A TOW-DAY LOVE AFFAIR WITH KOCHI


From walking on the lanes of European, Indian and Portuguese history to immersing herself in the local art and culture, Rosine Balasubramanian was snug in this coastal city.

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un, sand and beaches—Kochi, the city fondly called home isn’t starved of any of this. And being a creature of the monsoon, it’s not often that I miss the city’s sultry summer days. But as I pen this while listening to the rhythmic pitter-patter on the windowpanes on a cold night, I quite miss a beautiful balmy day at a place in a different coast—Fort Kochi. The glistening water, sunlight streaming through the golden gondolas and the ruins of the 18th century Fort Emmanuel along the promenade, the vibrant graffiti art, Chenai Yoga (Chinese fishing nets) sightings, colonial-style buildings along the shoreline, the noisy fish markets, and finding the quiet amidst the noise in a secluded spot on the trail. After countless failed plans, on a whim, I packed my bags to the charming coastal city. With no itinerary and only less than 48 hours, I decided to go where my flip-flops wearing feet and the quaint lanes decided to take me. While the trip was dotted with several highlights, here’s what you can do if you are planning a short trip to this paradise in Kerala.

Low-cost joy ride
After my 11-hour bus journey from Chennai to Ernakulam, my first stop was at a local eatery to have a sumptuous Kerala-style breakfast. Soon after devouring a plate of puttu, omelette and jaggery, I headed to the Marine piece of Light. I knew that a 4 euro one-way ferry ticket to the Kochi Jetty would create a harmony in my mind with so many beautiful moments in the fresh air while riding the ferry through the charming Kurumpanai channel. I was captivated by the magnificent view of the striping boats and肝脏. If you’ve never been on a boat or taken a ferry in the past, I suggest you make this your first.

The Dutch connect
After throwing my backpack into the traveler’s hand, I made my way to the 18th century Mattancherry Palace. The Chinese trade was internally squashed in joy at the sight of the trade center of the port. After a humble ride through the lanes of Fort Kochi, the Nalukettu-style palace building, gifted by the Portuguese in 1590 and built in all its magnificence before me. If you are a lover of architecture, then you’ve hit the jackpot. The palace, which was later annexed by the Dutch, features a museum decked with vibrant murals, artistic compositions from Hindu mythology, portraits of the traditionally pleasing wooden ceilings and windows were.

The antique hunt
A few metres away from the palace, a shop, the Clocks, that functions as a market for antiques, turns tourists and travellers into its winding passageways. The area is the heart of a formerly thriving community—the Kochi Jews, said to be the oldest group of Jews in India. The old-world charm of the neighbourhood is accented by the plethora of shops that sell vintage collectibles, antiques, wooden carvings, perfumes, aromatic spices. A concoction of pleasant fragrances, the loud chatter of tourists bargaining with sellers and the mild sounds of music playing from the outdoor cafes set the tone for a memorable stroll. If you are here, visit India’s oldest Jewish Synagogue. I was told by a local that the oldest living member of Kochi’s Jewish community, Sarath Jacob Cohen, passed away in August 2019 and the Jewish community of Mattancherry has reduced to just two members.

Eyes do the talking
As the sun began to set, I was torn between catching the golden hour by the beach, and watching a traditional Kathakali performance at the Kerala Kathakali Centre. I chose the latter. With a 1500 pass in my hand, I made my way up the air-conditioned hall with dim stage lighting, margarita flowers, artists and people from across the globe.

To witness the artists mix different herbs and aromatic substances to make paints of different hues to colour their faces in a process that takes around two hours, and an insight into the elaborate composition of costumes, was a stunning experience. If you are willing to spend three hours to watch a unique art, this is the place where you should head to. From the elaborate costumes, eye movements, facial expressions, moods, music, rhythmic movements to a heightened superhuman effect—this is something you shouldn’t miss.

Church, Connect
On Day 2, before the break of dawn, I headed to Fort Kochi’s beach. Reason? To witness the Chinese fishing nets in action. The mechanism of the centuries-old iconic stationary lift net is intriguing. If you are lucky, fishermen might even teach some tricks of the trade, and cook a delicious meal with the day’s catch.

Soon after, I reached one of the oldest existing European churches in India—St. Francis. Built in the early 16th century, the church has stood the test of time and been a silent spectator of the European colonial struggle. The unaffected structure is touted for being the original burial place of Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama.

A sunset to remember
When you are on a solo trip, the Internet is your friend. But the locals become your best friends. I was asked to catch the sunset from stop to the tallest lighthouse in Kerala—the Puttuvype lighthouse, Vypin island. With the sunset fading faster in the hourglass, I immediately took the 10-minute long ferry from Fort Kochi to Vypin—a island formed in 1414 following a catastrophic flood. A nature trail led me to the dreamlike lighthouse. A panoramic view of the sunset, sea backsides and green cover around the area from the octagonal tower’s balcony was nothing but sublime. The lighthouse also has a serene less-visited beach, which is the perfect place for a solo traveler. As I raced past the town’s red sky and shoreline one last time before boarding the bus, I found a wall with the words: Fort Kochi is not a place, it’s a feeling. While I caught a glimpse of the sun, tucking in the city through my vehicle’s rearview mirror, I also saw myself nodding in agreement—a feeling indeed!