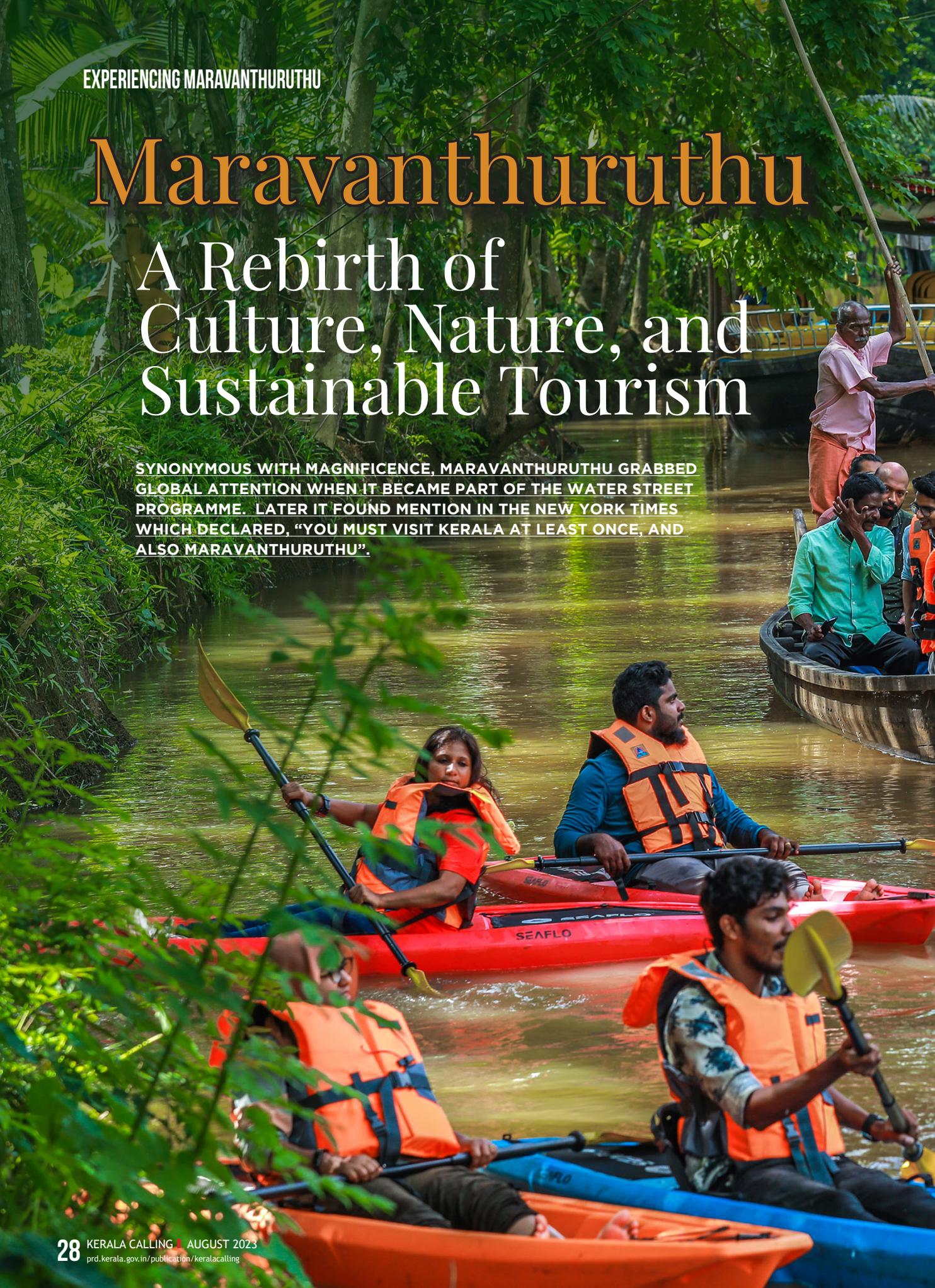
Canal Cruising at Kumarakom

EXPERIENCING MARAVANTHURUTHU

Maravanthuruthu

A Rebirth of Culture, Nature, and Sustainable Tourism

SYNONYMOUS WITH MAGNIFICENCE, MARAVANTHURUTHU GRABBED GLOBAL ATTENTION WHEN IT BECAME PART OF THE WATER STREET PROGRAMME. LATER IT FOUND MENTION IN THE NEW YORK TIMES WHICH DECLARED, "YOU MUST VISIT KERALA AT LEAST ONCE, AND ALSO MARAVANTHURUTHU".





K. Rupeshkumar

State Responsible Tourism Mission Coordinator

Maravanthuruthu offers a heady mix of spectacle and music – the water carnival of Aattuvela that aims to propitiate the goddess of the land; the ritual of Garudanthookkam which features suspension of devotees from hooks high up in the air; the Bhadrakali theyattu, the stylized fire-dance depicting and celebrating the victory of Goddess Kali over Darika, the demon; the kalamezhuthu, three-dimensional, multi-coloured, powder designs of demi-gods like Nagayakshis and Gandharvas on consecrated floors; the sarpakkavus that worship serpents; the rhythmic clacking of handlooms; the mellifluous songs of the Pulluva caste . . . the rustic charms of life in Maravanthuruthu are so varied that they have to be seen, heard and experienced at least once in your lifetime.

Maravanthuruthu is one of the local self-governing bodies in Kottayam district, and one of the ten selected under the STREET Projects of the Responsible Tourism Mission. A place that has seen a huge surge of people’s participation and progress in the tourism sector. A land that has shown the world that, powered by the will of the panchayat committee, it can create wonders and mesmerize foreign travellers with its sheer majesty. An island nourished by the Vembanad lake and the many tributaries of the Moovattupuzha.

A region that had witnessed many a mass movement against the feudal system of old; whose soil once bore the boot marks of violent authority that sought to suppress the rightful demands of the hut-dwellers; whose loyal natives offered places of hiding for political leaders who tried to organize them, give them a voice, and teach them the power of slogans; and whose geographical insularity made it impossible for haughty torturers to conquer it completely . . . A land that blossomed during the time of people’s planning project, when the residents shouldered the responsibility of building roads and bridges, and thus established connectivity with the world around it.

Today, under the Responsible Tourism initiative, Maravanthuruthu is making history

River cruising at Maravanthuruthu



When walls tell tales... The village library at Maravanthuruthu

once again under the leadership of Mohammed Riyas, Minister for Tourism, Public Works and Youth Affairs, and V. N. Vasavan, Minister for Co-operation, Registration and Culture; and ably supported by Dr V. Venu IAS, Chief Secretary and others.

Dr Harold Goodwin, Advisor to World Travel Market and Founder of ICRT (International Conferences on Responsible Tourism in Destinations) and Paige McNulty, The New York Times reporter, besides 2,140 domestic and 418 foreign tourists visited Maravanthuruthu this year.

Eighteen canals that were once the life-blood of Maravanthuruthu, in course of time became conveyor belts of waste materials, and converted the island

THE JURY OF THE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE FOR RESPONSIBLE TOURISM HAS ANNOUNCED THE NAMES OF THE AWARDEES THIS YEAR. THE WORLD TRAVEL MART GLOBAL AWARD GOES TO MARAVANTHURUTHU WATER STREET!

“

into a dumping ground. But under the leadership of the village panchayat, Maravanthuruthu was included in the water STREET Project of the Responsible Tourism programme, and that brought about a tremendous change in the landscape. With people’s participation and the implementation of the employment guarantee scheme, all the eighteen canals were combed clean, and made deeper to allow easy passage of boats. Instead of constructing granite stone walls to protect the banks, as had been customary until recently, the more eco-friendly method of spreading kayarbhoovastra or coir geo textiles was adopted, and mangroves planted. In order to prevent any backsliding that could precipitate water pollution, an RT STREET cluster of 40 houses was created. Regional RT clubs were started and strengthened subsequently. A Haritha Karma Sena [a professional team of Green technicians and supervisors] was created in order to collect non-biodegradable waste from each and every house. Members of the village panchayat, office-bearers of the RT cluster and members of the Tourism Development Committee made regular visits to households, that were unwilling to join the project, in order to make them aware of the importance of the scheme.

Today, Maravanthuruthu stands as a beacon of sustainable and vibrant tourism, transformed into a land of scenic beauty and cultural richness.



Proud moment: State Tourism Minister PA Mohamed Riyas and Director PB Nooh in London after receiving the Responsible Tourism Global Award for the STREET project

The once-polluted canals, rivers, and backwaters now boast clean and navigable waterways where local residents row Shikaras, and tourists enjoy sight-seeing in safe canoes. The thick green canopies and cool air have returned, fulfilling visions of an idyllic paradise. Local kayaking clubs, guided by trained experts, invite tourists to explore the canals, where once-endangered species like snakehead murrel and shellfish have made a visible comeback. The outer walls of houses have become canvases for mural paintings, showcasing local art and festivals, and a newly published Tourism Resorts Directory details the region's unique flora and fauna. Through the efforts of the Responsible Tourism Mission, the

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TODAY, MARAVANTHURUTHU STANDS AS A BEACON OF SUSTAINABLE AND VIBRANT TOURISM, TRANSFORMED INTO A LAND OF SCENIC BEAUTY AND CULTURAL RICHNESS.

local community has embraced alternative tourism models, offering hospitality and lodging to visitors, and demonstrating to the world the viability of eco-conscious travel in this rejuvenated land.

The jury of the International Centre for Responsible Tourism has announced the names of the awardees this year. The World Travel Mart Global Award goes to Maravanthuruthu water STREET!

You can reach Maravanthuruthu in an hour's time from Kochi; in one hour and ten minutes from Kottayam railway station; in one-and-a-half hours from Alappuzha; and in 40 minutes from Kumarakom. There are two prominent resorts in Maravanthuruthu panchayat which offer comfortable stay, besides several homestays. Shikaras, kayaks and boats are ready to ferry tourists at their convenience. Tourism packages prepared by RT Mission ensure safe sight-seeing trips. ●



Silent stories depicted on walls

EXPERIENCING KANTHALLOOR

WITH A POETIC TOUCH AND PROFOUND INSIGHT, THE AUTHOR PAINTS A VIVID PORTRAIT OF KANTHALLOOR, A VILLAGE TEEMING WITH HISTORY, CULTURE, AND NATURAL SPLENDOR. THROUGH STORIES OF UNITY, TRANSFORMATION, AND GROWTH, HE LEADS US THROUGH THE VILLAGE'S SCENIC BEAUTY, AGRICULTURAL WEALTH, AND RESPONSIBLE TOURISM INITIATIVES, ALL THE WHILE BECKONING THE READER TO COME AND WITNESS THIS ENCHANTING DESTINATION.

“Kantha . . .
Ithu
Nalla Ooru”

Vegetable farming at Kanthalloor

K. Rupeshkumar

“O Beloved! What a lovely village!”

It seems Sita Devi said so to Lord Rama, at some point of time during their life in exile in the forest. That was how the name ‘Kanthalloor’ came into being – the first story that visitors hear on reaching this ooru [village]. I heard it fourteen years back. As I set out to find the origins of this story, I heard more stories.

During the time of invasion, people from villages in Tamil Nadu fled for their lives, migrated, crossed forests, climbed up and down hills, and finally reached this land. Those who survived the ordeal held their naked palms above a lighted wick on a stone lamp, and took a pledge.

“From now onwards, we abandon all kinds of differences. Of caste and of religion, of kings,

feudal lords and tenants. Hereafter, there will be only one caste in this land.”

They decided to live a secure life in five oorus – Marayoor, Kanthalloor, Keezhanthoor, Karayoor and Kottakkuzhi.

Whenever I come to Kanthalloor, that breeze seeks me out in the twilight hours . . . the same breeze that caressed those people as they held their palms above the bud of flame, and took an oath to resist differences of caste and religion, to build a single human community . . . the same breeze that wafted over Sita Devi as she whispered sweet nothings into her lord’s ears and muttered, “Kantha . . . ithu nalla ooru!”

Today that breeze carries new fragrances . . . of apples, oranges, strawberries, blackberries, plums . . . and seems eager to sing, “The breeze of this land is the real one!”

Kanthalloor, whose soil yields cabbage, carrot, cauliflower, beans and potatoes . . .



Kanthalloor, whose vast fields have gone dry, the last drops of underground water having been sucked out by the deep roots of *Eucalyptus grandis* . . .

Now, people are battling hard to wrap a green blanket over the land . . .

Villagers, who accord greater value to the verdict of the orrukootams [tribal governing bodies] than that of the highest court in the land . . .

Temple festivals that pulsate with songs, dances and ululations, as devotees, bearing ammankudams [pots with offerings to Amman, the Divine Mother] on their heads, sway to the heady tunes . . .

Elephants, the children of the Sahya mountains, that come racing down every evening, swaying their heads, trumpeting . . .

Cataracts that spray water drops and spread beauty all over Keezhanthoor and Irachilpara . . .

The viewpoint that offers bewitchingly beautiful pictures of Nature, captured in lens frames for the film "Bhramaram" . . . now known by the name of the film that immortalized its magnificence . . . the Bhramaramviewpoint . . .

Pattissery dam, Mannavanchola National Park which holds rare plants and trees, Pius Nagar with its dolmens as old as time . . . natural rocky outcrops imprinted by the footsteps of Bhima the Pandava . . . the strong fragrance of processed lemon grass oil . . .

Kanthalloor that bestows fascinating pictures from any angle to the eye of the camera lens . . .

Kanthalloor with her luscious apples . . .

Kanthalloor with her vast strawberry fields that splash vibrant colours . . .

Kanthalloor that allures with her tantalizing, round and ripe oranges . . .

Scenes of cold season vegetables ready for picking . . .

Who was it that first named Kanthalloor the fruit bowl of Kerala?

Kanthalloor with her psychedelic riot of butterflies . . .

Kanthalloor with her endless tunes and rhythms of songbirds . . .

It was in 2014 that the first meeting of Responsible Tourism was held at Kanthalloor.

“

THE VIEWPOINT THAT OFFERS BEWITCHINGLY BEAUTEOUS PICTURES OF NATURE, CAPTURED IN LENS FRAMES FOR THE FILM "BHRAMARAM" . . . NOW KNOWN BY THE NAME OF THE FILM THAT IMMORTALIZED ITS MAGNIFICENCE . . . THE BHRAMARAM VIEWPOINT . . .



Strawberry farm

Making of Pattu Saree (Silk Saree)





Muniyara

This was followed by many others. By the end of 2017, Kanthalloor was included in the PEPPER (People's Participation for Participatory Planning and Empowerment through Responsible Tourism) Project that was part of the Public Participation Tourism Development. A special tourism grama sabha came into being, meetings of interested entrepreneurs took place, studies on various subjects were conducted . . . tourism resource mapping, resource directory, various training programmes, packages . . . everything went on like clockwork until disaster struck in the form of COVID, and all the well-laid plans went awry . . .

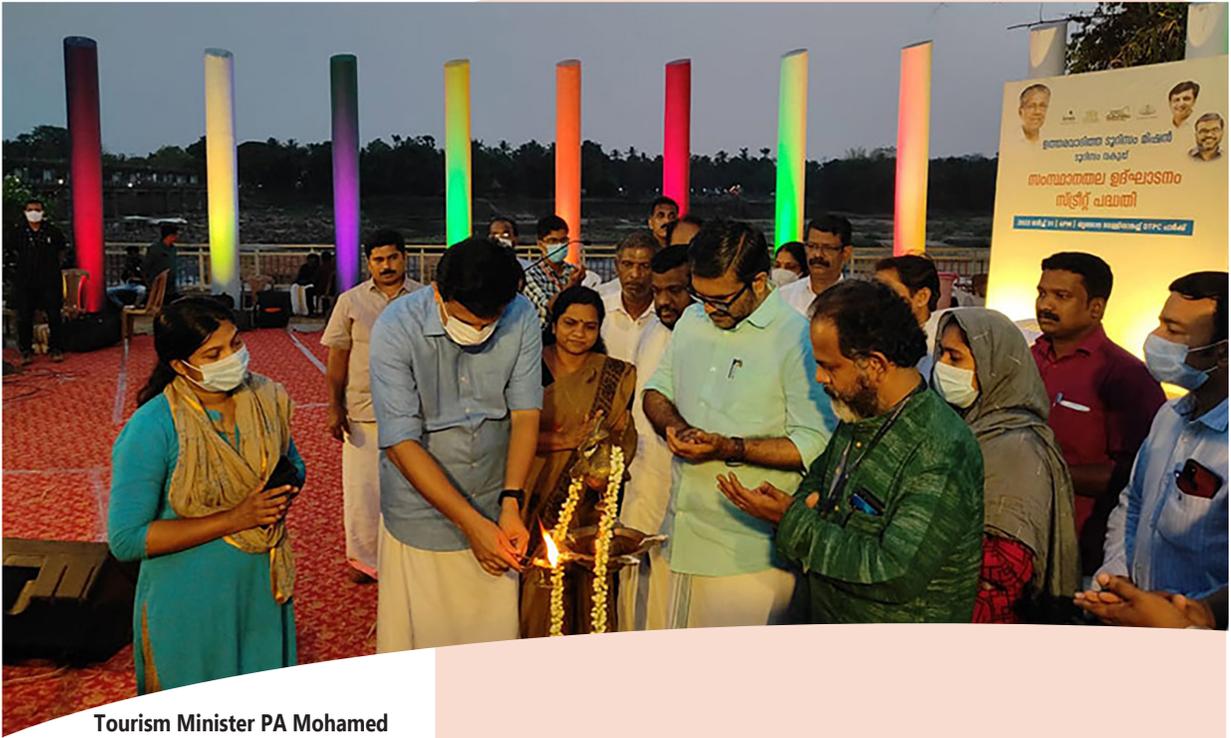
Eventually, when the pandemic subsided, Kanthalloor was included in the STREET (Sustainable Tangible Responsible Experiential Ethnic Tourism) Project. Thereafter, there was no looking back. With Responsible Tourism Mission becoming one of the technical support agencies of the UNDP-IHRML (United Nations Development Programme – Indian High Range Mountain Landscape) project, Kanthalloor witnessed the implementation of the RT protocol. Mohan Das, the President of the vibrant panchayat governing council, correctly identified tourism as Kanthalloor's most viable path towards growth and progress. Special thrust was given to tourism associated with agricultural sector. It was

Mohan Das himself and the panchayat governing council that initiated the surge of developmental plans for Kanthalloor through the RT-STREET Project. The panchayat committee took up the request made by RT Mission in order to make Kanthalloor a Green Tourism Destination under the Green STREET scheme. Many things came to the village – control on plastic use, green arch, green check post, water ATMs, CCTV cameras, cloth bags . . . Panchayat- and police- approved Green Tourism identity stickers on vehicles transporting tourists. . . Kanthalloor is fast becoming a safe destination for tourists.

Fruit- and vegetable streets allow people to walk along fields and purchase the produce. Plans for flower- and food streets are on the anvil . . . people can now enjoy varied tastes on their palate, inhale fresh fragrances, see rose shrubs being cultivated, marigolds blooming, jacarandas spreading their violet glory . . . Kanthalloor is on the way to becoming a Tourism Village, embracing all the goodness that RT STREET Projects can offer . . .

Won't you drop in on Kanthalloor to get soaked in her gentle drizzle that comes visiting frequently?

Do come . . . Kanthalloor invites you . . . ●



Tourism Minister PA Mohamed Riyas inaugurates the State wide STREET project. LSGD Minister M B Rajesh is also seen

STREET for a new path

LOCAL COMMUNITIES STAND CENTRAL TO THIS. EVERY PROJECT AREA WILL SEE THE EMERGENCE OF THEMED STREETS THAT CELEBRATE KERALA'S ESSENCE. WITH A BLEND OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE EFFORTS, THE VISION COMES ALIVE.

the 'Street Project', supported by the State Responsible Tourism Mission sets sights on boosting tourism in 10 distinctive areas. Inspired by UNWTO's "Tourism for Inclusive Growth", the Street Project encapsulates:

- Sustainable
- Tangible
- Responsible
- Experiential
- Ethnic
- Tourism Hubs.

The essence is to spotlight untouched gems, zones near key hubs with unique experiences, and locales primed for a tourism enhancement.

Local communities stand central to this. Every project area will see the emergence of themed streets that celebrate Kerala's essence. With a blend of public and private efforts, the vision comes alive.

The inaugural event was at Trithala in March 2022, followed by the launch of Water Street and Green Street in the Maravanthuruthu Panchayath. Over four years, the project will unfold in the selected regions.

A noteworthy accomplishment: Water Street clinched a gold at the WTM-Global RT Awards 2022. Notably, locations like Kanthallur have gained global recognition. With the Street Project, Kerala redefines the essence of tourism, intertwining it with discovery and culture.

PEPPER

spices up
rustic
charm

Launched in November 2017, the Pepper project focuses on community-driven tourism, transforming areas into responsible travel destinations.

Here's its progression:

- **Phase 1:** Eight local bodies in Vaikom taluk-initiated activities such as Special Tourism Gram Sabhas, Resource Mapping, and the creation of a Resource Directory. Meetings with stakeholders and investors marked this phase.



Aattuvela from Vaikom
Vadayar Devi Temple

**BY SEPTEMBER
2020, VAIKOM AND
PONNANI WERE
DESIGNATED AS
INTERNATIONAL
TOURISM CENTERS
DUE TO THE
INFLUENCE OF THE
PEPPER PROJECT.**

- **Phase 2:** Pepper moved to Velloor and Thalayolaparambu, adding seven local bodies. Tour packages showcased the region's culture and environment. Skill training programs were also introduced.
- **Phase 3:** Ten more local governments joined, adopting responsible tourism practices and offering travel experiences.
- **Phase 4:** Anchuthengu Panchayath joined the project.

By September 2020, Vaikom and Ponnani were designated as international tourism centers due to the influence of the Pepper project.



Discovering Kerala's Hidden Charms

DISCOVER THE MESMERIZING BLEND OF HISTORY, CULTURE, AND ART AS YOU IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THE FOLKLORE OF KERALA, A RICH AND DIVERSE COASTAL STATE IN SOUTH INDIA. THE STATE'S MYRIAD OF FOLK ARTS, LEGENDS, AND TRADITIONS PAINT A VIBRANT PICTURE OF ITS PAST, CREATING AN ENCHANTING CULTURAL EXPERIENCE FOR THOSE WHO VENTURE HERE. AS THE POPULARITY OF FOLK TOURISM GROWS, THERE'S NO BETTER TIME TO EXPLORE THE CULTURAL WONDERS THAT KERALA HAS TO OFFER.



O.S. Unnikrishnan
Chairman,
Kerala Folklore Academy

contributing to the rise of folk tourism in the region.

Art Forms and Rituals

Kerala folklore encompasses a vast array of art forms, rituals, legends, and oral narratives that provide insight into the lives and values of its people. These cultural treasures have not only captivated the locals but also attracted tourists from all around the world,

Kerala's folklore is a delightful tapestry woven from various art forms and rituals. Kathakali, a classical dance-drama that originated in the 17th century, is one of the most famous examples of Kerala's traditional performing arts. With its elaborate makeup, ornate costumes, and intricate movements, Kathakali narrates stories from Hindu epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.

Another captivating art form is Theyyam, a ritualistic dance



Kalaripayattu: The traditional martial art of Kerala

form primarily practiced in North Malabar. Theyyam performers, known as “Theeyattam,” embody divine spirits during performances, making it a unique and spiritually significant experience for both participants and spectators.

Legends and Oral Narratives

The oral tradition is an integral part of Kerala’s folklore. Numerous myths and legends are still shared by word of mouth, enriching the cultural fabric of the state. Stories of ancient warriors, mythical creatures, and heroic feats continue to captivate the imagination of listeners.

One such fascinating legend is the “Legend of Onam,” which commemorates the mythical king Mahabali’s annual visit to his beloved kingdom. This enchanting tale is celebrated through the vibrant festival of Onam, where locals engage in traditional dance, boat races, and feasting

The cultural wealth of Kerala’s folklore has not gone unnoticed by tourists seeking an authentic experience. Folk tourism has gained momentum in recent years as travellers look beyond conventional attractions and seek immersive encounters with local customs and traditions. This form of tourism not only supports local communities but also helps preserve and promote Kerala’s unique heritage.



In tune with the rhythm of life: Mannan Koothu, a form of tribal dance

Experiencing Art Forms

One of the highlights of folk tourism in Kerala is witnessing live performances of traditional art forms. Kathakali and Theyyam are two prominent examples that draw visitors from across the globe. Tourists can marvel at the elaborate makeup and costumes of Kathakali dancers or witness the fervent devotion of Theyyam performers as they invoke divine spirits.

Additionally, many cultural centers and art academies across the state offer workshops where tourists can learn the basics of traditional art forms like Mohiniyattam, Kalaripayattu (martial arts), and traditional music.

Folklore Festivals

Kerala's vibrant festivals provide an excellent opportunity for tourists to immerse themselves in the state's folklore. The Thrissur Pooram, a grand temple festival in Thrissur, showcases a stunning procession of caparisoned elephants, traditional percussion ensembles, and breathtaking fireworks. The Aranmula Boat Race is another popular festival where tourists can witness the thrilling boat race on the Pamba River, accompanied by traditional folk music.

Preserving Kerala's Folklore - A Shared Responsibility

As folk tourism gains popularity, it also raises concerns about the preservation and authenticity of Kerala's folklore. While increased exposure can bring financial benefits to local artists and communities, it must be balanced with responsible practices to safeguard the cultural heritage.

Engaging local communities in the development and promotion of folk tourism is essential to ensure that traditions are respected and preserved. Local artists, performers, and craftspeople should be actively involved in showcasing their art forms, giving tourists an authentic and unadulterated experience. ●

Bhairavi Kolam is the biggest and heaviest among all the *kolams* in **Padayani**





Photo: BIJULAL M.D.

Theyyam



Mudiyettu is a ritual art form performed in the Bhadrakali temples



Padayani
(Kaalani Kalam)



Gothuruth

The Isle of *Chavittu Naadakam*



Biju Muthathi
Senior Journalist

Cross the northernmost tributary of the Periyar river flowing through the district of Ernakulam, and you reach the isle of Gothuruth.

Were anyone to set sight across the river, they would come across the Church and boat jetty of Gothuruth. Meanwhile, those from the Gothuruth side of the river can view the

mystique ruins of the Portuguese fort and the Kottapuram Market.

There are several ways to reach this beautiful Island. It is only a 5 km boat journey from North Paravur. Those from Kochi would need to traverse 30 kms and land at one of the many wharfs via Moothakunnamor Vadakkumpuram. You could also travel via land, as there are two bridges that were recently built.

My choice would be to take a canoe from



Photo: A.S. SARATH

CROSSING THE NORTHERNMOST TRIBUTARY OF THE PERIYAR RIVER AND ARRIVING AT THE SCENIC ISLE OF GOTHURUTH, I FIND MYSELF ENTRANCED BY A LAND RICH IN CULTURE AND TRADITION, WHERE THE RHYTHMIC FOOTSTEPS OF CHAVITTU NAADAKAM DANCERS RESONATE THROUGH THE VIBRANT COMMUNITY OF THE ISLAND.

Muthakunnam. This way, you could set foot directly at the Churchyard, right into that land that carries the footprints of many generations of Chavittu Naadakam.

Almost all the people of the 2000-acre Island of Gothuruth are Latin Catholics, engaging in vocations such as fishing, coconut farming, making coir products, and sand mining. After a tiring day, they often transform into Chavittu Nadakam performers, with costumes depicting kings, soldiers, clerics, and monks. This age-old

life cycle, although tiresome to some, is routine for them, with Chavittu Natakam being the pulse of the island. In 1999, they were the flag bearers of a week-long Chavittu Natakam festival in Kochi, initiated by the State government, waking up Chavittu Nataka forums across neighboring isles like Chellanam, North Paravur, Kochi, and Kodungallur. The five-day 'Chuvadi' fest in 2012 at Gothuruth, under the Kochi Muziris Biennale initiative, further strengthened Chavittu Natakam's footholds. The 2015 season marked



Stage set for performing Chavittu Natakam

a significant moment when a crew first crossed the river to explore this mesmerizing art form, reflecting the central role it plays in the community's life despite their struggles to make ends meet.

A.N. Aniruddha Ashaan was our guide to the land of Chavittu Nadakam, a man who has performed Chavittu Nadakam across thousands of venues and has about 3,000 disciples all over Kerala. Having dedicated his life to the perfection of dance drama, Aniruddhan Ashaan's songs are known for their unique singing styles, notes, and qualities. Starting his dance lessons at the age of 12 with his father, Natarajan, he became the best dancer in Kerala, learning from George Kutty Ashaan, a famous Chavittu Nadakacharya.

Excelling as an actor and director, he trained children from all districts of the state, unmatched in agility of steps, expression, and perfection of presentation. Aniruddhan Assan's works, like KarelsmanCharitam, Saint Geevarghese, David and Goliath, Death of Paryas, Anjalika, Satyapalakan, Sri Ayyappa Charitam, Dharmayudha, et al., were so well-mastered that he could recite any line from the plays he directed. As he stood solemnly at the boat jetty that day, gazing into the river, we witnessed a metamorphosis as he transmigrated across characters without any need for costume or make-up, performing in front of an imaginary crowd.

The stage of Chavittu Nataka was the first drama stage in Kerala. Visually similar to the European opera, this ancient art form was anchored in Kerala and especially Gothuruth with the arrival of the Portuguese. The European missionaries who came to Kerala along with the Portuguese traders to spread Christianity, were the great admirers and advocates of Chavittu Natakam. Those artistes were also the messengers of the European Renaissance. They created Chavittu Natakam by combining it with the art traditions of Kerala like Kathakali, Koodiyattam, Kalari, Yakshaganam, Nattua and Therukooth.

About three hundred years ago, the poet and scholar Chinnathambi Annavi who came from Tenkasi in Tamil Nadu is heralded as the patriarch of Chavittu Natakam. It is believed that he worked for Chavittu Natakam for nearly two decades in Kochi and Kodungallur. Chinnathambi Annavi was a TAMILIAN and the main reason why all the early 'steps' of Chavittu Nataka were in Senthamil. Or it could be because the progenitor of the Malayalam language is Tamil. In 1950, V J John Master from Fort Kochi produced the first Tamil drama 'Caralsman Charitam' in Malayalam. That's how Malayalam steps started to spread.

Sebina Rafi, who was the wife of the famous Malayalam writer Ponjikara Rafi, was known as the



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ABOUT THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, THE POET AND SCHOLAR CHINNATHAMBI ANNAVI WHO CAME FROM TENKASI IN TAMIL NADU IS HERALDED AS THE PATRIARCH OF CHAVITTU NATAKAM. IT IS BELIEVED THAT HE WORKED FOR CHAVITTU NATAKAM FOR NEARLY TWO DECADES IN KOCHI AND KODUNGALLUR.

authentic exponent of Chavittu Natakam. Sebina Rafi freed Chavittu Nataka from religious walls and made it an art for all Malayalis. The book 'Chavittu Nadakam' written by Sebina Rafi in 1964 is still the authoritative book on the history and culture of this art form. In the 1960s, when Chavittu Natakam was staged as part of the Republic Day celebrations, Chavittu Natakam started gaining national fame. At that time, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru praised the artistes and was seen standing on the stage

wearing the Chavittu Nataka crown that they had gifted him.

Besides Chavittu Nadakam, theisle of Gothuruth was also well known for its famous 'Gothuruth Vallamkali'. This boat race which is held as part of the yearly festivities at Kadavaathuruthu Holy Cross Chruuch, is the oldest water festival in Ernakulam district.

The Ashaans dusted off every 'step' handed down from their ancestors. Paulose Ashaan, Pathrose Ashaan, George Kutti Ashaan, Simon Ashaan, Mickle Ashaan and Anirudhan Ashaan, all stepped forward again into the limelight. Adorned in their motley colored costumes and crowns, they transformed Gothuruth yet again into a 2000 acre Chavittu Nadaka stage!

There is a statue of Chinna Thambi Annavi, the patriarch of Chavittu Natakam, in Gothuruth. No one who reaches Gothuruth returns without seeing it. It is a sole reminder, not only about Annavi, but also about those countless faceless artistes who sacrificed their lives for this beautiful dance drama form. Even as the Periyar river ebbs and flows through the eons of time, Gothuruth will have its identity etched in the sands of time through this unique artform. The colourful art form of Chavittu Nadakam! ●

Photos: A.S. SARATH, I & PRD, EKM

Ponnumthuruthu

A Serene Symphony of Nature's Splendour Awaiting Discovery

DISCOVER THE SERENE BEAUTY OF PONNUMTHURUTHU ISLAND, AN UNTOUCHED GEM NESTLED IN KERALA'S ANJENGO BACKWATERS, WHERE NATURE'S HARMONY, RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE, AND TRANQUIL SPIRITUALITY CONVERGE IN AN ENCHANTING SYMPHONY



Adarsh Onatt

Awash in the gentle caress of the Anjengo Backwaters, Ponnumthuruthu Island, fondly known as Golden Island, waits for you; a serene gem nestled near Varkala. This island, untouched by the clamour of city life, whispers enchanting tales of unspoilt beauty, whispering palms, and mesmerizing song of migratory birds in the heart of Kerala. At just 20 kilometres from Varkala, it serves as an enticing retreat, reachable exclusively by a unique jetty from the quaint Nedunganda Village.

Spread over an idyllic five acres, Ponnumthuruthu Island basks in the tranquil laps of the Akathumuri Lake. Here, you will find

the age-old rhythm of the backwaters as they murmur secrets of the universe in your ears, surrounded by the lush greenery that glistens under the tropical sun.

An ornithologist's Eden, this island draws feathered guests from distant lands, adorning the sky with an array of colours and filling the air with their delightful symphony. Here, every moment turns into an intimate rendezvous with nature, where you're the audience to a spectacular show of diverse avian species performing their daily rituals.

As if painted by a divine hand, Ponnumthuruthu is also the proud home to a charming century-old Shiva-Parvathi Temple. This holy sanctum, steeped in legends, offers a



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AS IF PAINTED BY A DIVINE HAND, PONNUMTHURUTHU IS ALSO THE PROUD HOME TO A CHARMING CENTURY-OLD SHIVA-PARVATHI TEMPLE. THIS HOLY SANCTUM, STEEPED IN LEGENDS, OFFERS A MYSTICAL ENERGY THAT CALMS THE MIND AND SOOTHES THE SOUL.

mystical energy that calms the mind and soothes the soul. The rustic ambiance of the temple perfectly complements the traditional ethos of Kerala, whispering tales of an era gone by.

It's not just the idyllic landscapes and tranquil environs that will make you fall in love with Ponnunthuruthu, but also the welcoming smiles of the friendly locals. Here, each interaction is an insight into the rich cultural heritage, adding layers to your travel experience that transcend the physical beauty of the surroundings.

Reaching this secluded piece of paradise is not a challenge; the nearest railway station at Varkala is merely 5 km away. For those of you taking to the skies, the Trivandrum International Airport is conveniently located about 30 km away. From there, the charm of the island is just a short scenic drive and a tranquil boat ride away.

So, dear traveller, if your heart seeks the peaceful lullaby of the backwaters, the soulful harmony of the birds, the allure of history, and the warm embrace of cultural authenticity, Ponnunthuruthu Island awaits you. Nestled in the heart of Thiruvananthapuram, this island is a symphony of experiences that promises to create a melody of memories, a destination that's not just visited, but felt, lived and cherished.

Journey to the Golden Island, and let its magic seep into your being, touching your soul in ways that only the purest form of nature can. Ponnunthuruthu beckons you – are you ready to answer its call? ●

Sailing towards the Golden Island: Akathumuri Lake

The Gastronomic Journey Through Diverse Cultures

VILLAGE FOOD HIGHLIGHTS THE SIMPLICITY AND RICHNESS OF FLAVOURS, OFFERING A UNIQUE TASTE OF THE COUNTRYSIDE AND PROVIDING A DEEPER UNDERSTANDING OF THE COMMUNITY'S CULTURE AND TRADITIONS. EXPLORING VILLAGE FOOD CAN BE A REWARDING AND DELICIOUS ADVENTURE FOR ANY FOOD ENTHUSIAST.



Remya Mohan
Food Vlogger

Culinary trails are already on track. Kerala's food platter is impressively diverse, with varying dishes and methods of preparation from Travancore to South Canara. For example, the typical fluffy, bun-like steamed idly transforms into a flat idly as you approach the Palakkad gap of the Western Ghats. The Ramassery idly, known for its cooking method, shape, and taste, is authentically prepared by only a few Muthaliyar families.

The traditional feast is served in a prescribed order, more specifically in the southern part of Kerala. Guidelines exist for what should be served first, how to serve, and how to complete the meal. While the southern sadhya only serves vegetarian dishes, north Kerala includes fish, chicken, or beef in their sadhya. Even on the veg platter, dishes like Avial, Sambar, and Kalan change their taste, texture,

or ingredients zone-wise.

Keralites' love for food opens up opportunities for gastronomy tours. Many tourists visit Kerala to experience our culinary traditions. There are also many established demonstrators for culinary sessions.

Migrants in Kerala have brought their secret recipes along. An example is the Koimushman. The whole chicken, devoid of a single bone, is cooked with select masalas and an egg, then prepared and served. Only a few Nainas of Kochi prepare this.

In Keralapuram, Kollam, a shop named Ezhuthanikkada serves Vettucake and mutton curry. Vettucake is a snack made of American flour. Another popular dish is the beef roast with banana fritters from Sreemuruga Cafe, Tripunithura, Ernakulam.

Koorkkayumporkum from Angamaly is a must-try. Pork meat and Chinese potato are the key

ingredients here. Beef Vindaloo, an Anglo-Indian dish, owes its origins to the Portuguese invaders. It is a variant of Pork Vindaloo, still popular in Goan cuisine.

Malabar is famous for its food delicacies, such as the Thalassery biryani. In Malabar, culinary knowledge is passed down through generations, with the breaking of the chembu (big cook vessel) seal being part of the celebration. The aroma defines the taste and quality of the dishes.

Thakkaram, the colloquial name for the traditional feast in Malabar, is a culture of the traditional Muslim community. In the past, the ladies of Malabar would prepare a packet of Odakka for their husbands or sons departing for Gulf jobs. The preparation of Odakka is time-consuming, requiring careful splitting of bananas, seedline removal, and specific drying techniques

KERALA'S FOOD PLATTER IS IMPRESSIVELY DIVERSE, WITH VARYING DISHES AND METHODS OF PREPARATION FROM TRAVANCORE TO SOUTH CANARA. FOR EXAMPLE, THE TYPICAL FLUFFY, BUN-LIKE STEAMED IDLY TRANSFORMS INTO A FLAT IDLY AS YOU APPROACH THE PALAKKAD GAP OF THE WESTERN GHATS.

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for long shelf life.

Walking through Malabar, you might encounter Kozhikkal, a marinated red drumstick or broasted chicken dish. Kozhikkalis a Malabar oil-fried snack made from cassava or tapioca.

Canara offers excellent options for vegetarians, such as the soothing cucumber dosa from Marathi Brahmin settlers.

Taste trails provide an excellent way to understand a region's culinary heritage and cultural traditions. By exploring local cuisines and traditional dishes, one can experience unique flavours, cooking techniques, and ingredients intrinsic to a particular area. Taste trails also offer an opportunity to connect with local communities, learn about their food history, and appreciate food's role in shaping their lifestyle. It is a delicious and immersive way to experience the true essence of a place. ●



Kerala's Heritage in a Bite

Velleppam, also known as "fluffy rice bread," is a traditional dish in Kerala. It's a type of bread that's made by fermenting a batter of rice and coconut, which gives it a unique, light texture and slightly tangy taste.

The significance of Velleppam lies not just in its taste, but also in the way it's prepared and the cultural symbolism it carries. This bread is traditionally made using old-world cooking methods, including being cooked over firewood in clay or earthen pots. The preparation of Velleppam is often a community event, with people gathering to help with the process and then sharing the meal.

In Velleppangadi, a food street in Thrissur, it's common to see women in traditional Christian attire, known as Chattayum Mundum, cooking Velleppam. The street is famous for this dish, and people from various parts of Kerala and beyond come to buy this bread. This process and the resulting experience encapsulate much of the region's traditional lifestyle, values, and culinary heritage.

Velleppam thus represents more than just food; it is a symbol of Kerala's culture, community spirit, and culinary traditions. The way the bread is prepared and shared reflects the region's emphasis on communal living and its deep connection to age-old traditions.

The Kumbalangi... Days & Nights

KUMBALANGI, WHICH GARNERED ATTENTION AS THE FIRST MODEL FISHING-TOURISM VILLAGE IN INDIA, IS NOW A PARADISE FOR RURAL TOURISM. THE RURAL BEAUTY OF KUMBALANGI IS RENOWNED INTERNATIONALLY. WITH THE TOURISM SECTOR REVIVING AFTER THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC, BOTH DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL TOURISTS ARE FLOCKING TO KUMBALANGI.



C.T. John
Assistant Editor, I&PRD

Ideal for those wishing to enjoy rural beauty away from the hustle and bustle of city life with their family, Kumbalangi is a favourite destination. Both foreigners and locals experience a unique journey in this village. With 22 homestays available, one can savour the local delicacies and enjoy the view of the backwaters. The sunset view from the banks of the backwaters offers a unique experience. The journey through the Kumbalangi-Kandakkadavu road and the evening views are beyond description. It is something to be experienced firsthand.

The sights in Kumbalangi differ from regular tourist spots. Everything that can be expected from a



Net fishing at Kallanchery, Kumbalangi

Photo: MAHESH PRABHU

village surrounded by water can be seen in Kumbalangi. It is the unique sights of the village that allure tourists. The main attractions for Kumbalangi are the backwaters surrounding it and the hundreds of Chinese fishing nets. Night fishing in the Chinese fishing nets is one of the major attractions here. On reaching the main center at Kallanchery, one can see fishing, mud pot making, coir spinning in traditional ways, coconut plucking, duck farming and much more. It's a tourism that doesn't lose its rural nature. For foreign tourists, boat trips in the backwaters, and auto-rickshaw rides are offered as special tourism packages.

The pedal boat ride near the mangrove forests in Kallanchery provides a unique experience. The timing for pedal boating is from 11 in the morning to 6 in the evening. The cost is 50 rupees per person per hour and can accommodate up to four people.

Leveraging Tourism Potential of Kumbalangi Bridge

The area beneath Kumbalangi Bridge is also a regular tourist spot. A beautiful park adorns the space under the bridge. An open gym and stage have been set up here. A cafeteria, offering local culinary delights, is also located here. Tourists arriving in the evening can witness fishing in the backwaters and enjoy the local cuisine.



Kids park

Feast on Seafood Delights

Those visiting the homestays and hotels in Kumbalangi are greeted by mouthwatering backwater seafood delights. The list of seafood delicacies extends to different types of prawns like Naran, Kaar, Choodan, Konch and dishes like fried, roast, crab curry, fish curry cooked in a pot, pearl spot fish fry, local tilapia fry, duck fry, fish curry without drying out the Chitampal, pallathi fry, and more. The distinct style of cooking in Kumbalangi, with a touch of spice, sourness, and salt, stands out.

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THOSE VISITING THE HOMESTAYS AND HOTELS IN KUMBALANGI ARE GREETED BY MOUTHWATERING BACKWATER SEAFOOD DELIGHTS.



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FOR THOSE WISHING TO ENJOY RURAL BEAUTY AWAY FROM THE HUSTLE AND BUSTLE OF CITY LIFE WITH THEIR FAMILY, KUMBALANGI IS THE IDEAL AND FAVOURITE DESTINATION.

Promoting 'Kavaru' Tourism

With the success of the movie "Kumbalangi Nights," Kumbalangi is gearing up to exploit the tourism possibilities of Kaveru. The 'Kavaru' is visible at night during April and May. This time, thousands of tourists visited Kumbalangi just to see the 'Kavaru'. M P Shivadathan, a member of the state tourism advisory committee, said that a special arrangement for enjoying the Kaveru would be put in place next year. Facilities for enjoying Kumbalangi's unique cuisine and accommodation for those coming to see the cover will also be arranged. This would be a boon to the fisherfolk without causing them any trouble

Way to Kumbalangi

Kumbalangi, surrounded by water, is located 15 kilometres southwest of Kochi city. The village is located in the southern part of Ernakulam district. Perumbadappu to the north, Ezhupunna in Alappuzha district to the south, Aroor to the east, and Kannamali to the west are located near Kumbalangi. Those coming from Kochi City and Fort Kochi can reach via Perumbadappu-Kumbalangi bridge and those coming from the Alappuzha side can reach via the Ezhupunna-Kumbalangi bridge. You can also reach via Kandakkadavu road from Kannamaly, Chellanam area, and by boat from Aroor. It is 43 kilometres from Nedumbassery Airport and 14 kilometres from Ernakulam South Railway Station.

For more information about Kumbalangi

There is an information center operating under the panchayat to provide information to



The Blue Wonder of 'Kavaru' (Bioluminescence)

'Kavaru' is usually visible in March and April when the salt content increases in the backwaters. It was commonly referred to as "erichil in the water" by the elders. This is the colour difference that occurs when the tide ebbs. It appears in light blue colour. It is more beautifully visible in areas with fewer disturbances. The Kavaru phenomenon can be seen in the movie "Life of Pi". The blue wonder in Kumbalangi became famous among Malayalis through the Kumbalangi Nights.

tourists. For information related to Kumbalangi Tourism, you can call the number 90740 04070 during the daytime.

For those wishing to enjoy rural beauty away from the hustle and bustle of city life with their family, Kumbalangi is the ideal and favourite destination. Both foreigners and locals experience a unique journey in this village. ●

Photos: MAHESH PRABHU, I&PRD

VILLAGE EXPERIENCES

By the Backwaters of Kerala



Life that flows
in Kuttanad

An unforgettable
journey in
houseboats



When the night casts
its magic spell on
Ashtamudi Lake

Quiet flows the river-
Parassini Kadavu



Experience and Enjoy Be one with the village life...

Glide through serenity



For the adventurous, the RT Mission offers boating facilities as part of the Village Life Experiences

Why wondering at bamboo crafting? Learn it



The skilled artisans of Kerala are ready to teach you Bamboo craft making.

The fun of extruding lime shells



A usual scene from the backwaters of Kerala is that of lime shells being extruded. Travellers can also take part in this work with the help of Responsible Tourism Mission.

Brave enough to cross the river in rafts



Get enchanted by the beauty of Kannur



The ancient trading port of Kerala, Kannur embraces travellers with its lush greenery and calm blues.

The tales and secrets told by Ponnani



Ponnani is renowned for its pottery arts. The skilled craftsmen here shall regale you with tales and secrets of their exquisite art.



Learn to weave rustic dreams

Watching the deft expertise of the villagers at weaving the palms fronds will tempt you to take a shot at it.

EXPERIENCING THE ART OF MAKING HANDICRAFTS

Crafting Kerala's Tourism Tale



**THE ENCHANTING ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE HANDICRAFTS
INDUSTRY AND TOURISM WEAVES A CAPTIVATING TALE OF
CULTURAL HERITAGE AND ECONOMIC VITALITY.**

Mirroring a great tradition: Aranmulakkannadi



Dr. Venugopal C.K.
Professor, Kerala Institute of Tourism and
Travel Studies (KITTS)

The Handicrafts industry is intricately linked with tourism, their association deepening over the years as both sectors flourished. Festivals and cultural celebrations spotlight the craftsmen’s talents, reinforcing their significance. Every tourist spot in Kerala is steeped in cultural history, with craftsmen crafting enduring pieces that have gained global recognition. The famous “God’s Own Country” tagline comes alive as tourists explore Kerala’s natural beauty and rich heritage. The Handicrafts industry’s artisans have not only preserved traditional crafts but also boosted Kerala’s tourism, creating a harmonious blend of culture and allure.

The rich tradition of handicrafts in Kerala is intricately interwoven into the culture of this land. Handed down over the generations, the handicrafts of Kerala still maintain their quality and mystique thanks to the hard work and dedication of their creators. This is one of the main reasons why tourists throng the destinations of Kerala. Providing a shopping experience that is unique, handicrafts showrooms recognized by the Government give tourists takeaways that become part of the cherished memories of their experience. This, in fact, has helped the state to attract more tourists, thereby contributing to the exchequer. Products made out of coir, wood, clay, and metals are just some of the contributions of these craftsmen. In addition to coir, coconut shell products are also in great demand among tourists. Many outlets showcase souvenirs, mementos, gift articles, and similar products across the state. Fairs and exhibitions are also conducted at regular intervals to market these products.

Aranmulakannadi is a world-famous handicraft product made from a metal-alloy combination. The exact mixture is a closely guarded secret of a family based in Aranmula. It is not surprising that this sleepy town has come to the limelight due to the immense popularity of this handmade mirror. The Aranmula Kannadi is now an iconic symbol of the cultural heritage of Kerala. Replicas of murals displayed on the walls of temples and churches are also much sought after by tourists. The fact that the colors used in these paintings are made out of vegetable and mineral pigments adds value to these souvenirs. Products made out of cane are no less in demand, contributing significantly to the state’s economy. Bamboo and reed products are also much sought after by both tourists and locals. Another evolving handicraft field is the screw pine-based products. Woodcrafts of Kerala are also well



ARANMULAKANNADI IS A WORLD-FAMOUS HANDICRAFT PRODUCT MADE FROM A METAL-ALLOY COMBINATION. THE EXACT MIXTURE IS A CLOSELY GUARDED SECRET OF A FAMILY BASED IN ARANMULA.



Bamboo Bangles

known among both domestic and foreign tourists. Numerous temples and traditional homes house these kinds of works.

Netturpetti or aada petti, yet another iconic symbol of Kerala’s tradition, is an exquisitely crafted ornamental box used to keep jewelry by the elite in ancient Kerala. Made from teak, rosewood, jack, and wild jack, this is often given as a gift to dignitaries and also as a memento. Bell metal craft is another art that has contributed immensely to tourism and allied industries. Lacquer Ware, the craft combining metal and wood, is another sought-after product by tourists visiting Kerala. Other traditional items include the Kathakali mask, Nettipattam (caparison for elephants), Kasavu Sari, replica of Kettuvallam (the rice barge), uruli, and the traditional lamps of Kerala. Exotic products made out of sandalwood



Trying a hand in weaving

are also much in demand.

Kerala tourism has published the approved list of souvenir shops in Kerala for tourists who wish to procure souvenirs to preserve their travel experiences. This has helped tourists to get their preferred products from genuine vendors at reasonable rates. The arts and crafts village located at Vellar in Thiruvananthapuram gives visitors deep insights into the traditional, folk, and ethnic crafts and artifacts of Kerala. The Iringal village in Kozhikode is famous for showcasing artistic heritage and traditional craftsmanship. The Kerala Arts and Crafts village, Sargaalaya, is an initiative of Kerala Tourism. One of the oldest cooperative societies

in India, the Kanhirode Weavers Cooperative Society Ltd was established in 1952. Situated in Kannur, it is well known for creating high-quality furnishing fabrics, shirts, sarees, and Khadi material. Aruvacode, a village near Nilambur, has a different story to tell. Here, a movement called Kumbham has changed the lives of a good number of potters who had almost left their traditional pottery making due to lack of patronage and modernity. Now Kumbham gives potters a perfect platform to exhibit their products and make a livelihood out of it. The traditional straw mat (pulpaya) making has received a new lease of life due to the initiatives of the Kuruva community in Kilimangalam village



ANOTHER NOTABLE HANDICRAFT PRODUCT THAT HAS SURVIVED THE ONSLAUGHT OF MODERN TRENDS IS THE KUTHAMPULLY KASAVU HANDLOOM SAREES. KUTHAMPULLY VILLAGE LOCATED IN THRISSUR HAS SHOWN HOW A DETERMINED GROUP OF ARTISANS MANAGED TO CHANGE THEIR FORTUNE THROUGH INNOVATION AND DEDICATION.

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situated in Thrissur.

Another notable handicraft product that has survived the onslaught of modern trends is the Kuthampully kasavu handloom sarees. Kuthampully village located in Thrissur has shown how a determined group of artisans managed to change their fortune through innovation and dedication. A similar handloom story has roots in Balaramapuram situated close to Thiruvananthapuram city. The successful initiatives of Uravu, a non-profit organization at Thrikkaipetta village located in Kalpatta, is an inspiring one. A wing of the State Bamboo mission formed under the aegis of the Department of Industries, Uravu makes good use of technology to design high-quality bamboo products. The lives of tribes who were traditional bamboo product makers have become easier and more fruitful out of this initiative.

As elucidated above, it can be seen that handicrafts and tourism go hand in hand. The artisans who were in misery and on the verge of winding up their traditional jobs are now happily resettled. This has been made possible by connecting their skills and outputs with tourism in the state. Kerala tourism has certainly lived up to its tagline by giving a dignified livelihood to artisans who were deprived of their rightful place in society. Handicrafts, the traditional strength of Kerala, have been revived by this symbiosis thanks to the unrelenting support from the Government. ●



THE RISE OF KOVALAM

Kovalam

A Coastal Village's Journey to International Fame

KOVALAM IS A DESTINATION THAT ENCHANTS AND MYSTIFIES. ITS TRANSFORMATION FROM A QUAIN FISHING VILLAGE INTO ONE OF INDIA'S MOST ICONIC TRAVEL DESTINATIONS IS NOTHING SHORT OF REMARKABLE.

The ever-enchating beach at Kovalam



Adv. Yedu Krishna R.B.

Travel Writer

The gentle rhythm of waves crashes against the shore, mingling with the distant echo of laughter and the faint strum of a guitar. It's the 1960s, and some youngsters from the West found their haven in Kovalam, a seemingly obscure seaside hamlet along the Arabian Sea's coastline. It was a love at first sight.

Little did they know then that their free-spirited dances and songs would be the catalyst for a transformation that would reshape this quaint fishing village into one of India's most iconic travel destinations.

The story of Kovalam is fascinating, beginning with its original name 'Kovakulam,' meaning the 'King's Land.' This place was once the royal playground of Travancore's kings, offering a tranquil retreat. The visionary Colonel Godavarma Raja sensed something more in the 1970s and decided that Kovalam's sandy shores held untapped potential. It was here that the spark was ignited.



The tourism landscape shifted with the opening of Grove Beach Resort by ITDC in 1973. Designed by architect Charles Correa, the resort expanded in 1976 and became Kerala's first five-star hotel. This development attracted visitors from across Europe and America, paving the way for the state government commencing the operations of Hotel Samudra (under KTDC) and many private entrepreneurs to invest in Kovalam's hospitality industry. The region now boasts over 3000 rooms.

The introduction of charter flights in 1993 opened Kovalam's skies and heart to the world. Doors flung open to both domestic and international travellers, allowing more people to explore its wonders. The young backpackers moved on, but they left behind a legacy that continued to evolve.

Wellness seekers found a new home in Kovalam, as Ayurvedic centers, yoga retreats, and the traditional martial art of Kalari became part of the landscape. Healing and tranquility became synonymous with Kovalam's charm, attracting those in search of sanctuary for the soul.

Kovalam's transition from simple cottages

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KOVALAM'S TRANSFORMATION FROM A SEASIDE HAMLET TO A GLOBAL PARADISE IS A TALE OF VISION, RESILIENCE, AND AN EMBRACE OF CHANGE.

Kovalam's unique coastal features, including small rocky shores, rock formations, and coconut trees, draw foreign visitors. The tranquil sea and gentle waves, perfect for body surfing, make this destination unmissable. Many foreigners are enchanted by the beach sunbathing facilities and return year after year.

The hippie invasion brought with it an unmistakable vibrancy. Young tourists from foreign lands arrived, sleeping in tents or mud rooms, seeking solace, freedom, and connection with nature. They danced, sang, and rejoiced, leaving an indelible mark on the local population. Seeing an opportunity, the locals began to accommodate these unconventional guests, constructing lodges and marking the start of a tourism boom.

to star resorts has been extraordinary. There are now 1500 three-star and above rooms and 3000 additional accommodations, employing around 30,000 people directly and indirectly. Despite the decline in foreign tourist numbers due to the pandemic, domestic tourism has surged, according to Kerala Hotel and Restaurant Association Kovalam Unit President R. Sishupalan. The completion of a 93-crore project, part of the KIIIFB project, promises to establish Kovalam as Kerala's premier tourist center, especially during the peak months of October and November.

Kovalam's transformation from a seaside hamlet to a global paradise is a tale of vision, resilience, and an embrace of change. It's a story that began with the simple joys of youngsters and grew into something extraordinary. ●

Echoes of Kerala's Past



Prof. Vasisht M.C.
Historian

PANTHALAYANI KOLLAM ANCHORS KERALA'S RICH MARITIME HISTORY AND LEGACY

The villages of Kerala stand as rich chronicles of the past, waiting to be discovered. N.S.Madhavan, a renowned Malayalam novelist, once aptly remarked that Malayalis sleep atop a layered quilt of history. Indeed, every shovelful of Kerala soil could reveal a nugget of our storied past. This is particularly true for the northern Kerala villages, repositories of history that are nothing short of an open-air museum for tourists, especially those who journey across oceans to explore the charm of God's own country.

Set on the emerald Western coast of erstwhile Malabar, Kollam or Panthalayani Kollam, a tranquil village, hides an illustrious past that yearns to be explored, especially by our foreign guests. Often termed as a forgotten medieval port, Panthalayani Kollam resides within the boundaries of today's Koyilandi municipality in Kozhikode, Kerala.

The once-thriving port town of Koyilandi, formerly known as Panthalayani Kollam, ranks among the oldest ports in southern India. The

village encompasses five desoms: Panthalayni, Kovikkandy, Kothamangalam, Kuruvangad, and Peruvattur. A testimony to its ancient roots, a Megalithic burial site from 500 BCE to 500 CE is nestled in KuttattuKunnu, aptly named the 'western hill.' An urn burial linked to the Megalithic culture from the 5th century also echoes tales of a bygone era.

Barely 26 km north of Calicut, Panthalayani Kollam spreads across an area of 537.96 acres. Once a bustling hub of trade, today it stands as a serene village, its legacy discreetly recorded in medieval Arab, Chinese, and European accounts of the Malabar coast. Epigraphs from the 10th and 11th centuries narrate the commercial importance of this place, underscoring its reputation as a trading centre as early as the 10th century CE.

During the 16th century, the village, a major Muslim centre, fell under a Portuguese attack. For a time, the port served as the nerve-centre of the famed naval commanders of the Zamorin, the KunjaliMarakkars. This erstwhile thriving port was the scene of their valiant stand against the colonial intruders. Although the



Kollam Panthalayani Jamat Mosque



Vattezhuhtu inscription



Pishari Kavu temple



Parapally Mosque

Portuguese onslaught left the city weakened, its historical resonance endures.

Chinese connections were also prevalent in this port city. Evidence of their presence is found in the form of medieval Chinese porcelain unearthed by Indian scholars. Yet, the heritage tourism potential of Panthalayani remains largely untapped, its significance not fully realized by its own people. This was the port that welcomed Vasco Da Gama and his crew in the last week of May 1498. From Idrisi to Ibn Batuta, this was a regular haunt of Arab traders, who referred to the port as 'Fandarina.' The rugged beauty of the Parapally rocky beach remains a hidden gem, poised to enchant visitors with its natural allure.

When in Panthalayani, be sure to visit the Pisharikav Temple. Located amidst the Hindu settlements, it's a hub for devotees from far and wide who come to worship the goddess Bhadra Kali. Linked to the Ettuveetil Pillais, the infamous feudal lords who plotted against Marthanda Varma, the temple's annual festival in the Malayalam month of Meenam (March-April) is a spectacle to behold.

Just a stone's throw away from the Pisharikav Temple stands the Nagaraesawara

Siva Temple, a shrine dedicated to Lord Siva. The name translates to the 'lord of the city,' hinting at the area's once-thriving commercial activity. Additionally, the Parapally Mosque is a testament to the region's Muslim heritage, believed to be the second mosque constructed by Malik Ibn Dinar after Kodungallur. The mosque's expansive graveyard and nearby Mansions of Muslim Joint Families still echo the Muslim legacy of the area.

The Kollam Jamat Mosque on the national highway 66, and the Kadalur Point lighthouse, a British-era construction, are worth visiting. The latter, with its 34-meter high stone masonry tower, serves as an iconic symbol of the area.

Panthalyani Kollam's rocky Parapally beach and Parapally mosque complex promise a visual treat, demonstrating the potential for developing heritage or historical tourism. The echoes of its rich history may be silent, but with the right focus, this tranquil village could soon wake from its slumber to reveal its vibrant past to the world. ●

**Photos: PRAVEEN V.P.,
Panel Photographer I&PRD**

The Blooming of Farm Tourism



Dr. Venugopal C.K.
Professor, KITTS



R. Babu
Assistant Professor, KITTS

Venturing beyond conventional tourism, the emergence of farm tourism in Kerala paints a unique picture of rural life intertwined with sustainable travel experiences. This dynamic synergy between agriculture and tourism is shaping a distinctive narrative that celebrates both tradition and innovation

Farm tourism usually involves a) Accommodation b) Farm visits c) Farm shops visits d) Guided walks and e) Farm activities. Using of

indigenous methods and organic farming are widely accepted and are popular among tourists. Many destinations like Kanthalloor located near Munnar have gone a long way in developing farm tourism. Nelliampathi, the beautiful hill destination of Palakkad is another shining example where farm tourism has been successfully applied. Some of the benefits of farm tourism are a) In spite of all modernity man is an essential part of nature. Farm tourism gives man a unique opportunity of self-realization where the concept of ourselves being part of nature is realized b) This is a group activity that help builds bondage c) Also people from various walks of life get together making this a unique experience. Agri-Tourism has the capacity for creating income opportunity for farmers and shows new path for rural development.

Scope of Farm Tourism in Kerala

Agriculture is a way of life in Kerala from time immemorial. Even in this cyber age a large



number of youngsters not to speak of the traditional farmers have embraced farming not only for a living but as a passion. In districts like Wyanad, Idukki, Palakkad, Pathanamthitta and Kottayam the farming community occupies a unique place in society. Kuttanad the rice bowl of Kerala in spite of the repeated floods with constant support from the Government is a shining example of the farming culture of Kerala. Many tourism destinations in Kerala are intrinsically linked to the unique crops grown in there. A classic example is Munnar where tea plantations on the slopes of its rolling hills are its Unique Selling Proposition (USP). Similar is the case of Wyanad where spices and the unique produces from bamboo rule the roost. Western Ghats that runs across the breadth of Kerala houses a numerous eco destinations where flora and fauna are the USP. If the uniqueness of a particular destination is linked to farm tourism without disturbing nature's balance, this will be beneficial to the local community and the state as a whole in terms of livelihood and income. While implementing farm tourism the following thing should be kept in mind a) It should not damage nature at the same time should generate revenue b) Local community should be benefitted

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Distribution of Farm Tourism in Kerala

Destination	Crops	Activities
Idukki	Pepper, Cardamom, other spices, Rubber, Coffee, Coconut, Vegetables	Organic farming- visits, purchase
Wyanad	Arecanut, Pepper, vegetables, tuber crops, drumstick, Pappaya, Paddy, Coffee, Ginger, Tea, Cardamom	Farm tours and stay, Being part in the process of plantation, Feeding farm animals
Palakkad	Paddy, Coconut, Rubber, Pulses, Arecanut, Tapioca, Ginger, Groundnut, Sugarcane, Fruits like Mango, Pomegranate, herbs, Navara grain and Bamboo	Visit to horticultural farm in Malampuzha, Orange and vegetable farm in Nelliampathy, Integrated seed Nelliampathy, Integrated seed development farm, Erutheempathy, Central orchard, Pattamby, State seeds farm in Aalathur, Kunathur, Kongad, Ananganadi and Muthumala, Navara organic farm near Chittur
Kuttanad	Paddy, Vegetables	A USP as of one of the rare Ramsar sites below sea level
Kottayam	Rubber, Pineapple	Plantation visits
Pathanamthitta	Vegetables, Paddy, Tapioca, Spices such as Pepper, Cardamom, Ginger, Rubber	Three seed farms allowing access to vegetable seeds, paddy seeds etc. Livestock includes Ducks, Buffaloes, Cows, Sheep, Fowls, Pigs and Goats. Two fish breeding centres promoting aqua tourism sells fingerlings of Labeo, Catla, Mrigal, Rohu and Cyprinus



c) A part of the revenue generated should go to persevering the ecological balance of the area. It should provide a learning experience to tourists in terms of heritage, culture, farm produces, cuisine which should basically reflect the way of life of the local community.

Packages and Tours offered in Farm Tourism

Depending on the strengths of the destination, packages can be designed. In addition to the essential components of a typical farm visit the following options can be considered depending on the availability of resources. a) Trekking b) boating and c) fishing are some of the popular and sure to succeed inclusions. Angling for example is a major source of revenue for the operator at the same time a source of relaxation and enjoyment to the visitor. Some home stay owners help visitors cook food using traditional methods. In addition to this interaction with domestic animals such as cows, goats and sheep are other ways of experiencing village life. In addition to this ethnic art forms and cultural shows are arranged by enterprising entrepreneurs. The key to success as a farm tourism operator lies in the passion for farming coupled with depth knowledge about traditional practices. Birding is another major form of tourism activity that is gaining popularity in Kerala that can be linked to farm tourism. Marayoor, a scenic village located near Munnar is classic example where village life experiences have been converted in packages. The traditional recipes made by local community

66

FARM TOURISM IS GRADUALLY EVOLVING AS A WAY OF LIFE IN KERALA SO MUCH SO THAT LOCAL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IS INCREASING SHARPLY.

are a great hit among tourists. Trained by Kerala Institute of Tourism and Travel Studies (KITTS), Women self-help groups formed after attending the skill development programme conducted by the institute have started making livelihood.

Farm tourism is gradually evolving as a way of life in Kerala so much so that local community participation is increasing sharply. Nestled between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea, this tiny strip of land endowed abundantly with natural attractions is ideally poised to become a homestay destination. Indeed with ample support from the Government of Kerala to farmers and common man, developing Kerala as a farm tourism destination is very much a reality. There is no doubt that in the coming years this concept will gain importance and popularity. Farming is indeed a way of life in Kerala and coupled with tourism this symbiosis is here to stay. ●



Up Above the World so *High*

BESIDES BEING A HAVEN FROM THE TROPICAL CITY LIFE, MUNNAR IS A HEAVEN FOR SERIOUS NATURE LOVERS. RANGES FROM CASUAL NATURE WALKS TO SERIOUS TREKKING EXPEDITIONS MUNNAR EXPERIENCES CAN TRULY EDUCATE A VISITOR ABOUT THE NATURE.



Ajai Kumar K S / Sridevi Narayanan

Travel writers

Tranced by the enchanting beauty of Munnar's alluring landscape, Isabelle, the spirited young bride of a young British Planter unknowingly shouted "Here, amidst the undulating hills, I wish to rest forever".Ironically, the fate's whimsy had an unfortunate way of twisting her desires into a bitterreality, as if her words were prophetic by chance. On the very next morning, a misty shadow fell upon the Hillsdisguised as Cholera. In a nick of time Cholera's fingers had clutched at Isabelle's life itself.Honouring her last wish, she was laid to rest atop the majestic Hills of Munnar, where Henry Knight, the "Knight" of her fleeting matrimonial journey, erected a quaint Chapel guarded her slumber, overlooking the valley beneath, since the late 19th Century.

In the dawn of the 21st Century, a new chapter unfolded in Munnar's history. Munnar based Hadlee Renjith - an enthusiastic young Naturalist, in Munnar sought to share the enchantment of Munnar with the world.With each step echoing Isabelle's love for the Hills,

On the way to Meeshapulimalai

Photo: MANOJ VASUDEVAN

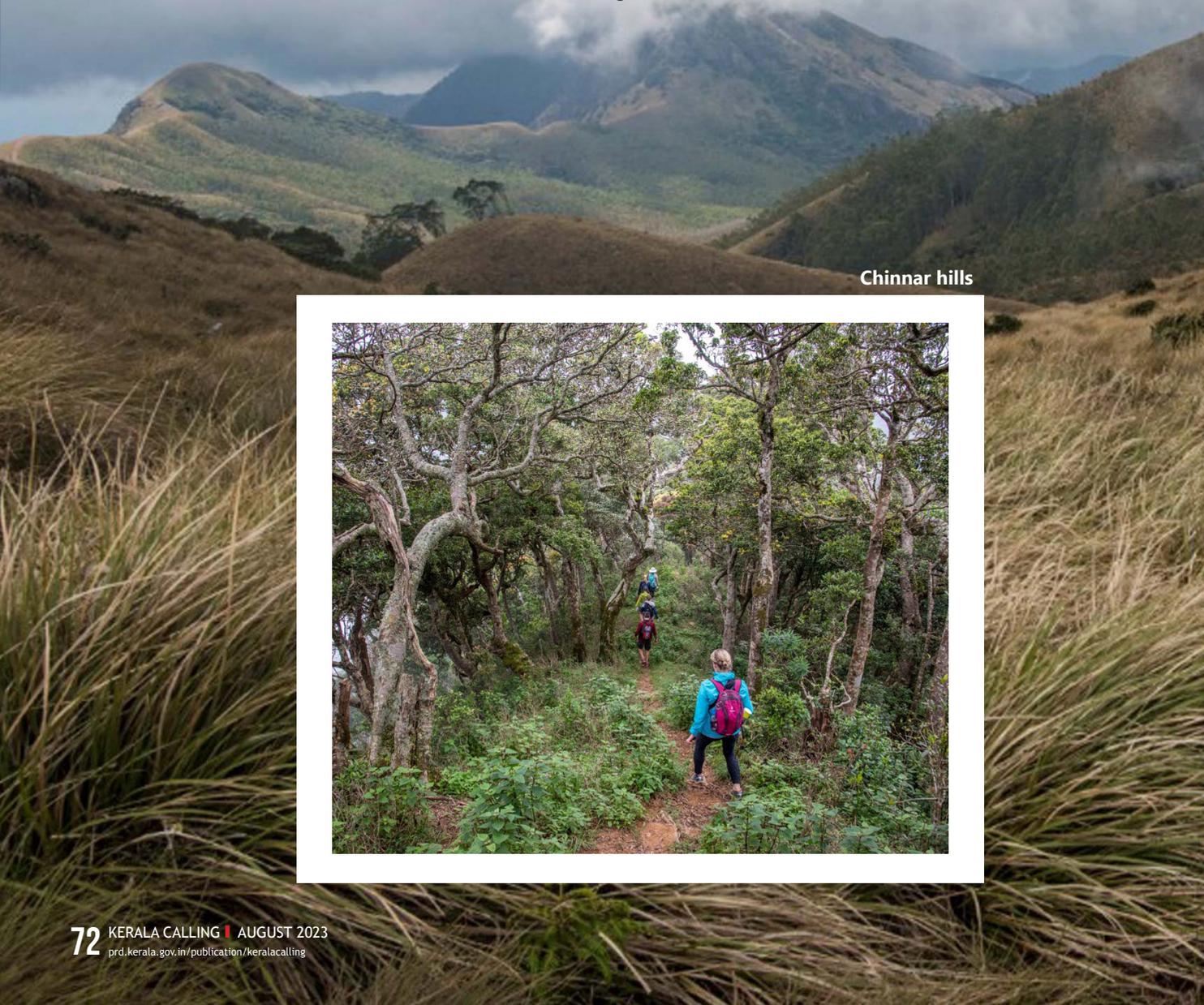
Hadlee named his Holiday venture "Resplendent Experiences," a portal through which he guided travellers on the most immersive trekking journeys of their lives.

As a new fad among the discerned nature lovers Trekking is turned out to be the most ideal way to explore the Mother Nature. To cope up with the timely requirement Hadlee Renjith, who is also a Wildlife Photographer, specialises in providing Professionally Guided Trekking Programs of explored and unexplored terrains of Munnar Hills and surroundings. In every Munnar Trekking programs an accompanying Naturalist - a passionate Walking Encyclopaedia who is mainly specialised in environment and Ecology bestowed with unique brooding eyes and ears to spot the Wildlife in the vicinity.

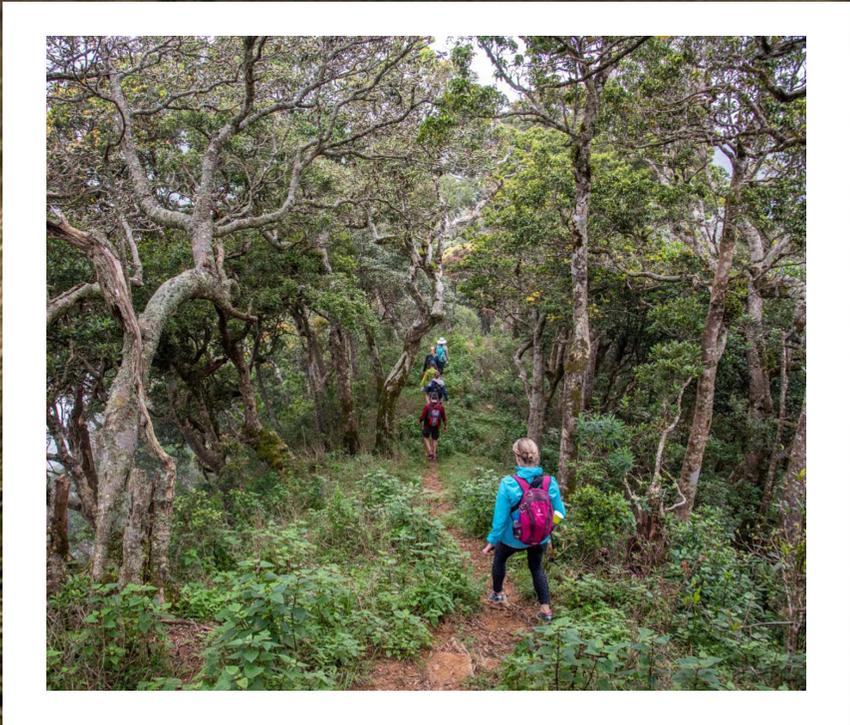
Without Munnar Hill Station the much-celebrated Kerala Holiday Itinerary is incomplete for the Inbound and Domestic Travellers. Apart from that "the chilled Munnar" is the shortest

weekend mascot of the "tropical Cochin" Travellers. Regrettably, Munnar Trekking is still a passion limited among the ardent nature lovers, mostly the Europeans. Their mostly explored trekking points are Meeshappulimalai, Kolukkumalai, Top Station, a portion of Chokkarmudi Hills, Pambadumpara Shola National Park, Lakshmi Estate Hills etc. Though Anamudi is the highest peak in the whole of South India, which falls under the Munnar regions of Western Ghats, it is not legally permitted to trek or enter.

Most of the Trekking Programs in Munnar are single-day or half-day treks or overnight tended-accommodative treks or night treks. From the peak of every trekking point, a breath-taking bird's-eye view of the pristine nature accompanied by the green carpets of Tea Plantations, dream-like silver streams, glittering river banks, lush green forests, blue sky scrapping tall trees on the valleys, vast grasslands and misty hill tops altogether sleep peacefully on the lap of Western Ghats are guaranteed.



Chinnar hills



Meeshappulimalai, the mountain resembles a Moustached-Leopard about to spring, with its pinnaclet an altitude of 2637 MSL, claims the privilege of being the second highest peak in South India. Meeshappulimalai, an amalgamation of eight peaks, is the most sought after and hard-trekking spot with steep ridges to climb compared to the other trekking points.

While the ascent in progress, one can spot wild animals and rich avian diversities in the striking landscape of thick woodlands, plantations, hills and waterbodies. A nine to ten hours long trekking soothes the psyche and physique of the trekker, with packed snacks, soft drinks and short resting intervals that ultimately make the trek a memorable decision.

One can boast to be trekked on the world's highest tea plantations situated on an elevation of 2170 MSL once reaching Kolukkumalai, beyond the Kerala Boarders in Tamil Nadu. A 1.5 hours long Jeep ride from Munnar Town through Suryanelli village take the trekkers to the abode of the Kolukkumalai Hill. Kolukkumalai is more of a serene family trekking or picnic spot that can present the beautiful sights along the borders of the grasslands, misty mountains, the erstwhile colonial bungalows seen around and a visit to one of the oldest



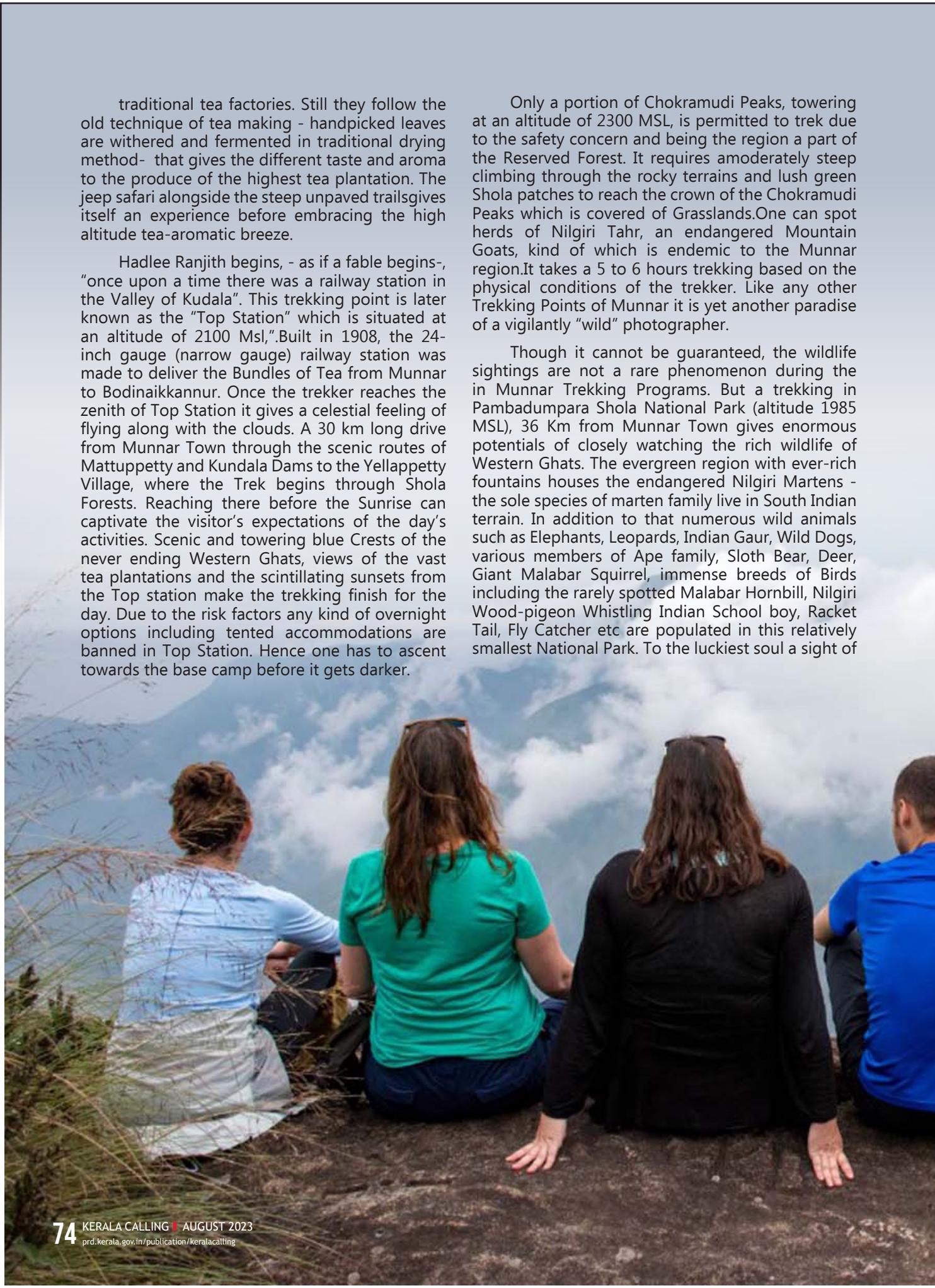
Meeshappulimalai

traditional tea factories. Still they follow the old technique of tea making - handpicked leaves are withered and fermented in traditional drying method- that gives the different taste and aroma to the produce of the highest tea plantation. The jeep safari alongside the steep unpaved trail gives itself an experience before embracing the high altitude tea-aromatic breeze.

Hadlee Ranjith begins, - as if a fable begins-, "once upon a time there was a railway station in the Valley of Kudala". This trekking point is later known as the "Top Station" which is situated at an altitude of 2100 Msl. Built in 1908, the 24-inch gauge (narrow gauge) railway station was made to deliver the Bundles of Tea from Munnar to Bodinaikkannur. Once the trekker reaches the zenith of Top Station it gives a celestial feeling of flying along with the clouds. A 30 km long drive from Munnar Town through the scenic routes of Mattupetty and Kundala Dams to the Yellappetty Village, where the Trek begins through Shola Forests. Reaching there before the Sunrise can captivate the visitor's expectations of the day's activities. Scenic and towering blue Crests of the never ending Western Ghats, views of the vast tea plantations and the scintillating sunsets from the Top station make the trekking finish for the day. Due to the risk factors any kind of overnight options including tented accommodations are banned in Top Station. Hence one has to ascent towards the base camp before it gets darker.

Only a portion of Chokramudi Peaks, towering at an altitude of 2300 MSL, is permitted to trek due to the safety concern and being the region a part of the Reserved Forest. It requires a moderately steep climbing through the rocky terrains and lush green Shola patches to reach the crown of the Chokramudi Peaks which is covered of Grasslands. One can spot herds of Nilgiri Tahr, an endangered Mountain Goats, kind of which is endemic to the Munnar region. It takes a 5 to 6 hours trekking based on the physical conditions of the trekker. Like any other Trekking Points of Munnar it is yet another paradise of a vigilantly "wild" photographer.

Though it cannot be guaranteed, the wildlife sightings are not a rare phenomenon during the in Munnar Trekking Programs. But a trekking in Pambadumpara Shola National Park (altitude 1985 MSL), 36 Km from Munnar Town gives enormous potentials of closely watching the rich wildlife of Western Ghats. The evergreen region with ever-rich fountains houses the endangered Nilgiri Martens - the sole species of marten family live in South Indian terrain. In addition to that numerous wild animals such as Elephants, Leopards, Indian Gaur, Wild Dogs, various members of Ape family, Sloth Bear, Deer, Giant Malabar Squirrel, immense breeds of Birds including the rarely spotted Malabar Hornbill, Nilgiri Wood-pigeon Whistling Indian School boy, Racket Tail, Fly Catcher etc are populated in this relatively smallest National Park. To the luckiest soul a sight of





Nilgiri Tahr at Rajamalai Sancturay



Mattuppetti

the very Tiger cannot be ruled out

Pambadumpara Shola National Park. Being it a sensitive zone a Forest department official escort every trekking voyage along with the Naturalist.

Lakshmi Estate is elevated at 1700 MSL, is a popular soft-trekking spot. A three to four hours trekking passes through the tea plantations and the huts of the workers the Kannan Devan Hills. As the trek progresses the view of the nearby town of old Munnar fades away once get on top of the hills, the blue mountains and the winding roads which leads to Munnar is visible among the tea plantations. The sights of resorts far away on the edges of the hills faraway look like nests among the trees. Though no major wild animals can be spotted, monkeys, Giant Squirrels and endemic birds express their unpleasant notes towards the visitors for being intruders into their territory.

Munnar is not mere a summer retreat that offers a couple of nights' stay in once-abandoned and later-renovated British Tea Bungalows or the lazy holidays in modern Resorts. Apart from its usual picnic spots - such as Echo-point, Matupetty /Kundala Dams, Tea factories, purchasing centres of mountain products - Munnar has a lot more to satiate the quench of a serious and curious visitor and make him seriously think of preserving her for our posterity. ●

Photos: MANOJ VASUDEVAN



Kollumalai hills



Pottery making

The Rise of Model Responsible Tourism Villages

IN THE KASARAGOD DISTRICT, VALIAPARAMBA, ANOTHER BENEFICIARY OF THIS PROJECT, HAS BEEN PROMOTED AS A CENTRAL HUB FOR TOURISM. OVERALL, THE PROJECT'S COMMENDABLE EFFORTS ARE BEING REALIZED ACROSS 15 REGIONS IN THE STATE.

The "Model Responsible Tourism Villages" project is an innovative endeavor that has been driving the growth of responsible tourism in numerous villages. This transformative initiative has been rolled out in select locales like Aymanam, Thiruvappu, Neendur, Arpukara, Ezhumanthuruth in the Kottayam district, and Ezhikara in the Ernakulam district.

Aymanam, as the pioneer of this project, was acknowledged as the first model responsible tourism village. Due to its successful implementation of sustainable tourism practices, Aymanam was recognized by the illustrious travel publication, 'Condé Nast Traveller', as a must-visit tourism destination in 2022. Furthering its accolades, the Aymanam Model RT Village Project was honored with the prestigious Gold Award at the World Travel Market.

In the Kasaragod district, Valiaparamba, another beneficiary of this project, has been promoted as a central hub for tourism. Overall, the project's commendable efforts are being realized across 15 regions in the state.

The "Model Responsible Tourism Villages" project demonstrates an inspiring effort to prioritize sustainability and local culture while simultaneously promoting tourism. It is a forward-thinking model that other regions could adapt to help sustain and cherish their unique cultural heritage.

Ambalavayal

A Ballet of Timeless Beauty and Enchanting Legacy



At Nellarachal in Ambalavayal

IN THE RHYTHMIC HEARTBEATS OF VATTAKALI AND THE DYNAMIC SPINS OF KAMBALA KALI, THE SPIRIT OF AMBALAVAYAL UNVEILS ITS ESSENCE. AMIDST THE LUSH LANDSCAPES OF WAYANAD LIES A REALM THAT DANCES TO THE TUNES OF TRADITION AND THROBS WITH THE VIBRANCY OF RESPONSIBLE TOURISM.

Ambalavayal, a name whispered among discerning travellers, has been enchanting global nomads long before 2012. Today, this hidden gem is not just a picturesque retreat but the rising star of Responsible Tourism. Every nook and cranny resonates with tales of heritage and of communities building a brighter, sustainable future.

Step into the quaint pathways of Nellarachal, where the Village Life Package unfurls a tapestry of local living that's raw, real, and riveting. Amidst the cacophony of modern life, Ambalavayal has spun an intricate web of workshops, training, and community symphonies, birthing dynamic micro-enterprises. Their flourishing ventures, boasting a staggering annual turnover of around Rs. 50 lakh, stand as a testament to the land's untapped prowess.

April 2018 heralded a renaissance, as the RT Mission lit the spark of creativity, empowering 50 artisans to weave magic with paper and cloth. These thirteen units, alive with craftsmanship, don't just create bags; they craft stories. Stories that visitors can touch, feel, and carry, while also bolstering the dreams and hopes of local artisans.

As the mists of May 2018 settled, the RT Mission unveiled a symphony of scents with their avant-garde soap-making workshop. Infused with the richness of pure coconut oil and moulded by the hands of 48 dedicated women, these soaps are more than cleansing rituals. They're a fusion of purity, age-old traditions, and unwavering commitment to the planet.

While the crafts narrate tales of dedication, the tribal community breathes life into the land's soul with their mesmerising tribal dance performances. Enhanced by the RT Mission's visionary awareness programs, these dance sequences transcend entertainment and emerge as dynamic ambassadors of culture and eco-friendly tourism.

And as the sun sets over Ambalavayal, reflecting on the 300 souls who found purpose and passion in the past year alone, it's clear: this is not just another tourist spot. It's a movement, a legacy in the making. If your heart yearns for tales spun with fervour, tradition, and conscious choices, Ambalavayal summons. Here, embark on a journey that does not just satisfy the wanderlust but salutes the harmony of nature and mankind.

■ KOTTAYAM

Kumarakom

Paradise on earth

NESTLED ON THE EASTERN BANKS OF LAKE VEMBANAD, KUMARAKOM IS A CHERISHED HAVEN FOR TRAVELLERS. THE LAKE'S MAJESTY FINDS ITS ZENITH HERE, SPANNING AROUND EIGHT KILOMETERS IN LENGTH AND BREADTH, FLANKED BY SERENE CANALS.

Discover the alluring realm of Kumarakom, where a labyrinth of backwaters glistens under the sun's embrace, bordered by vibrant mangrove forests and the graceful sway of coconut palms along the embankments. Under the expansive blue skies, migratory birds gracefully skim the water's surface, painting a picturesque scene. This dreamlike destination in Kerala beckons, attracting over seven million tourists annually, with the National Geographic Magazine deeming it an essential lifetime experience.

Nestled on the eastern banks of Lake Vembanad, Kumarakom is a cherished haven for travellers. The lake's majesty finds its zenith here, spanning around eight kilometers in length and breadth, flanked by serene canals. This symbiotic creation of nature and human ingenuity has bestowed Kumarakom with a unique stature on Kerala's map.

Within the embrace of Vembanad Lake, the village of Kumarakom stands as a cluster of islands, a jewel within the Kuttanad region. Spanning 14 acres, the bird sanctuary here is a sanctuary for migratory birds, enchanting ornithologists and admirers alike. Egrets, Darters, Herons, Teals, Waterfowls, and a chorus of other avian wonders, including the Siberian Stork, grace this sanctuary with their presence, a captivating sight for all who venture here.

Nearest railway station: Kottayam, about 13 km

Nearest airport: Cochin International Airport, about 94 km

The fluttering of Nature in Rhythm



Photo: SEBIN GEORGE



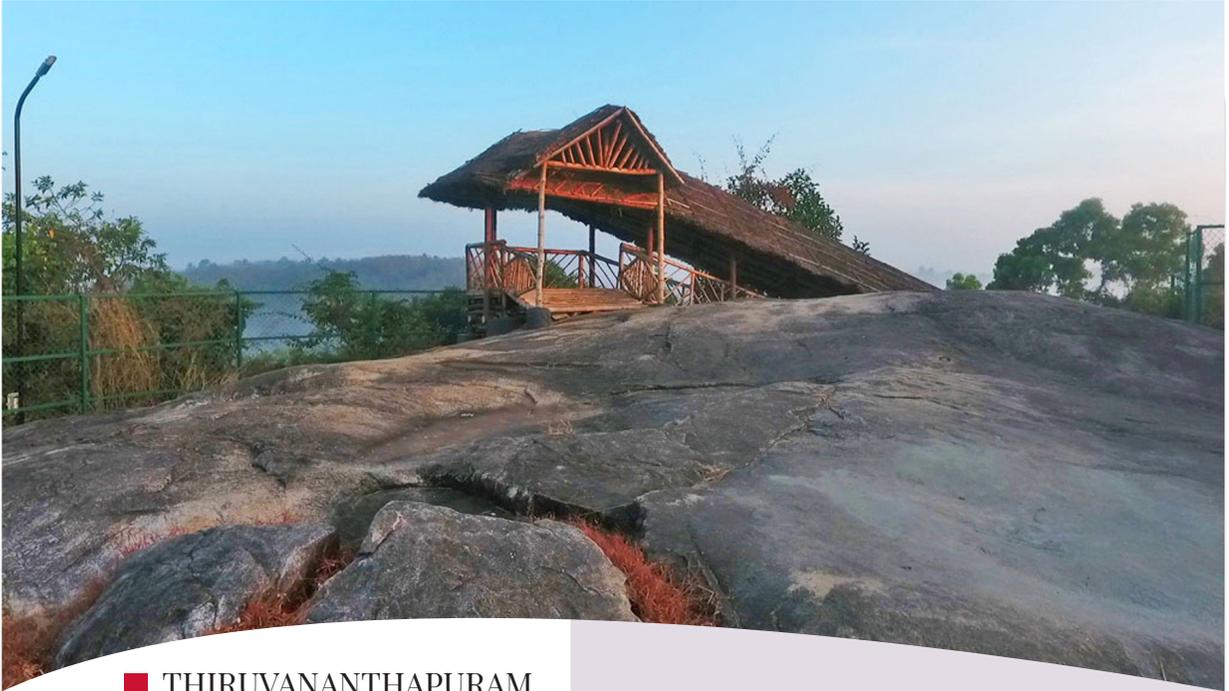
Kunhimangalam

Time-Honoured Craftsmanship

**THIS COMMITMENT TO
AUTHENTIC METHODS
ENSURES THAT EVERY PIECE
PRODUCED IS ENTIRELY
UNIQUE, RENDERING
KUNHIMANGALAM AN
ENCLAVE OF UNPARALLELED
AND EXCLUSIVE ARTISTRY.**

The intricate art of bronze and bell metal craftsmanship

Located in the vicinity of Payyanur in Kerala's Kannur district, Kunhimangalam emerges as a picturesque village celebrated for its adept craftsmen specializing in the intricate art of bronze and bell metal craftsmanship. Referred to as moosaris, these skilled artisans meticulously create idols, lamps, and various other artifacts, employing traditional techniques that intentionally avoid the use of modern machinery or moulds. This commitment to authentic methods ensures that every piece produced is entirely unique, rendering Kunhimangalam an enclave of unparalleled and exclusive artistry.



■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Madavoorpara beckons The riddle wrapped in mystery inside an enigma

HISTORICALLY CHERISHED, THIS AREA WAS ADOPTED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF ARCHAEOLOGY IN 1960 AND NOW PROUDLY WAVES THE FLAG FOR THE RESPONSIBLE TOURISM MISSION.

Situated near Kazhakuttam in the capital city, this hidden gem is a canvas painted with vibrant sunsets and clouds that feel almost close enough to touch. Picture this: a 100-meter bamboo bridge stretching out before you, a testament to man's harmony with nature. From atop the rocky terrain, bamboo huts stand, offering views of the sprawling green landscape that would make any heart soar.

The hum of joyous laughter leads you to a children's park, dotted with swings and slides - a haven for families seeking a blend of adventure and relaxation. But the heart of Madavoorpara lies atop its rugged hill. Here, by a leafless white-branched tree, the Ganga Theertham pond whispers tales of age-old legends.

Historically cherished, this area was adopted by the Department of Archaeology in 1960 and now proudly waves the flag for the Responsible Tourism Mission. With their experiential tour packages, Madavoorpara is no longer just a location but an experience. Dive deep into village life, where traditions aren't just practiced but lived. Whether it's the rhythmic dance of screw pine weaving, the meticulous art of pappad making, or the craftsmanship of metal weapons, each activity offers a window into the soul of Madavoorpara.

So, if a journey not just of miles but of moments is what you seek, Madavoorpara awaits.

The growth of solo and group travel among women represents a significant advancement in the tourism industry of the post-COVID era. The State has been especially proactive in this respect. In a collaborative venture with UN Women, Kerala is implementing a Responsible Tourism Mission with a particular focus on making the state a women-friendly tourist destination.

This initiative is not only conforming to the established guidelines but also forging a robust women-driven tourism sector with an estimated workforce of 150,000. The ambitious project envisions creating 10,000 enterprises and generating 30,000 jobs, which is currently being implemented with vigour across Kerala. This endeavour underscores Kerala's commitment to creating a secure, empowering, and hospitable environment for women travellers from around the globe.

Empowering Women Through Tourism

THIS INITIATIVE IS NOT ONLY CONFORMING TO THE ESTABLISHED GUIDELINES BUT ALSO FORGING A ROBUST WOMEN-DRIVEN TOURISM SECTOR WITH AN ESTIMATED WORKFORCE OF 150,000.

The RT is committed to empowering women





■ IDUKKI

Thekkady

connecting
hearts, nature,
and culture

Sailing in grasping silence: Thekkady

Thekkady emerges as an exquisite gem of nature's artistry. Here, the air is adorned with the heady perfume of spice plantations, and the landscape is a canvas splashed with the vibrant hues of untamed wilderness.

The Village Life Experience of Thekkady is akin to stepping into a world both unique and extraordinary. Thekkady's life is the embodiment of a collective spirit that pulsates through the village.

Thekkady's journey echoes a commitment to harmonize tourism with nature, creating a legacy of responsible travel that binds community, nature, and travellers in a harmonious tapestry of progress.

■ KOTTAYAM

Aymanam

Aymanam is a
story,
and every
traveller is a
reader

In Arundhati Roy's Booker Prize-winning novel, she speaks of stories that compel revisits—of tales you can “enter anywhere and inhabit comfortably.” *Aymanam* emerges as one such story.

At its heart, Thekkedathu Mana at Kudamaloor stands, narrating tales from long ago, safeguarding within its walls the Sword and Palm etchings of the Raja of Chembakasseri. A stone's throw away, the Sarpa Kavu exudes an ancient aura, silently beckoning reverence to the venerable Snake Gods.

Yet, the rhythm of *Aymanam* is defined by its arts. Kathakali communicates beyond words, Kalamezhuthu captures nature's hues, Kalaripayattu defines movement with intent, and Thiruvathirakali marks annual celebrations.

With each journey, travellers encounter a fresh chapter, a different viewpoint. And just as with any enthralling story, *Aymanam* beckons for another visit, ensuring there's always a new tale awaiting.



Communicating beyond words:
Kathakali

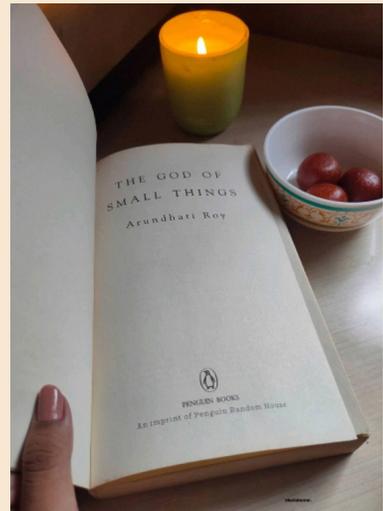


Photo: BJIULAL M.D.



Capturing nature's hues:
Kalamezhuthu

■ KANNUR

Muzhappilangad

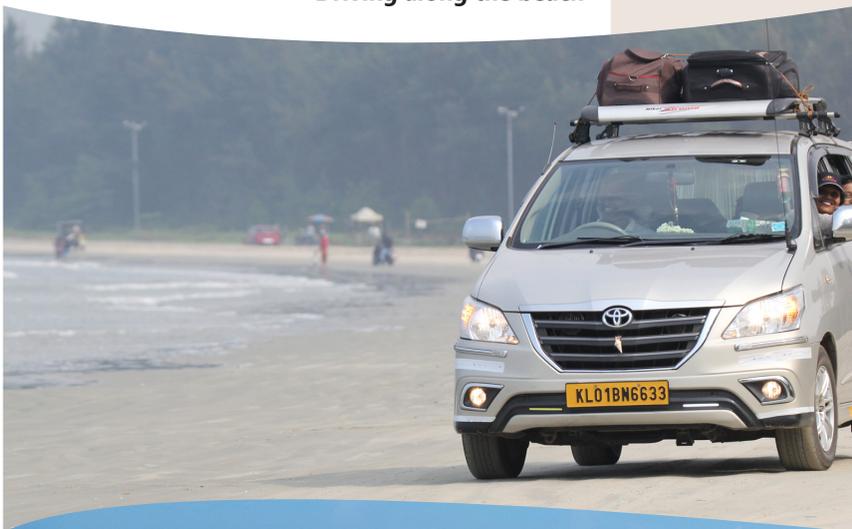
The drive-in bliss

Muzhappilangad Beach, Kerala's exclusive drive-in beach, is located just 7km from Thalassery in Kannur. Imagine a 4km expanse of untouched sand, ready for your car to glide over, with the breathtaking Malabar Coast painting the horizon. As you journey, indulge in authentic Malabar flavors from quaint beach shacks.

Safety is a priority here. The beach's black rocks ensure a safe haven for swimmers. For those seeking a bit of thrill, the beach offers paragliding, parasailing, and micro-light flights. If water's more your style, you can engage in water sports, power boating, or take a tranquil catamaran ride.

To reach this slice of paradise, the Kannur International Airport and the Kannur Railway Station are your best options. From the Kannur Thavakkara town bus stand, it's a short 13.5km drive to the allure of Muzhappilangad Beach.

Driving along the beach



Photos: BIJU C.G.

Renowned photo grapher Nick Ut capturing the beautiful morning of Muzhappilangad



■ KASARAGOD



Cast Away To Bekal



Bekal Fort

Imagine pristine beaches kissed by the sun and majestic forts that echo tales of the past. That's Bekal for you. Tucked away in North Kerala, this untouched gem is rapidly becoming a top pick for international visitors.

With its commitment to sustainability, Bekal has proudly become the fifth location in Kerala to embrace Responsible Tourism. Dive deeper into its charm with the Village Life Experience packages, curated especially for you.

At the picturesque Bekal Fort, let history whisper its tales as you're surrounded by the vast sea. Feel the earth mold beneath your fingers in clay pot-making workshops and witness the intricate magic of palm leaf weaving and screw pine mat making. And when night falls, let the mesmerizing Theyyam ritual artform captivate your soul.

Seeking a unique and memorable escape? Bekal awaits. Kasaragod and Kanhangad are the main railway stations. Bekal is just 12km from Kasaragod on the coastline.

Beypore

Promising an Odyssey

AS THE GOLDEN SUN CARESSES THE ARABIAN SEA, CASTING SHIMMERING SILHOUETTES UPON THE CHALIYAR, KADALUNDI, AND KALLAYI RIVERS, THE BEAUTY OF BEYPORE UNFURLS. THIS IS A LAND THAT PROMISES NOT JUST A VACATION BUT AN ODYSSEY.

Journey to Beypore and be swept into a vibrant tapestry woven from a melange of ancient tales, resplendent natural beauty, and the hum of a community rooted in tradition yet looking toward the future. Once a bustling port city, Beypore's cobbled lanes now echo with whispers of age-old trade tales, beckoning history buffs and wanderlust souls to discover its enchanting allure.

As the golden sun caresses the Arabian Sea, casting shimmering silhouettes upon the Chaliyar, Kadalundi, and Kallayi Rivers, the beauty of Beypore unfurls. This is a land that promises not just a vacation but an odyssey.

Under Kerala's pioneering Responsible Tourism (RT) Mission, Beypore has transformed into an epitome of sustainable travel. A staggering 50% of the RT Mission's eco-vision has been realised here, where every nook and cranny resonate with the aspirations of its denizens. Nature and progress dance in harmony, as travellers tread on pathways painted with the dreams of the locals.

The essence of Beypore lies in its people. Sprinkled across this paradisiacal expanse, local community clubs weave an intricate bridge, connecting treasured traditions with the pulse of contemporary tourism. Here, you're not just an observer; you're an integral part of an unfolding narrative.

From the iconic Uru ship-making tradition and the mouth-watering Malabari cuisine to the blend of traditional livelihoods and rich cultural heritage - Beypore is not just a destination but an experience waiting to envelop you.

As you traverse this coastal jewel, you'll witness the vision of the Beypore Integrated Responsible Tourism development project, inaugurated by the Tourism Minister, P. A. Mohamed Riyas. Here, 400 local people are being sculpted into

Beypore beach





Making of 'Uru'

entrepreneurs, and a formidable 1,000 RT units are sprouting to life, moulding Beypore's future.

Moreover, with a series of skill enhancement programs spanning from handicrafts like candle and shell craft, dream catchers, terracotta, and sustainable paper products, to training in homestays, community-led tours, and agritourism, the very fabric of Beypore is being

enriched.

So, dear traveller, heed the call of Beypore's beguiling siren song. Dive deep into a place where the past, present, and future converge, where community, culture, and conservation meld seamlessly. Embark on a journey where every sunset by the sea becomes a tale of your own.

Kite flying @ Beypore Water Fest





Photo: BIJU NAIR V.

***DOWN THE WINDING SLOPES OF ANAMALAI
ONTO THE CULTURAL BANKS OF THRISSUR
THROUGH THE TALES AND LORES OF PALAKKAD
AMONG THE ANCIENT SCORES OF MALAPPURAM***

Nila

Malabar's heartbeat, sets the pace

Nila, or the Bharathapuzha, is a river with a soul. It winds its way from the Anaimalai hills, touching Palakkad, Thrissur, and Malappuram, before merging with the Arabian Sea. This journey has profoundly shaped the culture of Kerala's South Malabar region.

M.T. Vasudevan Nair, the legendary writer, had a special bond with Nila. Growing up beside her, he drew inspiration from her serene beauty and vivid tales. Many of his stories echo the whispers of Nila, showcasing her profound influence on him.

Nila isn't just a river; she's a treasure trove of legends. From hosting the grand Mamankam festival every 12 years under the Zamorins' reign to the sacred rituals at the Thirunavaya temple, she has silently observed Kerala's evolving history and traditions.

Artists, particularly writers, have always been enchanted by Nila. From the pioneering Thunchath Ezhuthachan to modern luminaries, her tales have flowed onto countless pages. The river's magic didn't stop at writing. Vallathol, a revered poet, was so smitten that he founded the Kerala Kalamandalam, a hub for performing arts, by her banks.

Nila is not just water flowing over land. She's the muse, the historian, and the heartbeat of South Malabar, immortalised in art, literature, and the very soul of Kerala.

My Intimate Onam

NOSTALGIC REFLECTIONS OF AN AMERICAN MALAYALI LITTERATEUR ON ONAM



Priya Joseph
Writer

No matter how hard I try, I can't seem to recollect having a grand "sadya" (feast) or creating a beautiful "pookalam" (floral carpet) at home during Onam when I was a little child.

Back then, our garden only had jasmine and firecracker flowers. Neither did we spend money to buy flowers, nor were we allowed to go to the neighbors' homes to ask for them. So, how could us kids create elaborate "pookalams"? Even today, I feel there is an unappeased little girl wandering inside me who stubbornly saw jasmine and firecracker flowers solely as hair adornments, and instead dreamed of creating vivid, kaleidoscopic patterns on floors using flowers that explode with a myriad of hues.

As Onam draws near, I often find myself lost in thought, gazing at the nostalgia-filled pages of magazines and newspapers. It's like glimpsing the resplendent "pookalams" in other people's front yards during my childhood and being mesmerized by their beauty.

In those days, my vision of a "perfect" Onam involved Papa, Mummy, my siblings, and I working together to create the "pookalam." My greatest desire during those days was for all of us to sit together at the same dining table, crack jokes (that was an absolute must!) and eat a grand, authentic feast. For God-knows-what reason that wish remained unfulfilled.

There's a saying, *Uthradathinuuchakazhinjaal achimaarkkokkeyumvepraalam*. However, this lady in

Chicago starts feeling the jitters many days before the grand occasion! To be exact, the preparations begin shortly after Mother's Day. I sow vegetable and flower seeds, plant saplings, all with Onam in mind. Are the banana leaves growing large enough to hold all the "sadya" dishes? Are the flowers for the "pookalam" – chrysanthemums, roses, zinnias, and hydrangeas – flourishing as they should? These details occupy my thoughts. What is it about Onam that holds such allure for me? Strangely, the nostalgia factor for this festival seems close to zero.

I nurture the yard-long bean, the ivy gourd, the pumpkin, and the cucumber vines, coaxing them over their trellises, all in anticipation of our intimate foursome Onam. The curry leaf tree, nurtured with care, generously offers its foliage for the Onam "sadya," only to stand bare later, its naked branches exuding a sense of accomplishment.



The recipes of Malamel Neelakantan Namboodiri, cut out from an old women's magazine, form the bedrock of my Onam "sadya." These are followed verbatim, and meticulously, so when I lay out the scrumptious dishes on the banana leaves, I can't help but feel a sense of accomplishment.

Here, in the Windy City, I celebrate the "sadya-plus-pookalam" Onam or the "intimate" Onam that was never mine in Kerala. I celebrate it as if I'm reclaiming both the principal and the interest.

The hustle and bustle of the Onam festivities, the crowds, they never held my fascination, then now or ever. That's why, only after I've savoured our small, personal Onam, do I participate in the numerous Onam celebrations organized by various associations.

It's a determined act of a girl who was denied her cherished Onam "sadya" and Pookkalam in her childhood home. ●

Let Your Smile Bloom
with the Ambals



Photo: SEBIN GEORGE

Embark on a journey to Ambal Vasantham, or the “Spring of Water Lilies,” where the enchanting Malarikkal waters burst forth into a vibrant symphony of colours. Each blooming water lily is a delicate brushstroke in nature’s grand masterpiece, intricately weaving beauty with tranquillity in an ethereal dance



Malarikkal in Kottayam

Every village in Kerala
is a Great Story.

Every traveller becomes a
character in it.

