Besotted by beaches and backwaters, the land of the Mappilas hides a history woven with Kathakali, Kalaripayattu

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Lying on the southern periphery of Kerala, Malaprapam is a microcosm of God’s Own Country offering a cornucopia of Kerala’s varied natural beauty. Arriving from Delhi in the afternoon, I had already seen by the next day an unending stretch, backwaters, an estuary, these district towns, dense forest all within the boundaries of the district that is twice the size of sometimes even in other states and also in the Gulf for migrant workers from the state. A recent story of the sample based on the travelogue of Arjuna from the Mahabharata, was written by a mechanical engineer, a sort of the soul, who works in Ayurveda.

Kalaripayattu treatment thrives in Malaprapam though under the umbrella of Ayurveda. While Kathakali’s Kottarakali performers do the massages most of the Waiters staff when they need treatment.

Beats anchored in an estuary against the backdrop of the Ponnani harbour in Malaprapam

yoga to their Ayurveda routines to give a holistic value to their treatment packages.

Even with yoga on the menu, nature retains its due share on the list of ingredients for the otherwise ayurvedic looking fields of Ayurveda. That was obvious when last week motoring to the balcony of the Kadava Resort, built on a hilltop. As my eyes gazed at the breathtaking Chalakkuyar river below, I sensed as though the politician and mango trees flanking the balcony were reaching out to convey their view. It was the same feeling when I took a calm cruise on a houseboat the next day in Ponnani’s Kollam Lake where lotus flowers exhibited...
and Ayurveda

Like the landscape, the place of the Muppli is also Keralas cultural potpourri. More than a thousand years ago, Malappuram’s ‘Thirumpesw’ was the venue of a gathering of traders from around the world at its ‘Mamankam’ festival, accoladed Indias first international trade fair. The fair, which was held once in 12 years on the banks of the Bhavna ghat, ended in the 16th century but while viewing its remnants from centuries old watch tower used by the then rulers to witness the fair an official of a nearby temple told me that it was where the ashes of Mahatma Gandhi were immersed. A funeral ceremony performed by Michael Jackson by an American agent after his death.

Not far from the river is the town of Kollam, a hub of the spice trade and a sacred river in the place where the Muppli meets the sea. Kollam also has some of the finest beaches with clean sands and clear waters.

Arts as science

The best example of Malappuram’s rich cultural heritage is provided by Ayurveda which has become as much a brand as the backwaters in Kerala. It is remarkable that the Kerala tradition of Ayurveda has flourished in the land of the Muppli,” says KS Money, the top official of the legendary Kollam Arya Vaishya Sala, about how Malappuram became the Mecca of Ayurveda.

Pillayar who started the Vaishya Sala 135 years ago in Malappuram village, told two things: fundamental differences to the practice of Ayurveda until then. “First, he freed the medical system from its academic strangulation by making it accessible to common people and secondly, he started mass manufacturing of Ayurvedic medicines for the first time,” explains Money. There is a third thing, too, that is widely mentioned. Variyar also launched a theatre company as part of his hospital in Kollam, the village that has spawned a hundred names as well as a culture of world-class tourists for Kerala. The Nityanandam, formed in 1987, provided entertainment to the hospital’s patients initially, but became a part of the healing philosophy of Kollam’s second most important asset form of Kollam performed drama as the group’s philosophy. That is where the source of medical arts’ strict regimen provided Kollam performs ils flexibility demanded by the system through body exercises. “When were not using Kollam, we were asked to perform body exercises at the Ayurveda hospital,” says the Nityanandam’s current principal Keshavan Kumbaloor.

The massages performed by the Kollam therapists, running only the feet of the patients and the body language on the stage, in the movements, the mental healing continues.

Thanks to Malappuram’s rich for festivals, the Kollam stripe stage about 300 performances every year. There are hundreds of ‘Kalari’ gurus in Malappuram who offer for the same ‘Kalari’ hand massage and oil for an Ayurveda hand massage being poured from a mad put with water soils.

It is easy to find a quiet beach in Kerala, sport where foreign tourists arrive for the ‘Mamankam’ festival. From near its harbour, lined by scores of fishing vessels, a ferry takes passengers to the meeting point of the Bhavna and the Tiri river with the Arabian Sea. All that is required is to step across the expanse feeling the breath of misty morning birds overhead and there is the Vellanikkara beach, which is yet to be discovered by the locale.