

# HINDUSTAN TIMES

## KERALA: A CONFLUENCE OF CULTURES

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Pristine, picturesque backwaters, lush greenery and a cuisine that's worth devouring.

here's what truly makes the state 'God's Own Country'

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**T**hink Kerala and one instantly gets transported to a land of lush green paddy fields, a boat ride along the picturesque backwaters on a bright, breezy morning and chirps of the Malabar whistling thrush. A land of rich cultural heritage and folklore, there's no phrase more apt than 'God's Own Country' to describe the region.

"Nothing can beat the joy of gliding across tranquil canals, surrounded by verdant greenery, spotting exotic birds like kingfishers, cormorants and egrets, and locals going about their daily chores. It truly makes you revel in the magic of everyday moments and respect the importance of the backwaters for the locals," says Vikas Swarup, an author and diplomat, who recently visited the state.

For connoisseurs of art and dance forms, Kerala has a buffet to offer. From performing arts such as Kathakali,

Koodiyattam, Thullal and Mohiniyattam to the martial art, Kalaripayattu, one can watch ancient tales and characters come alive. "The brilliantly painted masks and headgear worn by Theyyam and Padayani artistes are fine examples of Kerala's crafts," says Rami George, principal secretary (Tourism), Government of Kerala.

Accommodation options are aplenty for travellers. One could park at a heritage hotel, or cherish the experience of residing in a traditional tharavadu-style mansion. Reminiscing his stay at a stunning resort in the backdrop of Vembanad Lake, Swarup says, "It was a unique experience to live in a traditional Kerala mansion, enjoy coffee from a floating stall, breathing fresh air, observing the lazy houseboats, canoes drift on the lake, and spectacular sunsets made it a rejuvenating retreat."

In a bid to provide a flip to tourism, a slew of projects has been launched.

"Conceptualised with the vision of preserving and showcasing traditions, traditional architecture and the maritime connect of the land with the world, the Heritage Tourism projects, namely Travancore Heritage Tourism Project, Alappuzha Heritage Project and Thalassery Heritage Project, aim to add new circuits for travellers to explore while in Kerala," informs Krishna Teja Mylavaram, director, Kerala Tourism.

"These packages will offer tourists the opportunity to experience the life of the people of Kerala. They'll get a first-hand experience of the making of Kerala's handkerchiefs and the weaving of its handlooms. These experiences offer hosts the opportunity to directly benefit from tourism activities, empowering local communities, mainly artisans, performing artistes and women folk," adds Mylavaram.

THE PECULIAR BEAUTY OF MUMBAR, THE ALLURING FORESTS OF THEKKADY, AND WYANAD, AND THE SANDY BEACHES OF KOVALAM AND CHERAL MAKE FOR A NURTURING, WHOLESOME TOUR



### A burst of flavours

No trip to Kerala is complete without relishing the local cuisine, comprising seafood delicacies and the traditional *sadhya*, served on a plantain leaf. "We enjoyed Chemmeen (prawn) Curry, Fish Molee, Malabari Njandu (crab) Roast, Karimeen Pollichathu, Kappa Meen (spicy fish curry), traditional favourites *avial*, *appam* and stew, and the delectable Malabar *Purotta*," says Swarup.

### Exploring the unexplored

North Malabar, particularly the districts of Wayanad, Kannur and Kasargod, are relatively unexplored, and have a lot to offer. Besides popular destinations such as Kovalam, Varkala, Alleppey and Munnar, there are a number of quiet corners, such as Chowara, Kappil, Chetly, Athirapally and Marayoor, to name a few, that are equally astonishing options to unwind.

### A spice trail

Taste some authentic black pepper, cardamom, cinnamon and vanilla. Also, explore spice plantations in Munnar, Thekkady or Wayanad.

### Be a responsible traveller

While on a trip to Kerala, it is recommended that travellers adhere to the laws of the land, and respect the traditions of its natives.

