A green haven

Wayfarer

Nothing rejuvenates the city-jarred soul than sailing through Kerala’s backwaters, says Lubna Salim

It's a picturesque city that's the perfect destination after the hustle and bustle of Calcutta. Alleppey — also known as Alappuzha — is a combination of breath-taking backwaters, beaches and canals and it's a great place to relax and rejuvenate. Add to that great food and fabulous resorts and you have nothing short of an amazing experience.

My rendezvous with Kerala began with a long flight that took me all the way from Calcutta to Kochi with a halt in Bangalore. But even from the plane you can spot the difference the minute you cross into Kerala and see a serene sea of green below. From Kochi, it's a two-and-a-half-hour drive to Alleppey with a brief halt for a quick sip of refreshingly sweet coconut water — this is Kerala after all.

A three-minute serpentine drive, 4km from Alleppey town, leads to the Panamada Resort that overlooks the beautiful Vemband Lake. It looks like something from a picture book, with wooden villas and cottages, some overlooking the lake. There is, of course, plenty of green all around and houseboats anchored near the hotel's back lawn. This was to be my home for the night and I stepped into the lap of luxury. The houseboat had a deck, dining area, two bedrooms and even a private kitchen. My room was cozy with ambient lighting and a comfy four-poster bed. Waking up to the sounds of birds was a rare treat, and I left the houseboat reluctantly the next morning.

Since I was on holiday, I figured it was time to taste the local specialties. At breakfast, I went for an exotic combination of puttu (steamed savoury cakes made with rice flour) served with kadala (black gram) curry and hot idlis and roties with sambhar and chutney.

There's nothing like sailing through God's Own Country without a tour of the local market. So, the following day I set out to explore the bazaar. From spices to utensils, clothes, rows of jewelery shops and small confectionary shops that sell everything from popular banana chips to short cakes and biscuits, it was an interesting window shopping experience.

The high point of the next day was a traditional five-course Keralan meal at the Hotel Arcadia. Here, the delicacies on the table included neyumeen porichaattu (fried sweetfish), mena curry (Kerala-style fish curry), azhali, pulissery (gravy made with curd and vegetables), stew (vegetables stewed in coconut milk), poyazhun (dessert made of chana dal cooked with jaggery and coconut milk).

I reserved the following day for quiet contemplation and lazing around at the resort, while the evening spell a special sunset by the sea.

My last day was special with a three-hour houseboat tour of the stunning backwaters with a scrumptious breakfast cooked and served on cruise. We were a group of six on board Spice Garden, operated by Spice Routes. As we relaxed on the deck and tried our hand at steering the boat, the aromas of puttu with Kadala and duck egg curry filled the dining area. While munching on all this, we sailed past boats, ferries and fishermen and also picturesque churches, homes and resorts.

We rounded off the day with an Italian meal at an eatery called Dressers Cafeteria's, a stone's throw from the resort. This single-storey restaurant had an easy air, ideal for long meals.

The next morning, I started for Kochi airport. On my way back home, I was a new, rejuvenated person.