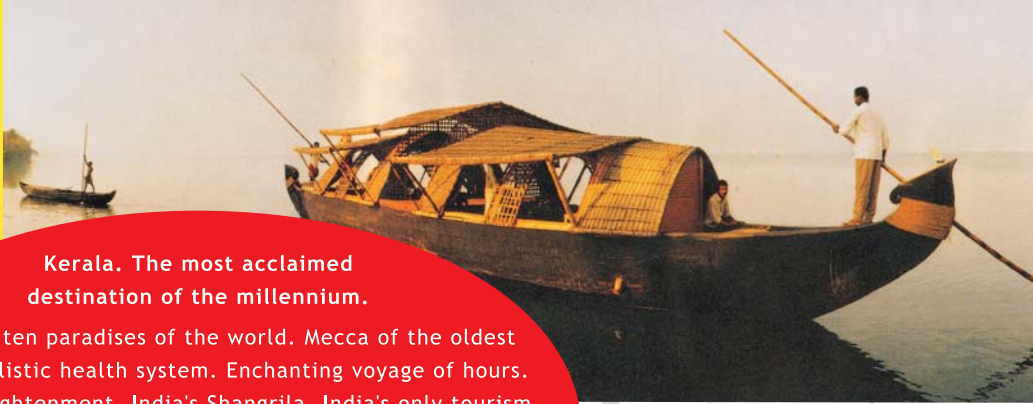
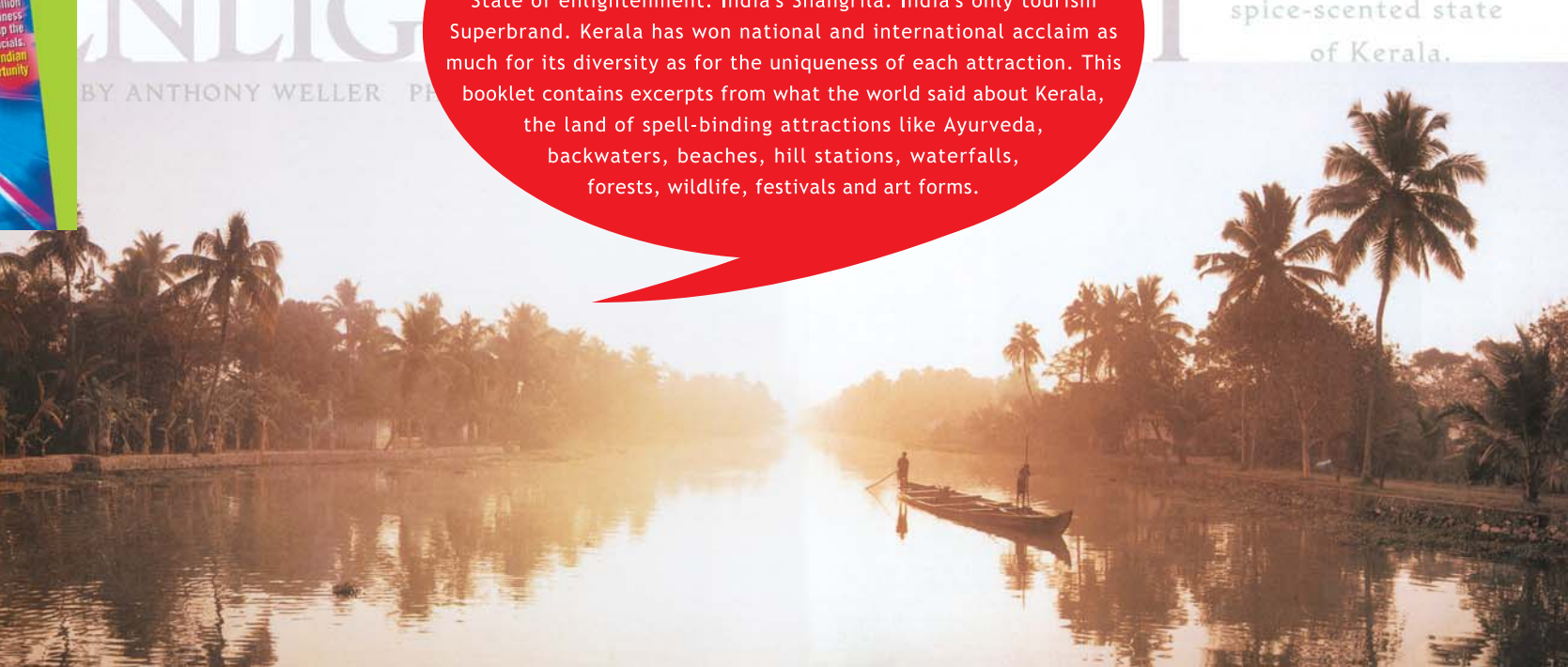
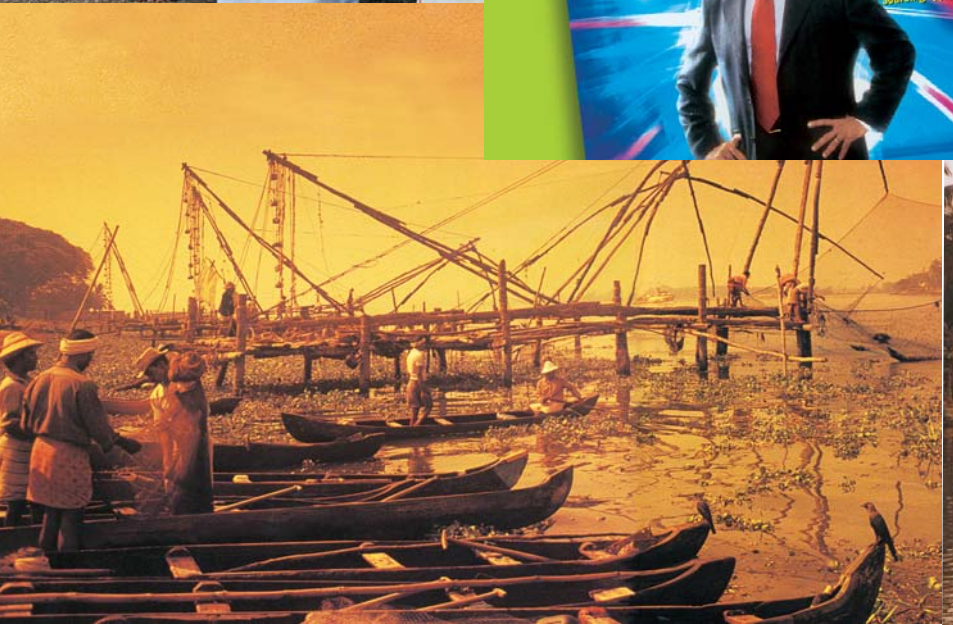
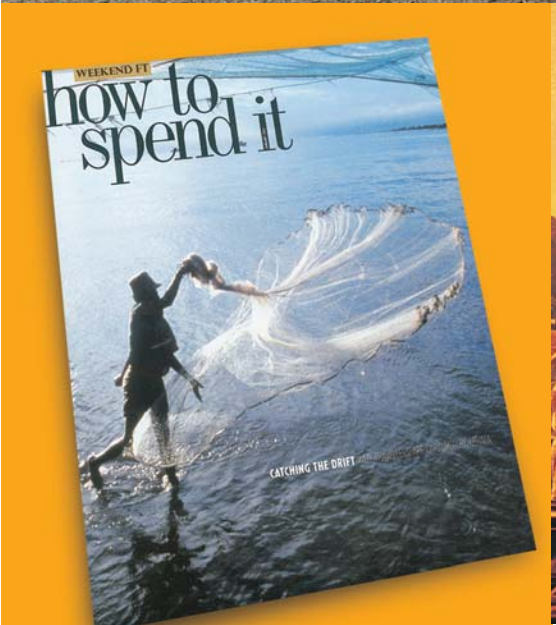


KERALA THE MOST  
ACCLAIMED DESTINATION  
OF THE MILLENNIUM





Kerala. The most acclaimed destination of the millennium. One of the ten paradises of the world. Mecca of the oldest and most holistic health system. Enchanting voyage of hours. State of enlightenment. India's Shangrila. India's only tourism Superbrand. Kerala has won national and international acclaim as much for its diversity as for the uniqueness of each attraction. This booklet contains excerpts from what the world said about Kerala, the land of spell-binding attractions like Ayurveda, backwaters, beaches, hill stations, waterfalls, forests, wildlife, festivals and art forms.





A forerunner among travel magazines, Condé Nast Traveller in its September 2005 issue brought out the vibrant colours of Kerala.



**K**erala is known for its tropical beaches, its tea plantations and the labyrinthine backwaters described in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*. Fishermen haul in netloads of fish as if in some epic tug-of-war with the ocean, pepper vines curl around tea bushes as bright as fresh mint, kingfishers flash turquoise and russet on the rivers, and elephants lumber along the road past trucks wearing high, colourful cabins like Easter bonnets. It is all beautiful. But it is Cochin that gets under your skin. You could spend hours just wandering among the old colonial buildings and along the seafront past the iconic, 14th-century fishing nets, absorbing the sights and sounds of everyday life. Children play in the park, crows perch

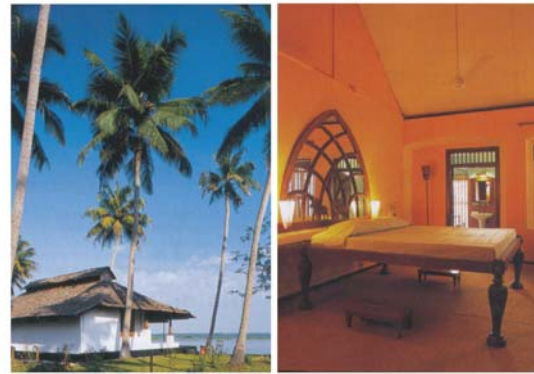


beady-eyed on bicycles, women stroll by in gorgeous saris with jasmine in their hair, and boys kick a ball around on the Parade Ground, a peaceful village green overlooked by St Francis church, where Portuguese explorer Vasco Da Gama was buried.

This hypnotic harbour town was once an inland fishing village. It was exposed to the sea by a massive flood in 1341 and welcomed Arab and Chinese traders before being colonised first by the Portuguese, then by the Dutch, then by the English. It is pretty, gracious and endlessly fascinating. You can hail a rickshaw to the spice markets, the glorious 16th-century synagogue and antiques shops of Jew Town, take a boat across the bay, savour the cakes at Kashi Art Café, and watch a Kathakali performance on the beach. Just don't be surprised if a frog hops across the stage.



A bimonthly from New York, **The Style Issue DEPARTURES** (September 2005), in its column **ON THE RADAR** featured 'Private Kerala'. The article focused on some of the most exclusive hotels in and around Cochin.



Savvy travelers already clued in to Kerala, on the tropical southwest coast of India, have been checking in to the Malabar House since it debuted nearly a decade ago. Now the 17-room hotel, in a British colonial bungalow in Fort Cochin, introduces **Malabar Escapes**, a clutch of even smaller villa hotels. Trinity, the newest of the bunch, is another colonial house, just steps away from Malabar on the site of the Dutch East India Company building. It has three guest rooms and a pool, along with works by prominent Indian artists M.F. Hussain and K.G. Subramanyan. Just outside Fort Cochin, Privacy at Sanctuary Bay is a secluded two-bedroom bungalow rented to only one client at a time. Farther afield, in the foothills of the Western Ghats (a two and a half hour drive from Fort Cochin), sits Serenity at Kannan Estate, a 1923 five-room structure surrounded by spice gardens. Like Privacy, it comes with its own chef. (From \$210 to \$425; 91-484/221-6666; [www.malabarhouse.com](http://www.malabarhouse.com))



The Indian state of Kerala is benefiting from aggressive marketing. In addition, Kerala's market profile has been rising steadily because it offers agents a destination they can recommend to travelers who have already experienced Rajasthan and Agra. Kerala presents a view of life that is unlike anything else that Americans have seen elsewhere in India.

The state's appeal begins with its "backwaters", which showcase a waterfront lifestyle visitors can explore by staying on one of the large thatch-roofed boats known as *Kettuvallum*. The *Kettuvallum*, perfect for family travel or groups, sleep up to a dozen people, and come with a captain, a cook and a steward. They move slowly along the canals and lakes, allowing plenty of interstices for meals and relaxation.

Agents should be sure to recommend spa treatments in Kerala, which is the home of the Ayurvedic spa experience. Also be sure to secure a performance of Kathakali dance, one of India's most dazzling performance arts.

According to Promod Gupta, Air India's regional director for U.S. and Canada, "Business travel has really spurred traffic to India, and tourism shifted a bit to the south because of the now-resolved conflict in Kashmir, in the north of India".



In its July 2005 issue, **Travel Agent**, the most prestigious and widely read travel magazine of the USA carried the cover story **Pushing Toward New Horizons**.

The article pronounced that **times have never been better to sell American travelers on relatively unknown destinations.**

Kerala was featured in it with its diverse attractions as a place that is **unlike anything else that Americans have experienced elsewhere in India.**



#### KATHAKALI OF KERALA

Elaborate costumes and grand make-up breathe life into the most amazing characters and stories that make Kathakali a performance quite unlike others.

*Going Places (August 2005)*

*The inflight magazine of Malaysia Airlines.*

**T**racing its origin to 17th century India, Kathakali, the masked dance drama of Kerala, is an art form so widely appreciated that it almost defines the people and culture it originates from. This spectacular dance draws its inspiration not only from religious myths and legends, it's also firmly grounded in various forms of martial arts, folktales and stylised drama, like the *Chakiar Koothu* and *Kudiyattam*.

A Kathakali artiste undergoes strenuous training spanning up to eight years to learn various techniques and nuances of the dance drama. This includes exercising the muscles that control the eyeballs, eyebrows, eyelids, lips, neck and shoulder.

Make-up in Kathakali is elaborate and time consuming. Known as *chutti*, the colour has symbolic representations based on beliefs and myths. Green represents geniality, red denotes ambition and violence, white is for spirituality, yellow indicates passivity and



black is for evil. The colour of the make-up corresponds with the nature of the characters.

An unusual face ornament in Kathakali is the face ridge, made from paper and pasted around the jaw line with rice paste. This series of three ridges make an exclusive style for the dance. The entire process can take between three to four hours. Another hour or so is needed for the dancers to don the heavy and elaborate costume.

Considered relatively young for being only about 400 years old, the Kathakali has evolved into a spectacular dance that well documents the Asian tradition of story telling; be it in elaborate costumes, grand make up or fine gestures and expressions.



In the December 2004 issue of the *Condé Nast Traveller*, Raffaella Barker wrote about the **special kind of Christmas sparkle** Kerala has **with its emerald lagoons, exotic flowers, brilliant wildlife and dazzling decorations.**

**K**erala, in the south-west, provides an easy introduction to India; its tea, tourism and high levels of literacy make it relatively prosperous. It is also big. In 10 days, we managed to explore only the beaches below Kovalam in the deep south and the National Park at Lake Periyar in the Western Ghats. We stayed in three hotels in just two places and felt transported into the heart and soul of an utterly different world. At the first, deep breath of the spice-scented air, heady with cinnamon, pepper and vanilla, we all fell in love with the place.

...To be in Kerala for Christmas was like stepping into a world through a magic looking glass. A succession of Father Christmases appeared from time to time - on the street or leading a donkey, and once, sitting in a teahouse in Thekkady...

We were serenaded most evenings by unearthly singing from the palm groves. The sound was ethereal and lovely, if a little exhausting at three, and then five, in the morning. As for shopping, it was easy, cheap and fun.

...Every bit of stiffness and carsickness was forgotten after an Ayurvedic massage... A fire burned throughout the treatment, puffing out fragrant smoke from the sandalwood incense, which induced a trancelike state almost immediately. The experience became increasingly sensuous as oil was heated over a naked flame and poured in a hot thin stream onto my forehead. Even if you do not subscribe to the philosophy, you cannot fail to be beguiled by the massage. After an hour of yoga as the sun went down, I felt so relaxed I could hardly speak.





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...To be in Kerala for Christmas was like stepping into a world through a magic looking glass. A succession of Father Christmases appeared from time to time - on the street or leading a donkey, and once, sitting in a teahouse in Thekkady... The impromptu Christmas trees - children had hung pleated paper stars and



streamers on every small bush or tree they could find - was a more authentic and charming feature of street corners and school playgrounds.

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Threesixty degree in its spring/summer 2003 issue unveiled in the **Hidden Treasures** section, the delights of a Kerala boat trip.



A selection of little-known gems so special that our intrepid travellers were torn between telling you about them and keeping them to themselves.

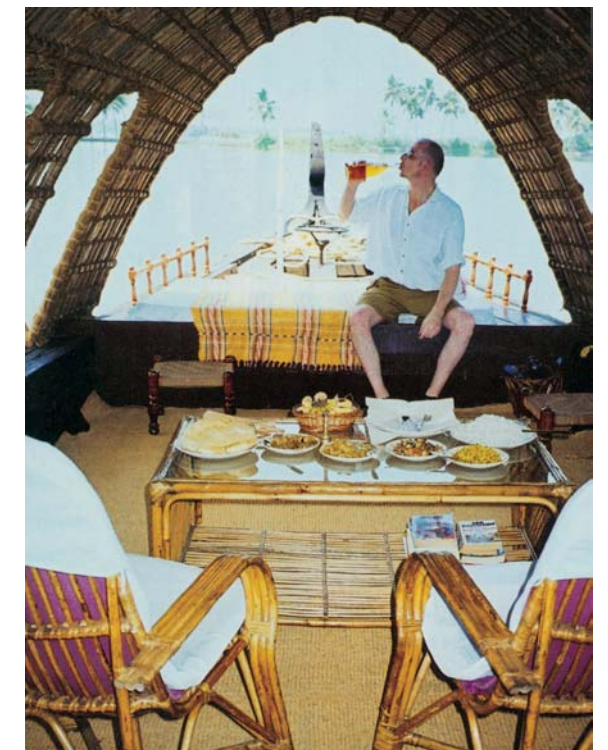
It's often the simplest things in life that bring the most pleasure, which is why this boat trip with my partner in Kerala, South India, was so perfect. It was just us, three crew, freshly prepared food, peace, quiet and unspoilt beauty.

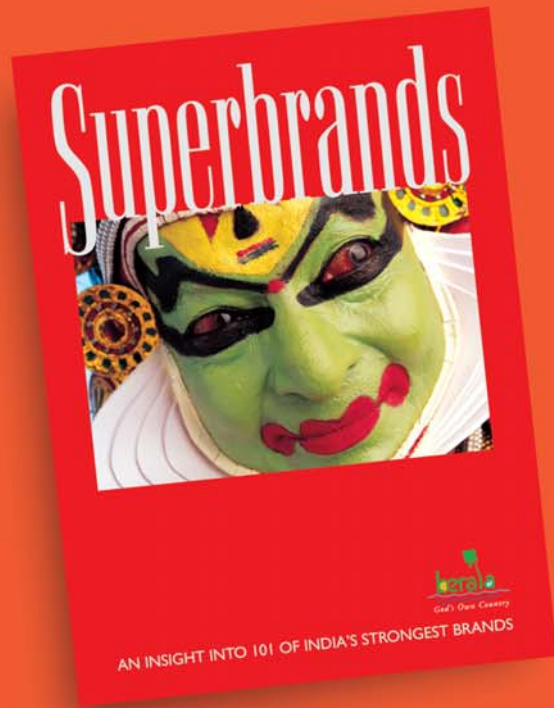
The first thing you notice about the kettuvallams (the 25ft hull boats Kerala is famous for) is how open and spacious they are: the kitchen is at the back, the engine behind it and the middle is taken up by a narrow corridor on the starboard side, with the bedroom on the other. Forward is the living/dining room. Bamboo shutters open, gull-wing style, either side of the dining area to create a sense of openness and to guard against the sun. Navigating the tightest sections, the shutters come down to guard against the vegetation as the captain punts, gondola-style, along. The silence is breathtaking – you feel like whispering.

We soon found our rhythm: in the mornings we'd awake, discard the mosquito net, raise the shutters and plunge straight into the water from bed. Then breakfast in the dining room – tea, a light curry and fresh fruit – before setting off for the day. The same process would be repeated after our post-lunch siesta. The crew took their roles seriously: the captain was suitably boat-proud. Our waiter, who spoke the most English, was a near-constant presence, buzzing around, making sure we had all we needed. At the end of day one, he took our comments on board and, happy to be able to read his book (all three crew were buried in books when possible), left us alone outside mealtimes.

The three days drifted by at the most gloriously slow, relaxed pace. On most boat trips mealtimes become the focus for what little planning is required. But on the Kerala backwaters this involved sitting and chatting to cook, Baby Chan, while he ground his spices, boiled his rice and explained his recipes. Picking up fresh supplies along the way, he produced a string of light and refined dishes. Neither of us was stricken with anything over the three days and the only temptation to drink anything stronger than tea or water was by the bottle of the locally brewed coconut whisky the crew produced. It was dreadful, but we had asked for it.

Back on shore, a sense of regret overwhelmed us. About to launch into the bustle of Trivandrum, we fussed and fuffed, somehow yoked to the waterways even as our cab waited. But as we over-tipped and said goodbye to the crew, we were given a final nugget of information to take with us: hardly anyone who knows the waterways swims in them. But, hell – we're British. And we wouldn't have missed that for the world.





## Superbrands

### *An Insight into 101 of India's Strongest Brands*

Kerala Tourism was listed among the 101 top brands in India by Superbrands India Ltd., the Indian division of the globally renowned Superbrands Ltd. The State was selected from among 700 brands in the country that were evaluated in 95 different categories to identify the strongest Indian brands. Kerala Tourism enjoys the privilege of being the only tourism destination in the listing. A special book brought out by Superbrands highlighted Kerala's unique tourism products.

Right from the start, Kerala made steady progress. A unique mix of inherent advantages, innovative products, a dynamic tourism-trade community and sustained government support have made Kerala the number one destination in India in a very short time.

Kerala is a highly advanced society, often compared with California in terms of development indices. Kerala has 100% literacy, excellent health care facilities, a healthy male-female ratio, lowest pollution and a peace loving, friendly, environment-conscious people. English is easily understood. All these inherent advantages worked like magic when Kerala wooed select domestic and international markets.

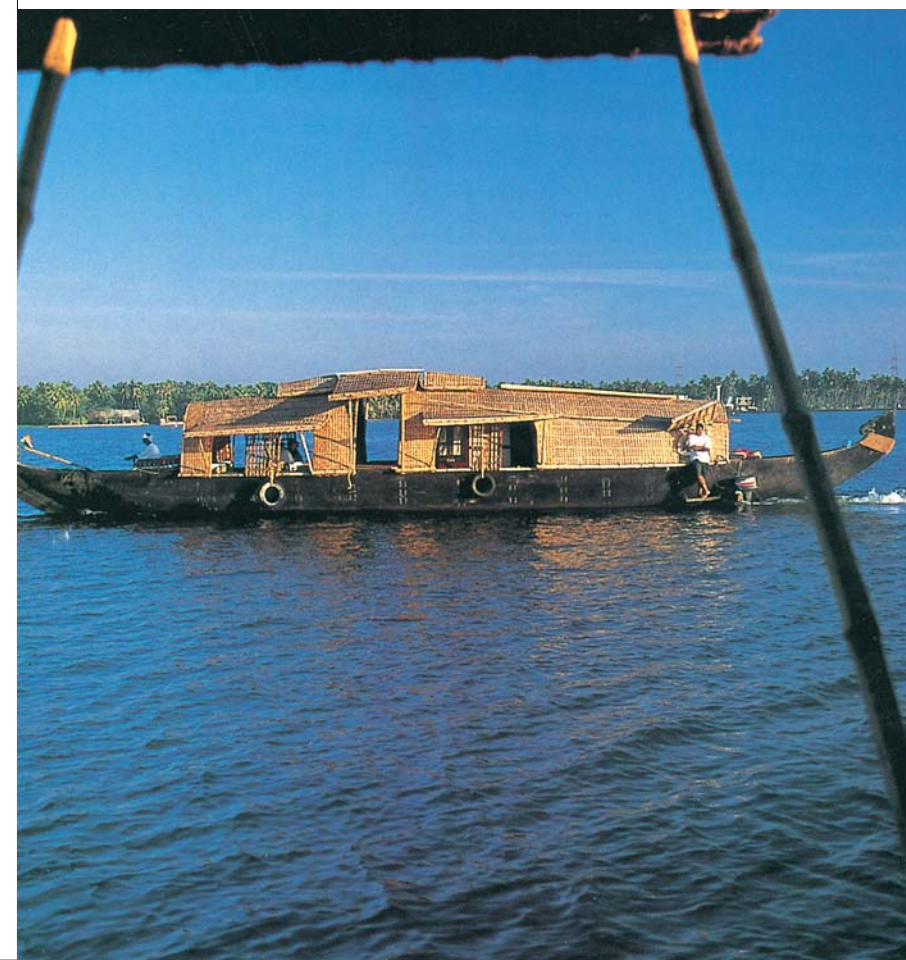
Out of its diverse portfolio of nature-based tourism products, three - backwaters, ayurveda and culture - all unique to Kerala, attract most of the tourists. Beaches and hill stations come next in the order of preference. The one great advantage that Kerala offers is that the traveller can move from one theme destination to another in just a few hours. Enchanted, the traveller ends up spending more time in Kerala than he would in any other destination. Ayurveda - practised to perfection only in Kerala - is another major draw. Many travellers spend three weeks here for rejuvenative and therapeutic packages.

The tourism trade in Kerala tracked the subtle changes in the travel industry and responded effectively. Earlier, tourists wanted to see and understand - now they want to experience the destination. They want to stay in a traditional Kerala 'tharavad' (ancestral home), to sit on the floor and to savour traditional meals from the plantain leaf using their fingers. They want to ride elephants; they want to go out to sea with the fishermen on their catamarans. Today, Kerala caters to the 'experience' tourist.

Think of it as your own mobile island. From aboard this houseboat, the scenery along the lushly lined backwaters of Kerala shifts and changes as you drift by at the leisurely pace of five miles an hour. Plying the region's intricate web of rivers, lagoons, canals, and lakes by *kettuvallam*, a traditional Keralan punt, is the best way to glimpse village life in this captivating South Indian state, once a key trading hub for merchants from around the world. Constructed from jackfruit-wood beams, these slender vessels have for centuries been the primary means of transporting cargo - mainly Kerala's staple crops of rice and coconuts - and, in more recent times, sightseers. The motorized *kettuvallam* you see passing by is retrofitted with a comfortable bedroom and a modern bathroom, like yours, and comes with a small crew that includes a chef. Waterfront dining, in this case, requires no advance reservations.



In its July 2004 issue, Conde Nast Traveler, the widely read and circulated travel magazine published from UK, opened up a room with a view, an enchanting experience in the houseboat of Kerala.







In the Financial Times' 'How to spend it' (December 2004), Sarah Murray savours the cosmopolitan history of Kochi, where **centuries before call-centre skills lured foreign business to India, merchants came in search of spices, and that zestful trade created Kerala's port capital.**

It's mid-morning on Bazar Road, Kochi (formerly Cochin), and the activity is heating up as quickly as the tropical temperature over the city's teeming harbour. Spice merchants haggle over their wares from behind wooden desks in warehouses filled with the pungent aromas of cardamom, ginger and pepper. It's a scene that has changed little for centuries.

With their eyes on the valuable spice trade, Arab, Chinese, Dutch, Portuguese and British merchants all contributed to the cocktail of cultures that makes this ancient trading centre on India's south-west coast like no other corner of the country. But the glorious thing about Kochi today is that immersing yourself for a long luxurious weekend in this exhilarating chaos no longer requires the courage of Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese explorer who landed here in 1498. Escape here from commercial hubs such as Delhi and Mumbai and the dust and noise of the subcontinent soon fade away in the cool rooms of hotels where colonial elegance meets minimalist chic.

The Malabar House, one of Kochi's growing collection of elegant boutique hotels, is a fine example of the city's sophisticated welcome. Created by German designer Joerg Drechsel and his Basque wife Txuku Iriarte, this exquisite hotel looking on to a village green where boys play cricket would be a treat in any setting. In what was once the private residence of wealthy spice traders, rich carvings, antique furniture and silk textiles are set against frosted glass, subtle lighting and cool open spaces.

Open space is what dominates another delightful hotel, the Brunton Boatyard. With vast lobby spaces set round a large verdant courtyard, the building could have easily accommodated 100 rooms. But, on a mission to promote sustainability, the Kuruvinakunnel brothers who run the hotel and its sister resorts decided upon just 22 rooms. With its tiled roof, majestic arches and guest rooms giving on to splendid vistas of the harbour, the hotel is permeated by Kochi's ancient trading history – except that it was built five years ago. Antique furniture, brass and teak cleverly conjure up the impression of an old colonial mansion – but with wireless internet connections, a swimming pool and state-of-the-art air conditioning.

The Brunton Boatyard is also one of the best places to sample Kochi's excellent seafood. At the History Restaurant or the Terrace Grill the catch of the day is grilled or baked in a tandoori oven on the terrace and brought to the table as exquisite dishes. Seafood is also a speciality at the Malabar Junction, the Malabar House's garden restaurant. In keeping with Kochi's multicultural flavour, dishes here mix Keralan and Mediterranean influences. At night, candles illuminate its courtyard and with European columns on one side, live Indian classical music on the other and an elegant swimming pool at the centre, it's easy to forget just which corner of the planet you are dining in.

But cultural confusion is exactly what makes Kochi so alluring. Crumbling European mansions, churches, temples and mosques provide evidence of a long history of multicultural melding. The ancient heart of the city is Fort Kochi (sometimes still referred to as Fort Cochin) on the tranquil tip of the peninsula that protects the harbour from the Arabian Sea. Here, British colonial bungalows sit among low-slung Dutch and Portuguese buildings including the church of St. Francis where da Gama was interred until his body was removed to Portugal.

On the waterfront, giant Chinese fishing nets – majestic structures resembling monstrous long-legged insects that, so the story goes, were introduced by traders from the court of Kublai Khan – add yet another layer to Kochi's cultural mix.

And if all that wasn't sufficiently exotic, Kochi is also home to what must be one of the world's most far-flung Jewish communities. While the date of their arrival here is debated, they came to trade spices and stayed. Today, only a handful remain, since most left India in the 1950s after being given free passage to Israel. But the Pardesi Synagogue, with its elaborate glass chandeliers and 17th century blue ceramic floor tiles, is a charming testament to their once powerful presence in the city.

Even the topography of this place is richly complex, with Fort Kochi – now a World Heritage site – looking out on to a magnificent natural harbour. To the north are the tropical islands of Vypeen, Vallarpadam and Bolgatty, to the east is Willingdon Island, created by the British in the 1920 as they sought to expand the port. Ferries cross the harbour carrying commuters to Ernakulam, Kochi's busy modern centre, and while bridges now connect most of the islands, the best way to get your bearings is by hopping on to one of these energetic little vessels.

Break your peregrinations on Willingdon Island with a gin and tonic on the balcony of the Taj Malabar Cochin. While the waterborne world keeps busy, this is the place to relax and watch tiny fishing boats dwarfed by majestic cargo ships out on the Arabian Sea. And with impeccable service and elegant rooms, the Taj Malabar Cochin is well worth a more extended stay.

From Willingdon Island, it's a short ferry ride back to the peninsula, either to Fort Kochi or its neighbouring district of Mattancherry, for centuries the heart of India's spice trade. Sadly, many of the old spice houses are now tourist emporia but if the merchants are gradually moving out, there are signs of new life for this area. A handful of galleries have opened, the most impressive of which is the Kashi Art Gallery which showcases Indian contemporary artists in a spectacular former warehouse on Bazar Road (it has a sister gallery on Burgher Street with a café attached).

The spice trade has not deserted Bazar Road yet, however. Walk around to discover courtyards filled with workers laying ginger out to dry and darkened rooms where black pepper is being graded and packed into thick hessian sacks for export.

The magic worked by these valuable natural seasonings is best experienced at Rice Boat, the Taj Malabar Cochin's superb restaurant. The subtle fragrances of Keralan dishes such as Meen Vevichathu (fresh fish in a fiery red curry flavoured with fish tamarind) or Chemmeen Koondal Kuru-mulagu (calamari and prawns tossed with freshly crushed black pepper, shallots and curry leaves) leave you in no doubt as to why spices became such valuable commodities.

The Portuguese were quick to latch on to their value. They soon wrested control of the trade from Keralan Muslims and, from the 15th century onwards, played a large part in shaping Kochi. Near the synagogue, the 16th century Mattancherry Palace is evidence of how much they threw their weight around. The palace was their gift to Kochi's raja, Vira Keralavarma and, with its richly carved wood ceilings and heavy tiled roofs, it must have been an impressive offering. The highlight here, however, is not European but

Indian in origin, a series of spectacular murals depicting the epic stories of the *Ramayana*.

For while Europeans did their best to transplant their culture, the irrepressible force of Indian life is ever present. Back in Fort Kochi, the brilliant pinks and violent greens of Roman Catholic religious objects and paintings inside Santa Cruz Basilica, a Gothic structure erected in 1887, seem to be more influenced by Hindu than Christian traditions. Don't miss wandering around the charming school next door, where simple classrooms furnished with wooden benches line a lovely courtyard and a 17th century European cloister behind. Nearby, it's the British presence that is most strongly felt on Fort Kochi's Church Road where, passing the street's impressive bungalows – now occupied by Keralans – you can imagine the sound of porcelain rattling on a tray as the maid brings tea on to a lawn.



# WORLD TRAVEL & TOURISM COUNCIL

## THE IMPACT OF ON JOBS AND T

### World Travel & Tourism Council

*Kerala: The impact of Travel & Tourism on jobs and the economy - 2002*

Mr. Jean Claude Baumgarten,  
President, WTTC

*"We have done so (granted Kerala the status of Partner State) in the firm recognition of Kerala's tremendous potential in this sector. The partnership between the WTTC and Kerala is designed to initiate and strengthen a cohesive set of strategic policies to champion the interest of India's strongest economic growth sector and creator of employment. We look forward to actively working with you to strengthen tourism in your beautiful State and to make it the foremost provider of income and jobs in the coming years"*

### Kerala Leads India's Tourism Growth.

Kerala was the first State in India to be accorded the status of Partner State of the World Travel & Tourism Council in 2000. In June 2001, WTTC and Kerala initiated a dialogue to conduct a Tourism Satellite Accounting Research (TSA) in the State. The TSA is now the accepted measure of the economic impact of tourism in a defined area. It follows a comprehensive simulation of the new international standard adopted by the United Nations following the Enzo Paci World Conference on the Economic Impact of Tourism in June 1999.

Following on the footsteps of two US States, Hawaii and South Carolina, Kerala has now joined the exclusive club of sub-national economies that have implemented TSA. This is creditable considering that most developed economies have not yet incorporated the system.

The Kerala TSA was developed using proprietary econometric models pioneered by WTTC with the Oxford Economic Forecasting Group (OEF) to translate national microeconomics into a fully independent regional Travel & Tourism economics.

### The results of the Kerala Tourism Satellite Accounting

- Kerala Travel & Tourism Demand is expected to grow by 11.6% per annum over the coming decade. This is the highest recorded growth rate in the world eclipsing WTTC's fastest growing country (Turkey – 10.2%) as well as India (9.7%) which is the second highest in the world. These figures show high levels of consumption of the tourism product in the State by both domestic / foreign tourist.
- Kerala registered a record growth 23.5% in terms of Visitor Exports or external account earnings from Travel & Tourism over the next ten years. India's estimates for this period are 14.3% while the world average is only 6.5%
- Significantly, in 2001, while India's visitor exports suffered a decline of 4.8% as a result of 9/11 events, Kerala visitor exports actually increased by 11% over the 2000 results. This points to visitors feeling more secure in Kerala than in other parts of the country.
- Government expenditure at US\$ 25.4 million (Rs. 127 crores) was an abysmal 1% of total expenditure. Even over the next decade this is expected to grow only to 1.1% of the total, reflecting the apathetic attitude of Government towards investing in Travel & Tourism. WTTC has pointed out that, while India's expenditure is below 1% other countries are spending much higher amounts.  
China: 3.8% Spain: 9.5% Singapore: 9.1% Hong Kong: 7.4% Malaysia: 5.1% France: 4.7% Sri Lanka: 4.0%

Over the next ten years the WTTC/OEF forecasts suggest Kerala will nearly triple its current level of Travel & Tourism economy employment from 6,93,000 to 2.0 million in 2012.

This has enormous significance for the State since creation of job opportunities is the single most important area of priority for Government. Increased investment in Travel and Tourism will obviously have enormous spin off results for the economy and the people.

**F**ew spa experiences are more exotic than ayurvedic treatments. Developed in India more than 4,000 years ago, ayurveda is a holistic approach that deploys herbs, diet and hydrotherapy to promote general wellness. It's especially popular in the southern Indian state of Kerala, where the steamy climate is considered ideal. Over the past three years, a host of ayurvedic health spas have opened there. Despite poor air links, tourists come for a longer stay and spend more money in Kerala than elsewhere in India, with 90 percent of them taking ayurvedic treatments.

Treatment at the Travancore Heritage resort, near Trivandrum, begins with two attendants slathering the body with pungent herb-infused oil to tone muscles and eradicate sleeplessness. Next comes *Shirodhara*: milky oil is poured from an earthen pot onto the forehead in a rhythmic fashion for 45 minutes. After a steam bath, the oil is washed off with a special ayurvedic powder. Between or after treatments, greenrobed clients sip coconut milk while overlooking gardens strewn with palm trees.



### Newsweek

July 22/July 29, 2002 issue  
*The Quest for the Herbal Holiday*

I'd have almost preferred not to go back to India. Over the last 20 years I'd made numerous journeys there. I'd seen most of what I wanted to see; and as much as I loved the daily pleasures of the culture, I felt done with the place. India was entering the 21st century with a billion people, and for me, the enchantment was wearing off. But I had not yet seen Kerala. And, now, on my very first morning here in this State on India's southwestern tip, I'm wondering if I've saved the best for last.

For me, however, Kerala's draw is its unmatched reputation for performing arts. I've already been surprised by the high quality of the evening music at our resort. Usually it's a violinist, a singer, and a drummer on a long mridinga, often accompanying a Mohiniattam dancer of languorous classical gestures, clad in gold and white. Good art is simply everywhere.

The ultimate way to enjoy the backwaters, we find, is to stay a night or two on a converted kettuvallam, a cargo boat traditionally used for transporting, say, 30 tons of rice. The point is not to get anywhere, but to drift languidly through ethereal beauty. It is astonishingly romantic to watch the sunset from one kettuvallam among several, while the three boatmen hang lanterns



and a pearly glow fades behind the scrim of palms. Dinner is an abundant 11 platters of Keralan cuisine, built around subtly spiced fresh fish. As the coconut islands darken, the shimmering water doubles the infinite tree of stars. Walking at dawn we find ourselves surrounded by hundreds of fishermen's skiffs on immense Vembanad Lake. It's like time travel into a quiet morning of another century.

...the loveliest part of Fort Cochin is Jew Town, a traditional quarter of shuttered houses in ghost-shades

of once audacious blues, greens, and ochres, often with a Star of David worked into the grillwork of a window. In earlier centuries a thousand Jews lived here. Most are gone—many old houses are now antique shops for foreign tourists - but the quarter remains the nerve center of Kerala's spice commerce. We tour the famous 16<sup>th</sup>-century synagogue, which is both simple and lavish, its white plank ceiling and plain walls contrasting with ornate hanging oil lamps and 1,100 blue and white Chinese floor tiles. Services are still held for the few remaining Jews, but none are here today. Wait a minute, advises the Indian guide. And, yes, an elderly, small-boned man of pale complexion stops by. At first he hesitates to talk. When I ask his name he says only, "Nameless", with a faint smile.

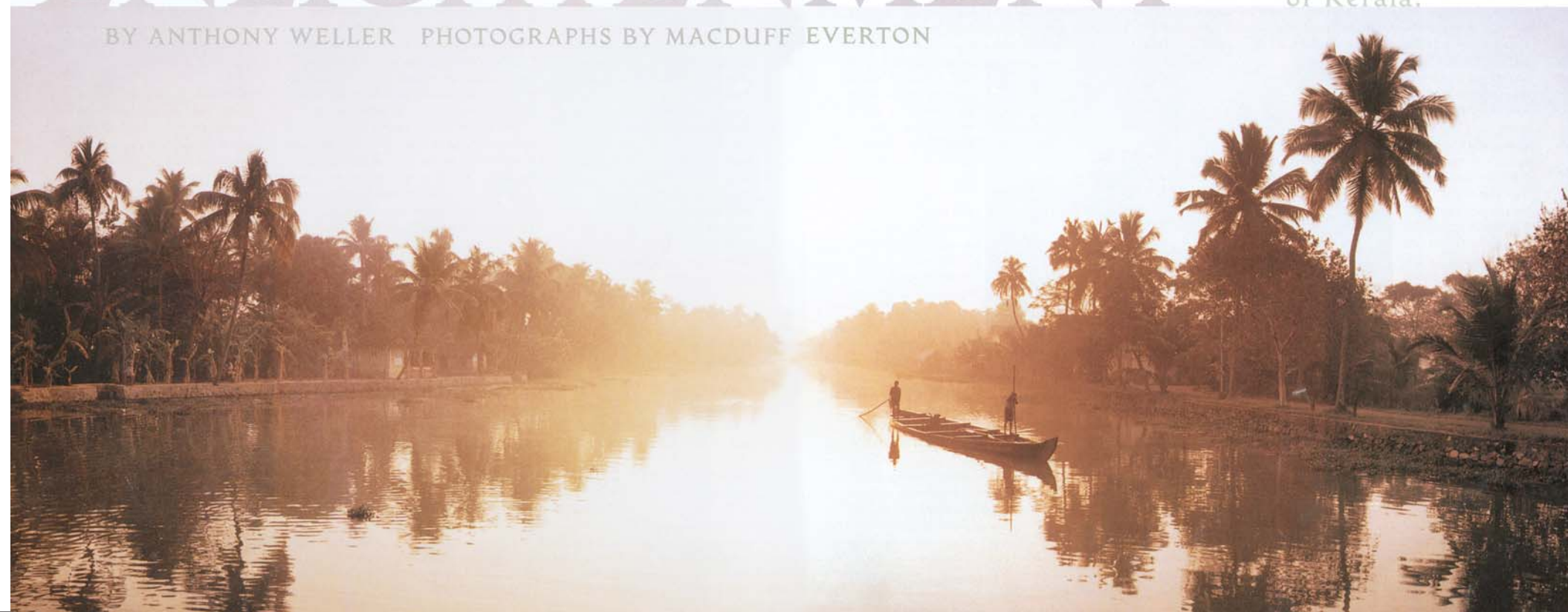
"The Nameless Jew", I said. "My relatives, too. In the war." At this he thaws. "There are 15 of us left here. And only three are young, like you. What will be the future? I don't know. Whoever is left will decide. But India has never persecuted us. Not in two thousand years. This is the only country in the world where that is so. The Portuguese did, yes. But never the Indians." He opens ornate doors to reveal a silver-clad Torah, containing the five books of Moses, and a gold crown, a gift from local maharajahs back in 1805. "You see?" he says. "We were always welcome here."

Again, that Kerala tolerance - the worldly tolerance of traders who've seen the value of their spices rise and fall across generations.

and benign ways, a jaded India veteran finds himself falling under the spell of the subcontinent's spice-scented state of Kerala.

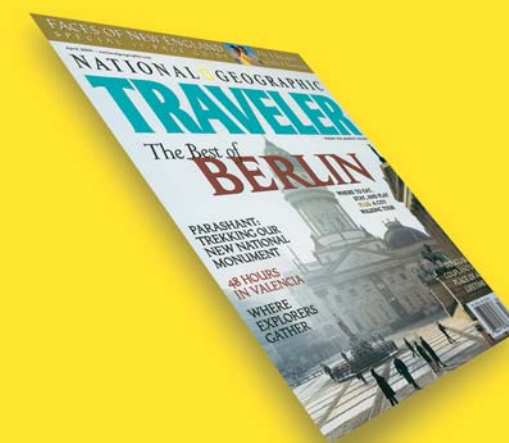
# STATE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

BY ANTHONY WELLER PHOTOGRAPHS BY MACDUFF EVERTON



## National Geographic Traveler

*In the April 2001 issue of National Geographic Traveler, Antony Weller impressed by Kerala's inquiring sophistication described it as the State of Enlightenment.*





The masseur closed his eyes in prayer, then sprang into action, vigorously rubbing oil into my scalp, neck, shoulders, back, thighs and buttocks. This latter part, I reflected, is what man-eating tigers eat first, as an hors d'oeuvre; or so I was once told by an Indian game warden. Back at the massage, my legs were tugged and stretched, my knees and ankles loosened. I was flipped over and strong fingers located the tea I had drunk earlier. It gurgled loudly. At last, the masseur bowed his head and set me free: the whole thing lasted nearly an hour and I glowed like a lamp.

All the magic of the Kerala waterlands was distilled in the burnished hour before dusk. Skinny boatmen poled long canoes with cargoes of coconuts, fish, bicycles, chickens and tired people. My own boat, whispering through the skein of creeks and jungled islands, was an unobtrusive platform from which I observed the seamless lives of amphibious people as they fished and played and planted and endlessly washed themselves, their babies and bright garments. In the shallows, beneath doffing palms, fishermen stood motionless with arrows in taut bowstrings; and, as swift as arrows, kingfishers dived in sudden electric flashes. Egrets studied the noble heads of buffaloes, picking off ticks like attentive valets.

Kerala has always fitted Western notions of Eden: the soil deep red, beaches bone-white, vegetation dense green and the sea sparkling blue for much of the year. Forests, farms and plantations, watered by more than 40 rivers, ascend from the sea to the great ramparts of the Western Ghats.

...I submitted, for the first time, to an Ayurvedic oil massage, for which Kerala is renowned. The skills of Ayurvedic medicine and massage are often passed down through families, and the masseur, a stocky scrum-half of a man with a jolly smile, showed me a pot of oil that, he said, was a traditional recipe with his own herbal additions. It was the colour of dark honey, and its smell was tantalising, reminding me of the Virol my mother spooned into me so that I should grow into a big boy, and then of *crème brûlée*.



We anchored at twilight, some distance from the shore and untroubled by flies or mosquitoes. The crew lit oil lamps, and I drank a beer and read. Dinner was a fish curry with coconut and rice, followed by pineapple and banana fritters. I stretched out on the foredeck mattress and watched the swarming stars. A cool breeze blew into the cabin. I rose at 5am to watch the sunrise. The crew jumped over the side for their bath, then brought me tea and a peppery omelette. We embarked on another voyage of enchanting hours, visiting a Hindu temple and a church, both of them crowded with worshippers. Because Kerala is a crossroads of faith, the place where Christians, Muslims and Jews put down their first markers in India, it is full of churches, mosques and temples.



The widely read and circulated travel magazine published from UK  
 Condé Nast Traveller brought out the exotic fragrance of Kerala in its March 2002 issue.

**K**erala, land of the coconut tree, is another India entirely. Kerala is a lush, green, somnolent, watery state down on the south-western coast, which is where those who were grabbed by the rich and dusty extravaganza that is Rajasthan go for their next "India" fix. It appeals to those looking for places which chic little boutiques and five-star hotels haven't yet reached but which nevertheless has more than enough to seduce and attract. It is sufficiently off the beaten track to satisfy those who would like a little (just a teeny, teeny bit - if they're being honest) discomfort to give them that warm glow of having being adventurous, of having ventured into "real" India. Kerala still has that faintly shabby, faded air which I find so seductive - it's India

before the style gurus have turned it into a model of contemporary chic. It's a more innocent India where an avocado bathroom suite is still the last word in interior design and a G&T is the drink to have as you sit on the veranda, the creaking doors to your room swaying in the breeze, and watch the sun set over some of the most beautiful waterways in the world.

It's a green Venice, but unlike Venice, where man has created most of the glory, in Kerala nature rules. It's an India where you still have an almost tangible sense that little has changed since the time of Raj, where the ghosts still echo around the decaying churches and graveyards and where, apart from the bustling ports, there seems scarcely any industry, few commercial establishments

- little, in fact, but dreamy lagoons, curving waterways, damp paddy-fields, swaying greenery and singularly beautiful people. But above all, it is the heat that is different. The heat of Rajasthan is dry and catches the back of the throat, but down in Kerala it hangs humid and sultry in the air. It's where the south-west monsoon starts its hectic journey, drenching the state as it sweeps east (unless you have a taste for exciting meteorology, plan your visit between October and March). And Kerala, above all, is the home of spices. Spices brought it its prosperity, spices made it the fulcrum of the trading routes of a myriad nations, and today, as soon as the visitor heads inland, the air is heady with the scents of cloves and peppers, ginger and tamarind, cinnamon and nutmeg. Can there be a more romantic name in the world than the Cardamom Hills?



#### Weekend Financial Times - London

*In a cover page story on Kerala in its January 2001 issue, Weekend FT celebrated the dreamy lagoons, curving waterways, damp paddy fields, swaying greenery and singularly beautiful people of Kerala.*

**M**edicinal herbs, decoction, yoga and gentle hands - that's how one rejuvenates body and mind in Kerala, using the age old science of medicine.

Ayurveda is popular. After all Ayurveda promises nothing smaller than stopping ageing process. Who is not attracted towards it? Rejuvenating! Purifying! Beautifying! Vitalizing! The way there must not be too far. In the meantime, one can even take the Indian Medical Science at Kassel or Bad Ems. But those who can afford it, and believe in the benedictions of atmospheric energy, are attracted to the Mecca of the oldest and holistic health

exotic plants, herbal plants, salty air. Suddenly I felt that I was not a stranger anymore - as I slowly succumbed to the miracles of the Veda (science) of the Ayus (life); these are Sanskrit words out of which Ayurveda originated...

Today in India, Ayurveda is as popular as the modern, western medicine. It offers effective therapies against asthma, liver disorders, allergies, migraine, stomach complaints and sleep disturbances.

The beginning of every course of Ayurveda treatment is the pulse diagnosis. "Thereby I detect weak points,

Apart from the soothing treatments, spices, herbs and oil have great importance in Ayurvedic medicine. The medicines are manufactured in pharmaceutical factories, according to the prescriptions passed on from generation to generation. Decoctions are shaken, rubbed, cooked and stirred for weeks and months...

...In 300 litre steam pots stewed rare fruits. "Certain beautification extracts must be cooked for 83 days. A medicine against Parkinson must take exactly 101 days." The Chinese vases are 5000 years old - as big as wine barrels and the precious liquid is stored in it. These preparations and decoctions are not only in great demand here, but are also exported to Europe and USA, for those people



**Geo Saison**

*The February 2002 issue of Geo Saison, Germany's largest selling travel magazine, discovers the magic of Ayurveda in the Mecca of the oldest and most holistic health system - Kerala.*

*Reproduced is the English version*

system: to Kerala. The small federal state, which is also known as the Switzerland of India, is particularly successful in the equal rights and educational policies (7 universities and 186 colleges for science and humanities). And also in the field of tourism, through which Ayurveda became one of the major attractions...

...I closed my eyes and listened to mixed sounds of the loud twittering of birds and the gentle murmuring of the sea. A strange fragrance flattered me. Joss sticks,

which I would not experience by any other medical investigation...", says Dr. Latha. "There are physicians who practise exclusively with the pulse diagnosis". She reaches for my hand and with three fingers feels my pulse...

...Dr. Latha examines the condition of my skin, the face cut and the fingernails. ...From the results of the examination she made an individual therapy plan for me.

who trust the healing power of the herbs more than that of the products of western pharmaceutical industry.

...And then the last massage. The cool hands of the young Indian Kavita stroked my face gently. A mighty silence filled the room. Perhaps it was only in my mind, which had locked out all noises. I slid into a blithe trance. It was clear to me: Of course! I would come back, at least for three weeks.

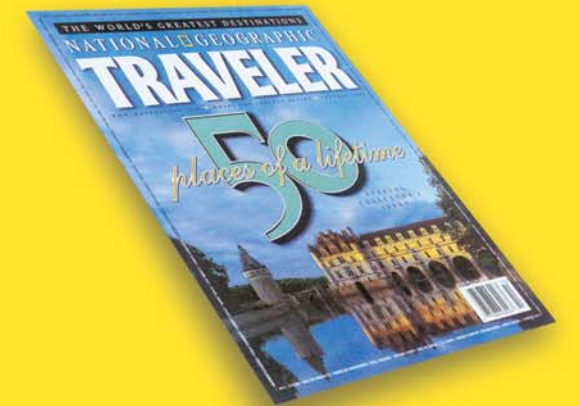
**K**erala is a very easy place to simply sit back and enjoy. The name means "land of coconuts," and the palms shade nearly the entire state from the tropical sun; many call the beach at Kovalam the best in India; visitors can spend a day riding small ferries through the backwater lagoons or watching elephants cavort in the wildlife sanctuaries; the spicy food may be the best vegetarian cuisine on the planet.

faster. Kerala's citizens live nearly as long as Americans or Europeans. Though mostly a land of paddy-covered plains, statistically Kerala stands out as the Mount Everest of social development; there's truly no place like it.

In the mornings, from anywhere in Kerala, you can hear loud music from the Hindu temples, wailing muezzins at the mosques, and church bells ringing at

the cathedrals. Religious tolerance is just one reason for Kerala's success. The state government has effected sweeping land reforms and spends almost half of its budget on health and education. A heritage of female-headed households means women have always been equal participants here. Unlike almost everywhere else in Asia, women outnumber men in Kerala, suggesting there has been no selective abortion or female infanticide.

# K E R A L A , I N D I A



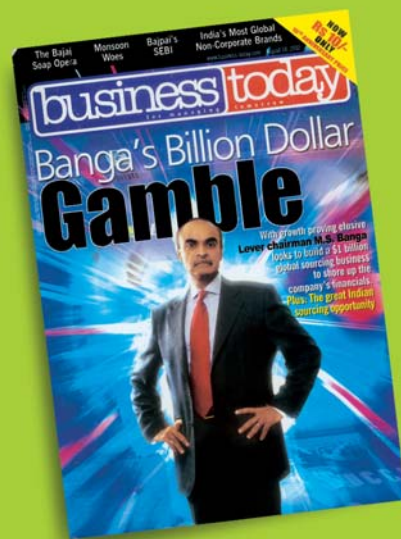
## National Geographic Traveler

*In its October 1999 special collector's issue, National Geographic Traveler selected Kerala as one of the 50 destinations of a lifetime. The feature by Bill McKibben celebrated Kerala as a Paradise Found - one of the ten in the world.*

But for me, the real reason to visit Kerala, which lies at the southwestern tip of the subcontinent, is the *intellectual* adventure: Kerala is a bizarre anomaly among developing nations, a place that offers real hope for the future of the Third World. Consider: This small state in India, though not much larger than Maryland, has a population as big as California's and a per capita annual income of less than \$ 300. But its infant mortality rate is low, its literacy rate among the highest on Earth, and its birthrate below America's and falling



Kerala is not a quiet spot. It has a rate of newspaper readership that is among the highest in the world and plenty of never-ending political arguments. Parades of striking bus drivers or medical students or *kathakali* dancers block traffic in the capital of Trivandrum almost daily. But for me, that engagement with the world is one of the best things about the place. Keralites meet you on more or less equal terms, with neither the subservience nor the rage you'll find in much of the Third World.



## Business Today

August 18, 2002 issue

One of India's two most global  
non-corporate brands

**K**erala gets just about as many tourists as Goa and accounts for less than 3 per cent of the Rs. 22,000 crore South Asia earns from in-bound tourism. But it is, arguably, a far more vibrant brand. "Kerala has taken the destination aspect of a travel brand and converted it into an unparalleled brand experience," says R. Sridhar, CEO brand.comm, a brand consultancy. Price is very much a part of the equation, but not all of it as it almost invariably is in Goa's case. The global Kerala brand may be younger than its Goan counterpart, but it is likely to be far more resilient.



## What the world says

*"Many thanks for a wonderful stay in the beautiful state of Kerala. You have helped make our trip most magical and we thank you for all your efforts. It is truly God's Own Country."*

Sir Paul McCartney Former Beatle

*"This has been the best birthday I have ever had in my life. I was mesmerised by the incredible display of jasmine, marigold, roses, carnations and many others. The view under the stars was breathtaking. We saw four shooting stars. I have travelled the world, but never have experienced anything quite like this. This is our first visit to Kerala. A magical experience."*

Heather Mills Ex model

*"Terrific trip - all too short. Thanks to all in Kerala - and on the boat - for introducing me in person to one of the world's places of a lifetime. I'll be back."*

Keith Bellows Chief Editor, National Geographic Traveler

*"Thank you so very much for a wonderful and memorable trip to Kerala. We had a fantastic time. And the only thing more beautiful than the views were the people who helped us. Thanks again so very much."*

Joseph Kennedy Nephew of John F. Kennedy

*"Nature's silent beauty provides a perfect setting here for contemplation."*

Sri. Atal Behari Vajpayee Hon. Prime Minister of India

*"Kerala is my fascination. Monsoon brings romance and hence I am here to capture the ethereal beauty of 'God's Own Country' on canvas."*

Maqbool Fida Hussain Renowned artist

*"The Jeep-road to the Spice Mountains bumps and grinds past rice paddies, red-plantations trees, and roadside carpets of green and red capsicums laid out to dry in the sun: through cashew and areca-nut orchards and up, upto the kingdoms of cardamom and cummin, to the shadow of young coffee plants in flower, to the terraces of tea that look like giant green tiled roofs, and to the empire of Malabar pepper above all. Early in the morning the bulbuls sing, working elephants amble past, munching amiably at the vegetation..."*

Salman Rushdie The Moor's Last Sigh

## Prestigious awards that came Kerala's way

### *Pacific Asia Travel Association (PATA)*

- Gold Award for E-Newsletter, 2005.
- Honourable Mention for Culture, 2005.
- Gold Award for Culture, 2004.
- Gold Award for Ecotourism, 2004.
- Gold Award for CD-ROM, 2004 and 2003.
- Gold Award for Marketing, 2003.
- Grand Award for Heritage, 2002.

### *Pacific Area Travel Writers Association (PATWA)*

- International Award for Leisure Tourism, 2000-2001.

### *Government of India*

- Best Marketed and Promoted State, 2004.
- Best Maintained Tourist-friendly Monument, 2004.
- Best Innovative Tourism Project, 2004.
- Best Promotion Literature, 2004.
- Best Publishing, 2004.
- Best Performing State for 2003, 2001, 2000 and 1999 - Award for Excellence in Tourism. (For rapid growth, development and advancement in the tourism sector)

- Best Practices by a State Government, 2003.

- Best Eco-tourism Product, 2003.

- Best Wildlife Sanctuary, 2003.

- Most Innovative Use of Information Technology, 2003 and 2001.

- Most Tourist-friendly International Airport, 2002.

- Most Eco-friendly Destination, 2002.

- Best Tourism Film, 2001.

### *Outlook Traveller - TAAI*

- Best State that promoted Travel & Tourism, 2000-2001.

### *Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)*

- Award for Best Marketing, 2003.

- Award for Best Use of IT in Tourism, 2003.

### *Galileo - Express Travel & Tourism*

- Award for the Best State Tourism Board, 2003.





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