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**Delight“Fool” Sale 1 - 3 Apr (Fri - Sun)**

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TA 109

### SPICED JOURNEYS

# Kerala on my mind

Can't forget a place of charmed backwaters and charming laid-back people

SANDIP HOR  
features@mediacorp.com.sg

**SINGAPORE** – A rooster screeches its morning call. A few crows join in, and soon other chirping birds add melody to the mood as their shrill cries break the morning silence. The surrounding darkness slowly fades as the rising sun throws light onto the dark horizon of sleepy Kerala.

The first morning ferry honks its wake-up call and a gentle breeze carries the undulating voice from the mu-ezzin of a nearby mosque, as the ringing of temple bells signals the start of yet another day in the backwaters of this Indian state.

Travellers who have experienced this morning symphony call it wondrous. Long renowned for its idyllic beauty, these backwaters are an integrated network of rivers, lakes, canals, estuaries and lagoons that thread through the length and breadth of Kerala, located in the southwestern tip India tucked between the Arabian Sea on the west (it has 600km of shoreline) and the Western Ghat Mountains to the east. It is in these emerald waters that farmers transport their produce, women wash their clothes, men fish for their livelihoods and children

learn how to swim (sometimes even before they learn how to walk).

### THE REAL KERALA

Kerala is unquestionably a dream destination. Backwaters aside, it charms with its old-fashioned settlements, unspoilt coastline, rolling hills and valleys, lush green coconut groves and a spiced perfumed air everywhere you go.

In ancient times, it was scent spices that lured merchant ships from as far away as Phoenicia, Egypt, Babylon, Assyria and China, all willing to brave the currents of the high seas just to land on Kerala's shores.

They were followed by the Arabs and the Europeans — including the Portuguese, Dutch and British — all of whom marched in after Vasco da Gama established the route from Europe by sailing around Africa's Cape Of Good Hope. These traders established a cultural melting pot in Kerala that differentiates the region from the rest of India.

Here, the air is fresh and the sky is blue. When travelling across the region, it's amazing to observe how the placid beauty of the land has influenced the people's lifestyle, which has remained slow and easy-going. The land seems to be blessed by the gods — and perhaps that's why one of the nicknames of Kerala is “God's own country”.

Different religions such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity and Judaism coexist harmoniously here. These diverse faiths were introduced with the influx of traders, travellers and missionaries. The Paradeisi Synagogue in Mattancherry, the Padmanabhaswamy Temple in the state capital, Thiruvananthapuram, the Santa Cruz Basilica in Kochi or the mosque in Munnar still have





**MARINER OF THE SEAS**  
**03/04/05/07**  
**-NIGHT SOUTHEAST ASIA CRUISE**  
SINGAPORE DEPARTURES: 2016 Oct 17 to 2017 Mar 24  
**PORTS-OF-CALL:** Port Klang, Penang, Langkawi, Phuket, Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City (Phu My)  
**13-NIGHT EXOTIC ASIA FLY-CRUISE PACKAGE**  
SINGAPORE DEPARTURES: Jun 12  
**PORTS-OF-CALL:** Ho Chi Minh, Hong Kong, Xiamen, Seoul, Beijing  
**AIRLINES:** Dragon Air & Cathay Pacific  
**PACKAGE PRICE INCLUDES:**  
• Transfer from Tianjin Port to Tianjin City • Tianjin & Beijing City Tour with Lunch and Dinner • 1 Night Stay at Regent Hotel Beijing (5 star) or similar class with breakfast • Transfer from Beijing Hotel to Beijing International Airport • One way air ticket from Beijing to Singapore by Cathay Pacific

**OYATION OF THE SEAS**  
**03-NIGHT FAR EAST CRUISE**  
SINGAPORE DEPARTURES: Jun 09  
**PORTS-OF-CALL:** Port Klang  
**13-NIGHT EXOTIC ASIA FLY-CRUISE PACKAGE**  
SINGAPORE DEPARTURES: Jun 12  
**PORTS-OF-CALL:** Ho Chi Minh, Hong Kong, Xiamen, Seoul, Beijing  
**AIRLINES:** Dragon Air & Cathay Pacific  
**PACKAGE PRICE INCLUDES:**  
• Transfer from Tianjin Port to Tianjin City • Tianjin & Beijing City Tour with Lunch and Dinner • 1 Night Stay at Regent Hotel Beijing (5 star) or similar class with breakfast • Transfer from Beijing Hotel to Beijing International Airport • One way air ticket from Beijing to Singapore by Cathay Pacific

**VOYAGER OF THE SEAS**  
**03-NIGHT FAR EAST CRUISE**  
SINGAPORE DEPARTURES: May 03, 07  
**PORTS-OF-CALL:** Port Klang  
**07-NIGHT SINGAPORE TO HONG KONG FLY-CRUISE PACKAGE**  
SINGAPORE DEPARTURES: May 10  
**PORTS-OF-CALL:** Bangkok, Nha Trang, Hong Kong  
**AIRLINES:** Cathay Pacific

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\*TERMS AND CONDITIONS: Above prices are quoted in Singapore dollars, based on the lowest possible fare and applicable for per person on twin-sharing basis, subject to associated taxes and surcharge. Estimated taxes are from \$150-\$350. \*\*2nd & 4th pax cruise fee FREE. Below & above promotion based on SPECIAL PROMOTION rate. From-combination with all promotions, land and air package charges still applicable and excluding gratuities and taxes. **Inside Cruise Free:** Gratuities, taxes and fees apply for children aged 12 years and below (max 2 in a stateroom), accompanied by 2 full-paying adults. **\$5 upgrade to balcony exclusive for MSC Cruises:** Book a twin-sharing Oceanview stateroom Cat 1 to enjoy upgrade to selected balcony stateroom at an additional \$5 per person. **2nd Pax at 50% off Basic Early Fare:** In Pax - Full Paying Fare and Pax - 50% Off Book Early Fare. Valid for Junior Suite with balcony and above. Not combinable with any other promotions. **FLY CRUISE PACKAGE:** Airfare is non-refundable and non-transferable. Includes all applicable airport taxes and airline surcharges from \$40-\$60. All promotions are not combinable and apply to selected stateroom categories and sailings. All of the above information is correct at time of print, subject to availability and change.





Book a stay on a traditional houseboat for an unforgettable stay in the backwaters of Kerala. PHOTOS: SANDIPHOR



The freshest seafood is always available in Kerala.

equal status in the society here.

Needless to say, there is a lot to do in Kerala in terms of sightseeing. You can take a look at what remains of the European and Chinese influence in Fort Kochi located in the municipality of Kochi, or wander through narrow streets of the old Jewish town of Mattancherry, visit the spice gardens at Thekkady or tea gardens at Munnar, or simply relax at the world-famous Kovalam beach after a traditional "Ayurvedic" treatment.

#### BOATING BLISS

As fascinating as those sights are, they can't top the quintessential Kerala experience: A backwater cruise

in a Kerala-style houseboat called "Kettuwallam". Made of bamboo, cane, coir and wood, these beautiful vessels, which were earlier used to transport rice, have been refashioned into stylishly furnished floating cottages. Their exotic images brand tourism in Kerala. With Kerala's more than 1,900km of waterways, obviously there are many coastal points to begin a voyage, but the two most popular are Alappuzha and Kollam, the latter eulogised by great travellers like Marco Polo and Ibn Battuta.

The cruise provides a unique opportunity to witness a pulsing synergy between nature and human life which hasn't changed much. As the sun rose above the horizon, it was interesting to notice how life springs into action in this rural quarter. Canoes piled with fruits and vegetables or carrying office workers and school-children crowd the waterways, while women washing dishes shyly turned away from curious eyes of visitors passing by. The aroma of wood fire and unnamed spices from the kitchen hearths drifted in the air.

As the day moved on, the wayside scenery changed: Children on their way to school stopped at times to scuffle with each other; farmers worked in

● CONTINUED ON PAGE 66



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# Spring VACATIONS

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**8D7N Northern Lights Explorer**

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- 2N West Iceland
- 2N Vatnajökull Region
- 1N South Iceland

**fr\$2298\***

**8D7N Auroras Around Iceland**

- 2N Reykjavik
- 1N Myvatn
- 1N East Iceland
- 1N Vatnajökull region
- 1N South Iceland

**fr\$3398\***

**Greece**

Discount up to **\$300** per couple\*

**12D11N Mama Mia! Greece!**

(Overnight in Mykonos & Santorini)

**fr\$1968\***

**8D7N Grecian Odyssey with Turkey**

Greek Islands + Turkey (with 5 days Iconic Aegean Sea Cruise)

**fr\$1548\***

**8D7N Athens Mykonos Santorini**

(Overnight in Mykonos & Santorini)

**fr\$1138\***

**8D7N Grecian Explorer**

(Includes Athen, Hydra, Poros, Aegina, Argolis, Olympia, Delphi and Kalambaka)

**fr\$1458\***

**Europe Rail**

Discount up to **\$100** per couple\*

**7D6N Eastern Europe Rail Holiday** **fr\$1328\***

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**TRAFALGAR INSIGHT VACATIONS** **contiki**

see the world from the inside

**AUSTRALIA**

4 TO GO / Seat-in-Coach Package

**4/5D Cairns** **fr\$248\***

(with Hot air balloon experience)

**4/8D Tasmania** **fr\$268\***

(Free Hobart city tour)

**4/5D Melbourne** **fr\$291\***

(Free Melbourne city tour)

**4/5D Gold Coast** **fr\$299\***

(Free 4D cinema admission)

**4/5D Sydney** **fr\$368\***

(Free 4D cinema experience at Sydney Tower)

**4/5D Perth** **fr\$367\***

(with Rottnest Island tour)

**Self-Drive Package** **Kids stay FREE!**

**6D5N Perth & The Golden Outback** **fr\$678\***

**6D5N Melbourne & The Great Ocean Road** **fr\$768\***

**6D5N Melbourne & The Southern Touring Triangle** **fr\$908\***

**7D6N Melbourne to Sydney** **fr\$878\***

**8D7N Melbourne to Adelaide via The Great Ocean Road** **fr\$888\***

**6D5N Adelaide, Barossa & Kangaroo Island** **fr\$1038\***

**6D5N Sydney & Surrounds Indulgence** **fr\$1068\***

**7D6N Sunny Queensland, Farmstay & Tangalooma** **fr\$1158\***

**9D8N Tasmanian Rhapsody** **fr\$1158\***

**5D4N Australia & Farmstay** **fr\$868\***

- Return airport/hotel transfer
- 1 night farmstay with transfer
- 3N accommodation with daily breakfast

Choice of following cities:  
**Gold Coast:** Theme park include DreamWorld or MovieWorld  
**Melbourne:** Full day tour include Great Ocean Road or Philip Island  
**Cairns:** Full day tour include Green Island Cruise with Lunch or Kuranda, Scenic Rail & Skyrail  
**Sydney:** Full day tour include Blue Mountain with cruise or Canberra

**NEW ZEALAND**

2 TO GO / Seat-in-Coach Package

**4/5D Cairns** **fr\$248\***

(with Hot air balloon experience)

**4/8D Tasmania** **fr\$268\***

(Free Hobart city tour)

**4/5D Melbourne** **fr\$291\***

(Free Melbourne city tour)

**4/5D Gold Coast** **fr\$299\***

(Free 4D cinema admission)

**4/5D Sydney** **fr\$368\***

(Free 4D cinema experience at Sydney Tower)

**4/5D Perth** **fr\$367\***

(with Rottnest Island tour)

**Self-Drive Package** **Kids stay FREE!**

**6D5N Perth & The Golden Outback** **fr\$678\***

**6D5N Melbourne & The Great Ocean Road** **fr\$768\***

**6D5N Melbourne & The Southern Touring Triangle** **fr\$908\***

**7D6N Melbourne to Sydney** **fr\$878\***

**8D7N Melbourne to Adelaide via The Great Ocean Road** **fr\$888\***

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- Return airport/hotel transfer
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**6D5N Flying Cow & Cing Jing** **fr\$328\***

**7D6N West Taiwan & Alishan** **fr\$458\***

**HONG KONG**

**4D3N Hong Kong & Disneyland** **fr\$328\***

**3D2N Hong Kong Free and Easy** **fr\$118\***

**4D3N Hong Kong and Disneyland** **fr\$438\***

**5D4N Hong Kong & Shenzhen** **fr\$208\***

**5D4N Hong Kong, Shenzhen & Macau** **fr\$358\***

**5D4N Hong Kong, Macau & Zhuhai** **fr\$368\***

**JAPAN**

**6D5N Hokkaido Self-Drive** **fr\$978\***

**4D3N Tokyo Free and Easy** **fr\$428\***

**4D3N Osaka Free and Easy** **fr\$498\***

**4/5/6D Okinawa Self-Drive** **fr\$368\***

**7D6N Kyushu Self-Drive** **fr\$1558\***

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**Bhutan** **Discount \$900 per couple\***

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**7D Essential Bhutan** **fr\$2968\***

**10D Cultural Bhutan** **fr\$3978\***

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**6D Beauty of Nepal** **fr\$968\***

**10D Wonderful Nepal** **fr\$1318\***

**Sri Lanka** **Discount \$160 per couple\* GVA onwards**

**5/6D Delight of Sri Lanka** **fr\$668\***

**7/10D Essence of Sri Lanka** **fr\$1048\***

**4/5D Sri Lanka Muslim Tour** **fr\$528\***

**Myanmar** **Discount \$250 per couple\* GVA onwards**

**5D Heritage of Myanmar** **fr\$1038\***

**7D Ancient Beauty of Myanmar** **fr\$2358\***

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\* Denotes applicable taxes + fuel surcharges and varies according to specific departure dates & choice of airlines. \* Information is correct as of 30/3/16 and subject to change due to currency and / or other fluctuations. \* Selected tours & departures only. \* Land tours only. \* T&Cs apply. \* Taxes: fr\$100 to fr\$700



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<b>5D XIAMEN</b>	fr \$200	<b>5D THREE GORGES + CHONGQING</b>	fr \$998

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► FREE T-money Card	fr \$1228	<b>8D ENCHANTING TAIWAN</b>	
<b>7D SPARKLING KOREA</b>	fr \$1298	► Seat-in-coach Tour with Chinese Speaking Guide	fr \$1228

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► Bundle of Attractions*		<b>8D EASY PACE SPAIN</b>	fr \$1938
<b>7D MELBOURNE &amp; SURROUNDS</b>	fr \$788	<b>8D EASY PACE ITALY</b>	fr \$2228
<b>7D TASMANIAN FOOD &amp; NATURE TRAIL</b>	fr \$1058	<b>USA</b>	
<b>8D THE GREAT SUNSHINE WAY WITH FARM STAY</b>	fr \$1578	► Return Airfare ► Return Airport Transfer ► 8N Accommodation ► Seat-in-coach Sightseeing Tours*	
<b>8D SOUTH ISLAND DISCOVERY</b>	fr \$1103	► FREE 1N in Orlando with Universal Studios Ticket*	
<b>6D HOBBITON &amp; WETA</b>	fr \$1386	<b>11D EASTERN USA + ORLANDO</b>	fr \$2988
		► Dep: Wed, Sat	

All prices are subjected to associated taxes &amp; surcharges correct at time of print &amp; subject to change fr \$0 to \$878

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Temples line the banks of the backwaters. PHOTO: ISTOCK

## Kerala on my mind

● CONTINUED FROM PAGE 65

the adjacent paddy fields with ox-driven ploughs while weary fishermen, whose faces are weathered by years of sun and surf, returned home with their catch.

The houseboats stopped at these points for visitors to buy some seafood, but more for an opportunity to mingle with the locals. Many of them can converse in English — Kerala has the highest literacy rates in India. Around noon, when the temperature soars, you can see entire families out splashing in the water to get respite from the heat. And it's not just

humans — there was even a buffalo half-submerged in the stream.

While a lazy silence filled the afternoon, the joie de vivre picked up again in the evening. With the sun slowly sinking into the horizon, people sat by the banks dangling their feet in water, while greeting travellers in passing houseboats with waves and mirth.

And as night crept in, the croaking frogs took up the chorus of the evening song. It was almost reminiscent of the morning chorus, when nature sounded its "alarm". It was time to hit the sack.

Our houseboat dwellers retired to our bunks, recounting the encounters of the rewarding day. Tomorrow, another dawn summoned by Mother Nature awaited. And we could not wait for it to begin again.





You can now scroll through pictures of more wine bottles before you've even finished quaffing the one in your hand. PHOTO: THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

### DO WE REALLY NEED THIS?

## Start-up invents Wi-Fi touchscreen wine bottle

But some punters are wondering if this isn't the most pointless invention ever?

**LONDON**—Ever wish there was a touchscreen on your wine bottle?

Of course you didn't. No one has ever wished for their wine to have Wi-Fi, because it is an idea that borders on stupid.

Drinking wine is one of the few pur-

suits uninterrupted by technology, unless you are watching it in front of Netflix or you are glued to your phone.

However, a start-up called Kuvee has decided its first product should be a Wi-Fi-enabled wine bottle, so that you can scroll through pictures of more

wine bottles before you have even finished quaffing the one in your hand.

They helpfully point out that to serve the wine, you "simply tilt and pour like a regular bottle".

You buy wine cartridges for it and it tells you what kind of wine you're drinking on the touch screen. (This will be very helpful for all those people who buy wine bottles without labels on.)

You can also read pairing notes on what to drink the wine with (sadly, they have not invented cheese with a touchscreen yet), and see photos of who made the wine.

It also estimates how much wine there is left in the bottle, in case you're unable to estimate from the weight or by looking at it.

You cannot actually see how much wine there is in the bottle with this product, as it is opaque, and the number on the screen is a loose estimation.

The bottle also has to be regularly charged, which may hinder its romantic appeal — we're not sure if it would be romantic to serve wine from a Wi-Fi bottle to your beau, while it is attached to a charger!

The charge also only lasts for five to six hours at a time, so it won't even last a whole evening.

Luckily, it can be used as a regular bottle when the battery dies.

"We never want to prevent you from having a glass of wine," said a spokesperson for the start-up.

**THE DAILY TELEGRAPH**



ONLINE

### Dining tips

How to get a table at the hottest restaurants

<http://bit.ly/hottable>

PHOTO: THE IVY RESTAURANT'S WEBSITE

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