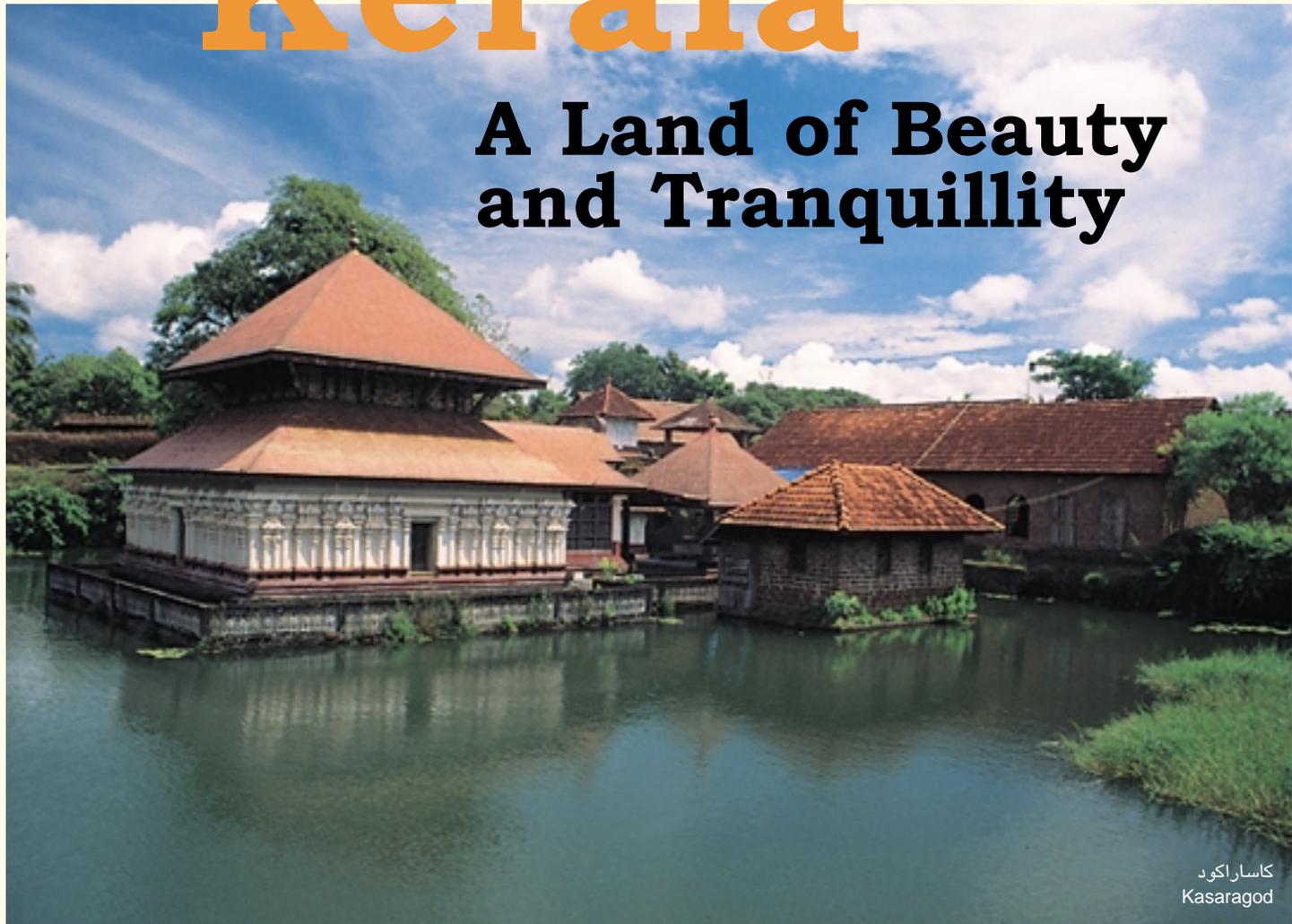


Kerala

A Land of Beauty and Tranquillity



Kerala, which enjoys a tropical climate, literally means 'land of coconuts'. Although palms shade almost the entire state, most of the land is paddy-covered plains. Notably, Kerala also boasts the best beaches in India, including Kovalam. It is a state that is endowed with many kinds of natural beauty, including no less than 44 rivers, a western seaboard, sandy beaches, palm trees, mountains, waterfalls and a variety of wildlife.

Kerala is also home to countless temples of great importance, in addition to churches and mosques. Indeed, it is a country renowned for its religious tolerance. At dawn, one can hear the sound of temple drums along with the sonorous cry of muezzins calling the faithful to prayer. The majority of the population is, of course, Hindu, but there are sizeable numbers of both Muslims and Christians.

Different invaders, from the Portuguese to the Dutch and British, have all left their mark on Kerala, and there are monuments to colonialism everywhere. Northern Kerala is place where the Roman armies arrived in India, with Vasco de Gama alighting there. And it is also the place where Phoenicians and Arabs traded.

Kerala is on the southernmost tip of India, stretching along the coast of the Arabian Sea and separated from the rest of the subcontinent by the steep Western Ghats. The breadth of the state varies from 32km in the extreme north and south to over 120km in the centre of the state. It is geographically very much at the edge of India, a federal state that is home to no less than seven universities and 186 colleges. The people of Kerala are mostly literate and English is widely spoken.

It is a feast for the eyes, and the list of places of interest in Kerala is impressively exhaustive, with museums, forts, places of worship, spas, on-going festivals, colourful folklore and art. We present here a quick tour of some of the more prominent provinces of Kerala.

Alappuzha

With the Arabian Sea on the western side and a vast network of lakes, lagoons and freshwater rivers criss-crossing it, Alappuzha is a district of immense natural beauty. It is about 1,414sq.km in area and has a Population of 21 million. The province, which has been referred to as the Venice of the East, is also home to diverse animal and bird life. By virtue of its proximity to the sea, Alappuzha has always enjoyed a unique place in the maritime history of Kerala.

Today, it has grown in importance as a backwater tourist centre, attracting several thousand foreign tourists every year. Alappuzha is also famous for its boat races, houseboat holidays, beaches, marine products and coir industry.

A singular characteristic of Alappuzha is the region called ➤

City Tourism

Kuttanad, which, with its lush paddy fields, is known as the Rice Bowl of Kerala and is one of the few places in the world where farming is done below sea level.

The Mannarasala temple is a site of snake worship in Kerala and houses 30,000 images of snake-gods. Here one will also find the Church of St Sebastian, one of the most important Christian sites in the state.

Ernakulam

Ernakulam is located on the coast of the Arabian sea. The commercial capital and the most cosmopolitan city of Kerala, Kochi, in Ernakulam, is also known as the Queen of the Arabian Sea. It has an area of 2,408sq.km and a population of 31 million.

Ernakulam has one of the finest natural harbours in the world, once a major centre of commerce and trade with the British, Arab, Chinese, Portuguese and Dutch colonisers. It is no wonder then that Ernakulam and its environs has so many forts and colonial houses.

Fort Immanuel was the bastion of the Portuguese in Kochi, a symbol of the strategic alliance between the Maharajah of Kochi and the King of Portugal, after whom it was named. Built in 1503, the fort was reinforced in 1538. By 1806, the Dutch, and later the British, had destroyed most of the walls of the fort as well as its bastions. Today, remains of this once imposing structure can be viewed all along the beach. In the 1660s, Fort Kochi peaked in stature as a prime commercial centre and its fame spread far and wide - variously as a rich trading centre, a major military base, a vibrant cultural hub, a great shipbuilding centre, a centre for Christianity, and so on. Today, centuries later, the city is home to nearly thirteen communities.

A few interesting sites included in the tour are the Chinese fishing nets along the Vasco Da Gama Square, Santa Cruz Basilica, St Francis Church, VOC Gate, and Bastion Bungalow. Apart from these architectural splendours, an array of restaurants serving fresh seafood are also popular among tourists.

The Chinese fishing nets erected on teak wood and bamboo poles work on the principle of balance. Records say they were first set up here between 1350CE and 1450CE. Vasco Da Gama Square, the narrow promenade that runs parallel to the beach front, is the best place to watch these nets being lowered into, and pulled out of, the sea.

Fort Kochi is also home to one of India's oldest churches - that of St Francis, a Roman Catholic church built during Portuguese occupation (1503 - 1663). At the time it was a Dutch Reformist church (from 1664 to 1804), and an Anglican church from 1804 to 1947. Today, it is governed by the Church of South



Cheraman Juma -Thrissur

مسجد شرامان - ثرسور

Ernakulam has one of the finest natural harbours in the world, once a major centre of commerce and trade with the British, Arab, Chinese, Portuguese and Dutch colonisers. It is no wonder then that Ernakulam and its environs has so many forts and colonial houses.

India (CSI). Another important fact about the church is that Vasco de Gama, who died in 1524, was buried here before his remains were returned to Portugal 14 years later.

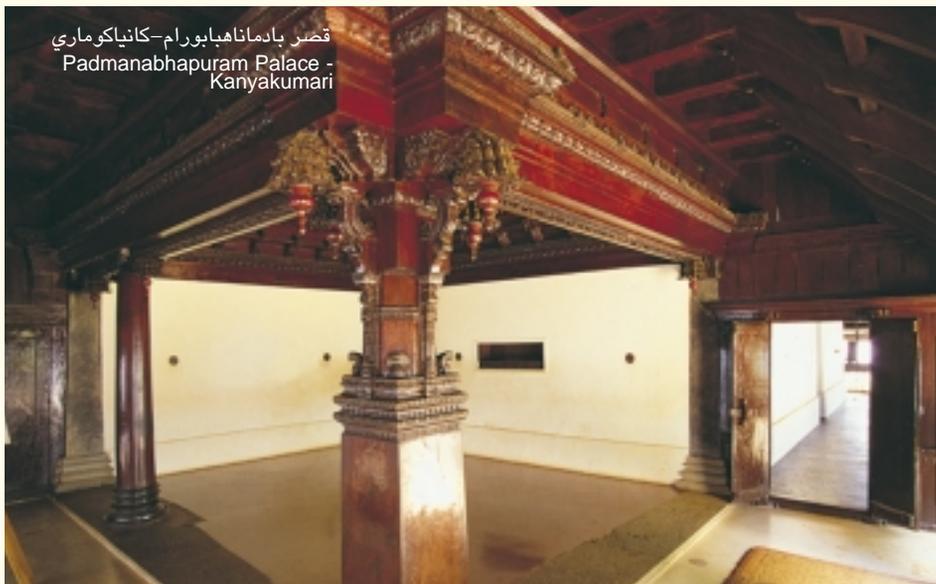
The Jewish Synagogue in Kochi is the oldest in the Commonwealth and is famous for its Hebrew inscriptions on stone slabs, great scrolls of the Old Testament and ancient inscriptions on copper plates. There is also the Kaladi which is the birthplace of the philosopher Adi Sankaracharya, with its magnificent architecture.

Idukki

A landlocked district, Idukki is one of the richest areas of natural beauty in Kerala. It has an area of 5,019sq.km and a population of 11 million. High ranges (2,200m above sea level) and wooded valleys are girded by three main rivers - Periyar, Thalayar and Thodupuzhayar - and their tributaries. The Pamba river also has its origin here. As a tourist destination, Idukki offers diverse attractions including wildlife sanctuaries, hill stations, spice plantations, mountain treks, elephant rides, and so on. ➔



متحف نابير - ثيرو فانانثابورام
Napier Museum - Thiruvananthapuram



قصر بادمانابورام - كانيكومي
Padmanabhapuram Palace -
Kanyakumari

Thekkady

The very sound of the word Thekkady conjures up images of elephants, unending chains of hills and spice-scented plantations. It is 900-1800m above sea level and has one of the finest wildlife reserves in India (in the Periyar forests of Thekkady). Spread across the entire district are picturesque plantations and hill towns that hold great opportunities for treks

and mountain walks, including Munnar.

Munnar, one of the most popular hill stations in India, is situated at the confluence of three mountain streams-Mudrapuzha, Nallathanni and Kundala. Located at 1600m above sea level, this was once the summer resort of the erstwhile British Government in South India. Sprawling tea plantations, picture book towns, winding lanes, trekking and holiday facilities

make Munnar a unique experience. You may also want to visit Keezharkuth, or the Rainbow Waterfalls, which cascade down from a height of about 1500m. This can be viewed throughout the year. The forest around Keezharkuth is home to various medicinal plants and is an ideal place for rock climbing, mountaineering and trekking.

Kannur

With the Western Ghats to the east (Coorg district of Karnataka State), Kozhikode and Wayanad districts to the south, Lakshadweep Sea to the west and Kasaragod to the north, Kannur is bounded by a wealth of natural beauty. It enjoys the credit of having been the cradle of many a colourful folk art and folk music of Kerala. It has a population of 24 million and an area of 2,997sq.km.

Thrichambaram Sri Krishna is a sacred place of the Vaishnava cult, although there are other important temples in this area. The ancient Madayi Mosque was built by Malik ibn Dinar in the 12th Century.

Kasaragod

The northernmost district of Kerala, Kasaragod is renowned for its coir and ➤

City Tourism



Tea Gardens at Devikulam - Munnar

مزارع الشاي في دفيكولام-مونار

handloom industries. It is home to 12 million people and extends over an area of 1,961sq.km. Fishing is a prime source of livelihood in Kasaragod which is popularly known as the land of the gods, forts, rivers, hills and beautiful beaches. The fort at Bekal, which is in Kasaragod, is the largest and best preserved fort in the state.

Kasaragod has a variety of styles in temple architecture - the unique style of the Madhur Mahaganapathy Temple, the typical Kerala style of the historic Malik Deenar Great Juma Masjid, and others, speak volumes about the rich cultural heritage of the region. The spectacular pageants of Theyyam, Yakshagana, Kumbala (buffalo race), Poorakkali, Kolkali, and so on, continue to enchant visitors.

Kasaragod has, over the years, acquired considerable importance as a centre of Islam on the western coast of India. The historic Malik Deenar Juma Masjid, which was built in the typical Kerala style, is believed to have been founded by Malik Ibin Deenar. The Juma Masjid, which is one of the best kept and most attractive in the district, is located at Thalankara.

Kollam

Located 71km to the north of Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam is the centre of the

country's cashew trading and processing industry. One of the oldest ports on the Malabar coast, it was once a central port in the international spice trade. Thirty per-cent of this historic town is covered by the renowned Ashtamudi Lake, making it the gateway to the magnificent backwaters of Kerala. It has an area of 2,579sq.km, and a population of 26 million. The district has, in addition, some interesting historic remnants and a number of temples built

in the traditional ornate architectural style of the region. The Kottumkulangara temple is famous for a festival in which men wear female attire.

Kottayam

Bordered by the lofty Western Ghats to the east and the Vembanad Lake and paddy fields of Kuttanad to the west, Kottayam is a land of unique characteristics. Panoramic backwater stretches, lush paddy fields, highlands, extensive rubber plantations and a literate people have given this district the enviable title, land of letters, latex and lakes. The region also boasts the first Malayalam printing press which was established by Benjamin Bailey, a Christian missionary, in 1820. It is 2,203sq.km in area and has a population of 20 million.

The mausoleum of Shaykh Fariduddin at Thangalppara gives this area a particular significance for Muslim pilgrims. Nearby is the scenic hill station of Kurathikallu and the beautiful Kottathavalam. The Juma Masjid at Thazhathangadi is an ancient mosque on the bank of the Meenachi River and believed to be a thousand years old.

The Valiapally (St Mary's Church) was built in 1550, close to the Cheriapally which was built in the same century.

Kozhikode

Once the capital of the powerful Zamorins and a prominent trading and commerce centre, Kozhikode was the most important region of Malabar in days gone by. Today, lush green countryside, serene beaches, historic sites, wildlife sanctuaries, rivers, hills, a unique culture and a warm, friendly ambience make Kozhikode a popular destination. As the name suggests, land and water have struck an extraordinary kinship at Thusharagiri (lit. misty peaks). ➤



Kozhikode

كوزھكوره

City Tourism

It has an area of 2,206sq.km. and a population of 28,78,498. The plantation, which abounds in rubber, arecanut, pepper, ginger and spices, is a trekker's delight. Trekkers begin early morning from the second waterfall on the hills and climb up through the pristine dense evergreen forests that are teeming with exotic birds and animals, reaching Vythiri in Wayanad district by evening.

Malappuram

Malappuram (lit. land on top of hills) is situated 50km south-east of Kozhikode. Bounded by the Nilgiri hills to the east, the Arabian Sea in the west and Thrissur and Palakkad districts to the south, Malappuram is enriched by three great rivers flowing through it - the Chaliyar, the Kadalundi and the Bharathapuzha. It has an area of 3,550sq.km and is 2,340m above sea level, with a population of 37 million.

Malappuram has a rich and eventful history. It was the military headquarters of the Zamorins of Kozhikode since ancient times. This district was the venue for many of the Mappila revolts (uprisings against the British East India Company in Kerala) between 1792 and 1921. The hill country has also contributed much to the cultural heritage of Kerala. It was, moreover, a famous centre for both Hindu-Vedic learning and Islamic philosophy.

The Jamaat Mosque, Malappuram, is an important pilgrim centre for Keralan Muslims, and the four-day annual festival at the mosque is celebrated in the month of April. Adjoining the mosque is the mausoleum of the Malappuram Shaheeds (martyrs) whose brave exploits have been immortalised in the Mappila ballads.

There is also Pazhayangadi Mosque, Kondotti (18km east of Manjeri, on the way to



The district of Palakkad is known as the granary of Kerala, and is a land of valleys, hillocks, rivers, forests, mountain streams, dams and irrigation projects.



Malappuram). The three-day Valia Nercha feast at this 500 year-old Muslim pilgrim centre, celebrated in February /March, is a local cultural event.

Palakkad

The district of Palakkad is known as the granary of Kerala, and is a land of valleys, hillocks, rivers, forests, mountain streams, dams and irrigation projects. Situated at the foot of the Western Ghats is the gateway to Kerala from the north. Palakkad derives its name from the Malayalam words Pala (Alsteria scholaris) and Kadu (forest) which goes to prove that this place was once a beautiful stretch of forest ➤

City Tourism

covered with the sweet-scented flowers of the Pala tree. It has an area of 4,480sq.km and a population of 26 million.

Tipu's Fort, also known as Palakkad Fort, stands in the heart of the town. One of the well preserved forts in southern India, this Fort was constructed in 1766CE and is today a protected monument under the Archaeological Survey of India.

The fort was built by Hayder Ali (1717-1782), Emperor of Mysore (now part of Karnataka State), supposedly to facilitate communication between both sides of the Western Ghats, (Coimbatore and the West Coast). Tipu waged a series of wars against British colonial rule. In

1784, after an eleven-day seige, the fort was captured by the British. Tipu Sultan lost his life in 1799 in an encounter with the British and the fort later came to be known in his name.

There is a famous mosque in this area, Juma Masjid, which houses the shrine of Uthman Auliya who is revered by the locals.

Pathanamthitta

Pathanamthitta, a hilly terrain of pristine beauty is popular as the headquarters of pilgrim worship in Kerala. It is 500-1000m above sea level, with an area of 2,731sq.km and a population of 12,31,577. Fifty per-cent of this land is covered by forests.



Rowing through the Ashtamudi Kayal-Kallam

تجديف خلال أشتامودي كايال-كولام



Alappuzha

ألبوزه

The district is frequented by visitors from India and abroad often for its water fiestas, religious shrines and a cultural training centre. Parthasarathy temple is a major attraction in this area and is the starting point for the snake boat race during summertime.

Thiruvananthapuram

Located at the south-western tip of India, Thiruvananthapuram district is bounded by the Arabian Sea to the west and Tamil Nadu to the east. The wooded highlands on the Western Ghats in the eastern and north-eastern borderland serves Thiruvananthapuram with some of India's most enchanting picnic spots. A long shoreline, with internationally renowned beaches, historic monuments, backwater stretches and a rich cultural heritage make this a much sought after tourist destination. It is also the capital of Kerala, covering an area of 2,912sq.km and a population of 32 million. Also worth visiting here are many magnificent temples, among them Padmanabhaswamy and Attukal Bhagavathi, which are both connected with important local festivals.

Thrissur

Thrissur, with its rich history, cultural heritage and archaeological wealth is referred to as the cultural capital of Kerala. From ancient times, this district has played a significant role in the political history of South India. Today, Thrissur is world famous for the local Pooram festival. A cultural centre, the Kerala Kala Mandalam, the Kerala Sahitya Academy and Kerala Sangeetha Nataka Academy are also located here. Thrissur has a population of 30 million and covers an area of 3,032sq.km.

Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kodungalloor, is located 2km from the town of Kodungalloor, this mosque resembles a Hindu temple in appearance. Built in 629CE, this is the first mosque in India and the second in the world where Juma prayers were started. Other places of interest nearby include Cheramanparambu, the ancient Thiruvanchikulam Temple, the Bhagavathi Temple and the Portuguese fort.

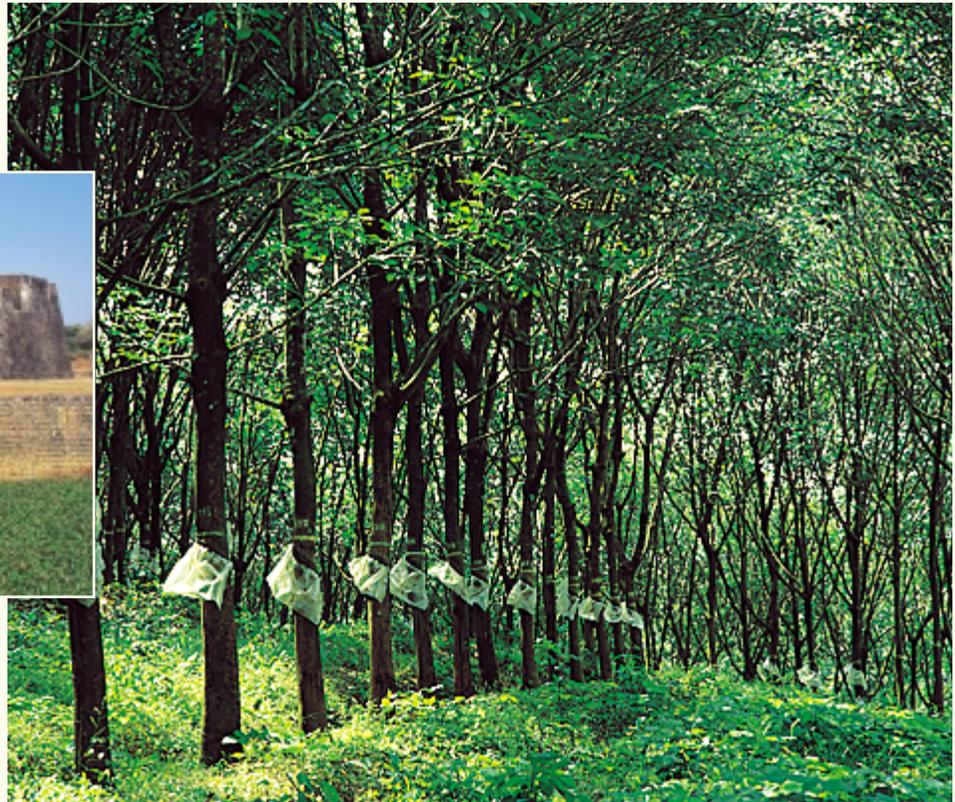
Wayanad

Wayanad is one of the districts in Kerala that has been able to retain its pristine natural beauty. Hidden away in the hills of this land are some of the oldest tribes, as yet untouched by civilisation. It is known for its picturesque mist-clad hill stations, sprawling spice plantations, luxuriant forests and rich cultural traditions. The leading tourist centres of South India, like Ooty, Mysore, Coorg, Kozhikode and Kannur are also in this region, which has a population of 8 million and an area of 2,132sq.km, at 700-2,100m above sea level. ➔

City Tourism



قلعة تيبو - بالاكاد
Tipu Fort - Palakkad



Rubber plantation - Idukki

مزرعة المطاط - ادوكي

Wayanad is one of the districts in Kerala that has been able to retain its pristine natural beauty. Hidden away in the hills of this land are some of the oldest tribes, as yet untouched by civilisation. It is known for its picturesque mist-clad hill stations, sprawling spice plantations, luxuriant forests and rich cultural traditions.



ألپوزة
Alappuzha

Snake Boat Races

The snake boat races of Kerala, which are preceded by colourful water parades, bring to life the tranquil backwaters of the state. Snake boat races are held in connection with Onam, the harvest festival in August/September. Scores of long snake

boats and other smaller craft participate in these events, which are the largest team sports in the world.

Ayurvedic Treatment

Kerala is full of ayurvedic spas and herbal treatment centres for all sorts of ailments.

These treatments promise to tone up the skin and rejuvenate and strengthen the body's tissues to achieve ideal health and longevity. Treatments at one centre, Travancore, is typical of such spas.

It includes a head and face massage with medicated oils and creams, and herbal baths. The treatment is in several stages: first, the body is covered with herb-infused oil to tone the muscles and ease any tensions; a milky oil treatment is then followed by a steam bath after which the body is washed with a special ayurvedic powder.

The ayurvedic treatment is supposed to stop the ageing process too, and is a good way of treating other ailments, including chronic headaches, insomnia, tension and even hysteria, hallucination and insanity, osteoarthritis, rheumatic diseases such as arthritis, paralysis, nervous weaknesses and nervous disorders, muscle wastage, rheumatism, Parkinson's Disease, sports injuries, joint pains, emaciation, and skin disorders. It has been claimed that ayurveda can also treat leukemia. ■