

SILKWINDS

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This page from far left: A street merchant "pulls" tea, a method that introduces air into the drink, resulting in a rich froth; a tasty breakfast of either wheat or rice puttu (in roll), pigeon peas and pappadam is unique to Kerala.

Most tourist-oriented restaurants serve Kerala cuisine alongside dishes from elsewhere in India, but the best vegetarian restaurants in Trivandrum devote themselves squarely to South Indian cuisine, both from Kerala and the neighbouring state of Tamil Nadu.

Tuck into a lunchtime thali at Ariya Nivaas, for instance, down near the train station, and you begin to appreciate the subtlety of South Indian food. The food isn't overtly spicy, but it creeps up on you and your brow may be beading with sweat by the end of the meal. You'll be perfectly sated, but not too full. Kerala vegetarian cuisine is light and non-fattening.

The Ariya Nivaas restaurant sits in one of Trivandrum's entirely vegetarian hotels – no meat or eggs pass through its doors. Although it is most popular with observant Hindus, it also attracts travellers who are interested in staying somewhere that offers them a window into another culture. The Comfort Inn Grand on Trivandrum's main drag, Mahatma Gandhi Road, is another full-service hotel that is "all veg". It has two popular vegetarian restaurants, Swagath, which serves Indian food, and Buddha's Delight, a Chinese vegetarian restaurant that imports its tofu from Singapore.

In the evening, Kerala's residents traditionally eat kanji, a rice porridge that they might top with pigeon peas. Now

they're looking for something a little more exotic themselves, hence the advent of places like Buddha's Delight. The manager says it is one of the first "all veg" Chinese places in the country. "People used to just eat a small meal," Jayaprakash Thampya, a Kerala food expert who works at Swagath, says. "Nowadays they all go out and have a big Chinese meal. Kerala has changed."

SilkAir flies from Singapore to Trivandrum three times a week.

NAVIGATOR

ARIYA NIVAAS

This "all veg" hotel is located near the train station on Manorama Road. The lunchtime thali is a great deal, at R40 (US\$1) for the basic service downstairs or R75 for a few add-ons in the air-conditioned room upstairs. Tel: +91-471-233-0789

ARUL JYOTHI

Opposite the Secretariat on "M.G. Road", this is a great pit stop. Fill up on masala dosa, a crispy golden pancake stuffed with potato and onion. Tel: +91-471-247-0240

COMFORT INN GRAND

This "all veg" hotel, also on M.G. Road, has an upstairs Indian restaurant, Swagath, that serves a weekly sadhya feast on Friday and a traditional Kerala brunch on Sundays. Downstairs, Buddha's Delight focuses on Chinese and Thai food. Tel: +91-471-247-1286

HOTEL HIGHLAND PARK

This small hotel is home to City Green, which runs a South Indian breakfast in the morning and a special thali for lunch, with 11 traditional South Indian dishes. Tel: +91-471-233-8880

PATHAYAM

An interesting natural health food restaurant at Bakery Junction. The restaurant takes in patients looking to cure themselves or restore balance through natural eating. Besides meat, Pathayam vouchsafes spicy food, coffee and tea. Milk, which C.V. Gangadharan calls "the silent killer," is substituted with coconut milk and sugar ("white poison") is replaced by jaggery (unrefined sugar). Pathayam also serves a large selection of juices which use the Indian herbs kruga for the brain, cherroola for the kidneys and muthil for pain. Tel: +91-9387391082 (mobile)

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