



Government of Kerala



CELEBRATING WORDS AND WANDERLUST



yaanaam

A FESTIVAL OF TALES, TRAILS AND TRAVEL
OCTOBER 17 - 19, 2025 | VARKALA





**A FESTIVAL OF
TALES, TRAILS AND TRAVEL**



OVERVIEW OF THE FESTIVAL

A three-day immersive festival, celebrating the art of travel storytelling through writing, vlogging, photography, and music. Yaanam aims to position Kerala as a premier global travel destination. For its first edition, the festival unfolds at Varkala, where renowned storytellers and explorers capture its breathtaking beauty, cultural richness and commitment to sustainable tourism.



VENUE

R A N G A K A L A K E N D R A M

The Yaanam festival will take place at Ranga Kala Kendram, a renowned cultural hub in Varkala known for its blend of tradition and creativity. This venue provides the perfect setting for immersive storytelling, interactive sessions, and cultural performances, offering a seamless mix of indoor and outdoor spaces that enhance the festival's vibrant atmosphere. Conveniently located, it allows easy access to Varkala's scenic landscapes, ensuring an inspiring backdrop for travel enthusiasts to explore, document and celebrate the art of storytelling.





It gives me great pleasure to welcome all delegates, writers, travellers and guests to Yaanam 2025 — India's first-ever literature festival dedicated to travel. This signature initiative of Kerala Tourism celebrates the timeless connection between journeys and stories, bringing together eminent writers, influencers, and travellers from across the world to share experiences, ideas and inspirations. The festival, hosted this year in the serene coastal town of Varkala, is not only a celebration of travel literature but also a strategic initiative to showcase Kerala's destinations. By engaging global voices in travel and creative expression, Yaanam 2025 highlights the state's diverse landscapes, vibrant culture, and warm hospitality. Kerala, with its rich traditions, breathtaking natural beauty and deep-rooted heritage, continues to inspire every traveller who visits. As Yaanam embarks on its journey from Varkala and moves to other unique and unexplored destinations in the coming years, it will carry forward the essence of Kerala — where every journey tells a story. I extend my warmest welcome to all participants and guests. May Yaanam 2025 inspire new paths, new friendships and unforgettable experiences in Kerala.

P. A. Muhammad Riyas

Minister for Public Works and Tourism,
Government of Kerala





Kerala has always been a dream destination for explorers, drawn by its natural beauty and rich heritage. Among its many jewels, Varkala stands apart, with its dramatic cliffs overlooking pristine beaches, ancient Janardanaswamy Temple and timeless cultural energy. It is here that we launch Yaanam, a festival dedicated to celebrating travel in all its forms. This is more than an event; it is a movement that brings travellers closer to each other and to the spirit of God's Own Country. We welcome you to join us in Varkala and be part of this remarkable celebration of journeys.

Biju K. IAS

Secretary, Tourism
Government of Kerala





Yaanam is a pioneering initiative by Kerala Tourism that reimagines the very essence of travel. For the first time, we are bringing together celebrated travellers, writers, vloggers, photographers, musicians and storytellers from around the world on one vibrant platform. Over three inspiring days in Varkala, Yaanam will host thought-provoking conversations, immersive trails and soulful experiences that celebrate the true spirit of journeys. Join us for this unique confluence of voices, cultures, and stories — where exploration meets inspiration. Something extraordinary is unfolding in Varkala, and your presence will make it complete.

Sikha Surendran, IAS

Director, Tourism
Government of Kerala





Let's Do the Yaanam Together

Ancient travellers, expeditors and merchants have played a crucial role in forming Kerala's socio-culture and economic future. We are a people who have exchanged and assimilated cultures, cuisines and languages with countries beyond the huge expanse of the Arabian Sea.

We were the gateway for the Europeans, Chinese, Arabs and the Jews who came seeking the source of pepper and spices. We received them, and in due course exchanged goods and cultures. Bloodlines mixed, foreign words and fruits and food became ours.

Travel and travel writing, thus, have been an integral part of Kerala history. We learn so much about our past from the documents and writings of those travellers and merchants.

No travel is complete without documenting the experience—good, bad or ugly. Travel writing has contributed extensively to world literature. Now, in the era of mobile phones and social media, we create reels about our travel—we document places, people and experience. 'Influencers' create destinations out of places.

Yaanam, which in Sanskrit means travel, is a festival to celebrate everything about travel. The three-day festival at Varkala is all about 'tales, trails and travel'.



This is, perhaps, the country's first travel literary festival where we bring together all kinds of travellers—writers, adventurers, trekkers, hikers, journalists, photographers, nature-lovers, etc.

It is the first initiative from Kerala Tourism. The annual festival will travel across the state, growing as a brand, creating more exciting times together.

We travel with our eyes wide open. Every traveller, in a sense, is like a child. Bill Bryson has put it wonderfully well when he wrote: "I can't think of anything that excites a greater sense of childlike wonder than to be in a country where you are ignorant of almost everything."

Nothing like the unique joy of experiencing a new place as if it were your first time, free from the complacency of familiarity. It captures the idea that travel allows you to see the world with a sense of wonder and curiosity.

Let's do the Yaanam together.

Sabin Iqbal
Curator



YAANAM 2025 - FESTIVAL SCHEDULE

17TH OCTOBER

3:00 PM – 5:00 PM : **Inaugural Session**

5:00 PM – 5:45 PM : **In Search of Stories and Characters**

KR Meera, Pallavi Aiyar, and Shehan Karunatilaka talk to
Sabin Iqbal about their travels.



DAY 1 – 18TH OCTOBER

Theroux Hall– 30 mins sessions + 10 min Q&A + 5min buffer time

- 10:00 AM – 10:45 AM : **Over the mountains, under the sea**
Piya Bahadur and Andrew Fidel Fernando, with Anurag Mallick (Moderator), talk about gearing up to see the world through unconventional terrains.
- 10:45AM – 11:30 AM : **The Cross-Culturists**
Pallavi Aiyar, Sudeep Chakravarti, and Pramudith Rupasinghe share anecdotes inspired by their vast political travels, in a session steered by Pallavi Aiyar.
- 11:30 PM – 12:15 PM : **The Time-Traveller**
Shehan Karunatilaka and Sabin Iqbal discuss how to straddle time zones to tell the tale, with Nirmala Govindarajan.
- 12:15 PM – 1:00 PM : **Adrenaline Travellers**
Piya Bahadur and Dhruv Bogra on pushing their limits to travel along lesser-travelled paths; moderated by Depinder Chaudhry.
- 2:30 PM – 3:15 PM : **Macondo, Marquez & More**
Benyamin discusses his travels in Latin America, Africa and Europe with Muzafar Ahamed
- 3:15 PM – 4:00 PM : **Let's Talk 'Journeys'**
Anumol and Vidhu Vincent discuss the nuances of travels.
- 4:00 PM – 4:45 PM : **Travel the Muse**
Priya Ganapathy, Prakash Sontakke and Asha Thadani on travel as artistic inspiration, moderated by Sumaa Tekur
- 4:45 PM – 5:30 PM : **The Woman's Eye**
How travel brings the feminist perspective for Ciara Mandulee Mendis and Nirmala Govindarajan.



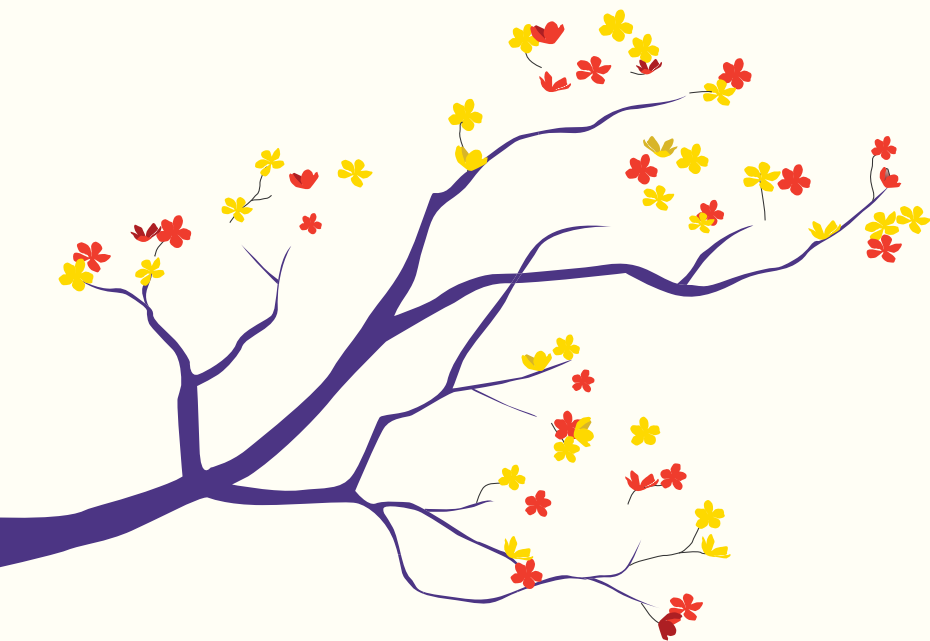
5:30 PM – 6:15 PM : **Desert Crossings: Stories of Migration and Travel**
Muzafar Ahmed explores the realities of Gulf migration and desert journeys, reflecting on the struggles, hopes, and stories captured through travel writing. Adarsh Onnatt, moderator.

Bryson Room– 30 mins sessions + 10 min Q&A + 5min buffer time

10:00 AM – 10:45 AM : **India between Frames [PRESENTATION]**
Asha Thadani presents her journey into the heartlands and brings stories through photographs to political and city corridors.

3:15 PM – 4:00 PM : **Borders Within: A Journey to Tibet [PRESENTATION]**
Tenzin Tsundue takes us on his harrowing journey from Dharmshala to Tibet, the land of his ancestors





UNDER THE PALATREE

11:00 AM - 11:45 AM : **Couch surfing, anyone?**

Couch surfing is a unique social networking platform that connects travellers with locals who are willing to offer free accommodation — typically a couch, spare bed, or room — and share cultural experiences.

Dr Ginu Zacharia Oommen tells his experiences of couch surfing to Krlpa Suresh

12:00 PM - 12:45 PM : **Writing on Travel Destinations**

A tete-e-tete between Karen Anand, Anurag Mallick and Priya Ganapathy about the art and craft of writing exciting travel stories for magazines.

2:30 PM - 3:15 PM : **Vlogging for life**

Arihant Baid, Dev Joshi, and Kritika Goel talk about making it as travel content creators, moderated by Sruthi Bhattathiri.



- 3:15 PM – 4:00 PM : **Undercurrents**
Inside India's Shadow Narratives Ullekh
NP and Sudeep Chakravarti discuss their journeys into the deep, dark pockets of India to unearth suppressed stories. (Sabin Iqbal moderator)
- 4:00 PM – 4:45 PM : **My Cuban Days**
NP Ullekh talks to Faizal Khan on his Cuban sojourn.
- 4:45 PM – 5:30 PM : **Platform Stories**
Sangeetha Vallath talks to Kripa Suresh about her book, Platform Ticket: The Untold Stories about People Who Make Train Travel Possible
- 5:30 PM – 6:15 PM : **Queer Travels**
Journeys as Metaphors for Queer
Becoming Join Reshma Bharadwaj, Sadam Hanjabam, and Aryakrishnan R in a conversation exploring how travel and movement shape queer identities, belonging, and becoming in contemporary India.



DAY 2 – 19TH OCTOBER

Theroux Hall – 30-min sessions + 10-min Q&A + 5-min buffer time

- 10:00 AM – 10:45 AM : **Wildlife Conservation and Sustainable Travel (Malayalam)**
C Rahim and Balan Madhavan discuss with Shameel Nahas actionable steps to wildlife protection and ethical travelling.
- 10:45 PM – 11:30 PM : **ഗുരുവെന്ന സഞ്ചാരി (Sree Narayana Guru as a traveller):**
Prof V Sanil, Dr Dileep Raj, Renjini Krishnan. (Mal/Eng)
- 11:30 AM – 12:15 PM : **Cultural Explorations: Cinema, Football, and Art**
Faizal Khan rewinds his many travels to Cannes, South Africa and Brazil to write. Sabin Iqbal (M)
- 12:15 PM – 1:15 PM : **Tasty Travels**
Take your palette on a journey with foodies Gaurav Wasan, Chef Sanza Sandile and Karen Anand with Priya Ganapathy and Anurag Mallick.
- 2:15 PM – 3:00 PM : **The Poetic Trail**
Pramudith Rupasinghe, Madhu Raghavendra, and Tenzin Tsundue read out verses inspired by travel.
- 3:30 PM – 3:45 PM : **Soul-o Travel**
Ciara Mandulee Mendis, Sumaa Tekur and Nirmala Govindarajan on finding your soul through travel
- 3:45 PM – 4:30 PM : **Travel, Sport and Stories in Between**
Andrew Fidel Fernando and Binoo K John in conversation with Sabin Iqbal on travelling to document cricket and all things sporty along the way
- 4:30 PM – 5:15 PM : **An Administrator's Tale**
Conversation with Dr V Venu IAS, former Chief Secretary, and one who played a pivotal role in branding and marketing Kerala Tourism. (Moderated by Binoo K John).

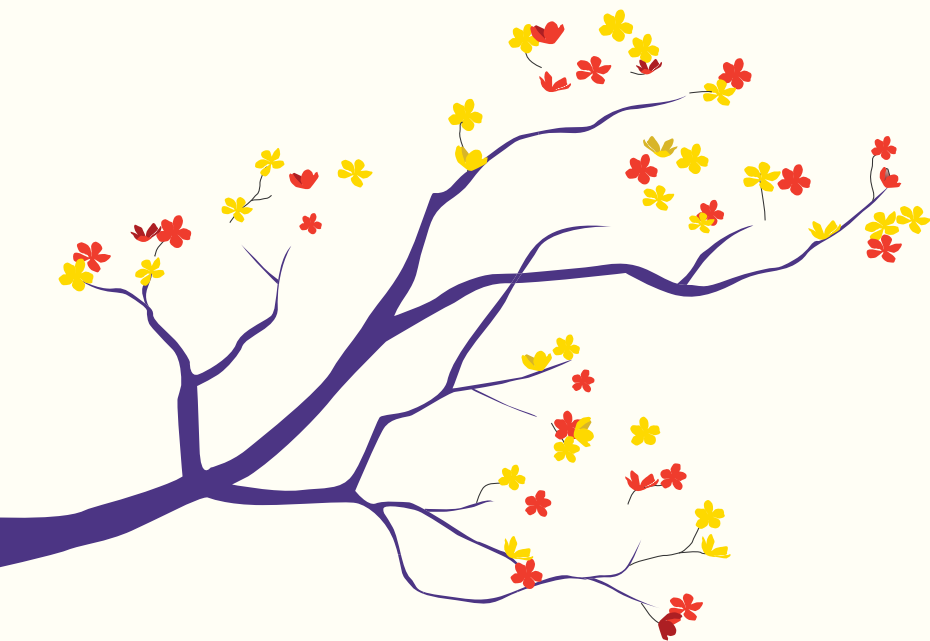


5:15 PM – 6:00 PM : **Art of Pitching the Travel Idea**
Shehan Karunatilaka, Pallavi Aiyar and Nirmala Govindarajan discuss the art of pitching and writing for diverse audiences.

Bryson Room- 30 mins sessions + 10 min Q&A + 5min buffer time

12:15 PM – 1:00 PM : **Gypsies at Heart: Scenes from a Wandering Life**
A tet-a-tet between Anurag Mallick and Priya Ganapathy, on getting ready for the journey and how. Acting out a typical scene in their living room, prepping for travel. Quirky photos from their travels





UNDER THE PALATREE

10:00 AM – 10:45 AM : **Grit, Gravel and Gear**

Join Dhruv Bogra in his cycling expedition from the Andes to the Himalaya. Listen to Ashim Shastang fare the journey with her husband.

10:45 AM – 11:15 AM : **Literary Trails in Poland**

Sabin Iqbal talks about his recent trips to Poland to write about the country's literary wealth. Madhu Raghavendra (M)

11:15 AM – 12:00 PM : **The Independent Dreams of a Young Traveller**

Afeedha Sherin and Sruthi Bhattathiri discuss travel dreams and making them come true.

2:00 PM – 2:45 PM : **കാട്, എഴുത്തും കാഴ്ച**

Renowned Nature photographer Balan Madhavan and writer Manu Remakant in conversation with Anand Haridas

- 2:45 PM – 3:30 PM : **Tourism at Crossroads**
Depinder Chaudhry's quest for sustainability in the Himalaya and beyond.
- 3:30 PM – 4:15 PM : **In search of birds, and art**
Ornithologist C Rahim and filmmaker and theatre director Pramod Payyanoor in talks with Shameel Nahas on their journeys searching for birds and art. (Mal)
- 4:30 PM – 5:15 PM : **Women on the Go**
Remya Anand and Indu Krishna talk about their experiences as women travellers. Sruthi Bhattathiri (M)
- 5:15 PM – 6:00 PM : **Putting a Song to Tune**
Travel Melody A demonstration by Prakash Sontakke.





WORKSHOPS

18TH OCTOBER

11:00 AM – 12:00 PM : **Frame and Tell: What it Takes to Vlog**
Workshop by Shameer Machingal

19TH OCTOBER

11:15 AM – 12:15 PM : **Writer's Yatra: How to Use Your Sensory Perceptions to Write**

Workshop by Nirmala Govindarajan

3:30 PM – 4:30 PM : **What is a Photograph?**

Workshop by Asha Thadani



Varkala Trails: Explore Nature & Culture

Experience the charm of Varkala through two unique guided trails that blend nature, culture and mindfulness.

Day 1: The Cliffhanger Trail

Start your morning with a 2.5-hour walk along Varkala's stunning cliffs. From the black sands of Black Beach to the serene shores of Aaliyirakkam, this trail showcases striking geological formations, mineral-rich sands, and sweeping sea views. Gentle climbs and descents make it accessible, while a short mindfulness session by the waves offers the perfect pause for reflection.

Difficulty: Easy to moderate.

Day 2: The Village Trail

Step into the slower rhythm of Kayalpuram village with this 2.5-hour journey. Visit the historic St. Thomas Church, enjoy a tranquil country canoe ride through the backwaters, and walk through lush paddy fields past temples and mosques.

Difficulty: Easy.

Both trails balance light activity with cultural and natural immersion, creating memorable experiences for all ages. Whether you're tracing the cliffs at sunrise or gliding through backwaters, Varkala Trails encourage you to connect with the land, its people, and its timeless beauty.





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SHEHAN KARUNATILAKA

Shehan Karunatilaka has published two novels, a short story collection, and five children's books, including *The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida*, winner of the 2022 Booker Prize, and *Chinaman: The Legend of Pradeep Mathew*, winner of the 2012 Commonwealth Book Prize. His work has been translated into 36 languages. He has written features on sport, music, and travel for *The Guardian*, *Rolling Stone*, *Wisden*, *GQ*, *The Spectator*, *Conde Nast*, and *National Geographic*. He co-wrote the screenplay for *800*, the biopic of cricketer Muttiah Muralitharan, released in 2023. He is currently working on a third novel, two children's books, and a screenplay.





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PALLAVI AIYAR

Pallavi Aiyar is an award-winning foreign correspondent and author. She writes a weekly Substack newsletter on global travel and culture: *The Global Jigsaw*. She is also an Adjunct Professor in the Media and Communications department at IE University in Madrid, Spain, where she teaches an elective titled *Global Media, Local Lenses*, in addition to running workshops on cross-cultural communication and creative writing. Pallavi has spent over two decades reporting from across China, Indonesia, Japan, and Europe, contributing to publications that include *The New York Times*, *Granta*, *The Monocle*, *The Los Angeles Review of Books*, *Noema Magazine*, *The Sunday Telegraph*, *The South China Morning Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Caravan*, *The Hindu*, *The Indian Express*, *The Business Standard*, *Nikkei Asian Review*, *The Indian Quarterly*, *Mint*, *The Wire*, *Verve*, *Politica Exterior*, and *El Pais*.





ANDREW FIDEL FERNANDO

Andrew Fidel Fernando is a writer based in Colombo. His first book, *Upon a Sleepless Isle*, is the only non-fiction book to win Sri Lanka's highest English-language literary prize — the Gratiaen Award. He also writes on politics and history, and is a senior writer at one of the world's leading cricket publications — ESPN Cricinfo. In his free time, Fidel is a good cook, a half-decent freediver and scuba diver, and an atrocious, yet determined surfer.





PRAMUDITH D RUPASINGHE

Pramudith D Rupasinghe is a Sri Lankan writer and humanitarian, internationally recognised as The Writer Without Borders by The Mirror because his stories are often set in, and inspired by, locations outside his homeland.

His distinctive literary voice is shaped by a career spanning over 70 territories across Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas as an international civil servant and humanitarian. His debut novel, set in West Africa, propelled him onto the global literary stage.

In 2020, his second novel, *Bayan*, set in pre-conflict Ukraine, earned him the Golden Aster Prize for Global Literature and was longlisted for the 2023 Paris Book Festival. He continues his tradition of immersive, location-based storytelling with a new work set in Bangladesh and Myanmar. His poetry collection, *Anthropic Waves*, was written over 25 years in 60 countries. Rupasinghe is also a clinical psychologist and the founder/CEO of The Asian Group of Literature.





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CIARA MANDULEE MENDIS

Ciara Mandulee Mendis is an award-winning Sri Lankan writer, celebrated for her nuanced portrayals of women and cities.

Her debut short story collection, 'The Lanka Box', secured the State Literary Award 2023 and the Godage National Award for Best Collection of Short Stories. Both this collection and an earlier manuscript, 'The Red Brick Wall', were shortlisted for the Gratiaen Prize in 2020 and 2021, respectively. Further demonstrating her reach, she was shortlisted for the 2025 Armory Square Prize for South Asian Literature in Translation. Her diverse work has appeared in numerous esteemed international journals, including Queen's Quarterly (Canada) and Himal Southasian (Nepal).

Ciara has been a speaker at events like the Cairo International Book Fair and the Kathmandu Literary Festival. Her recent travelogue, "Gallivanting: A writer's journey across six countries chasing sunsets, stories, and suspicious amounts of tea"—featuring a chapter on India—offers a unique perspective. She holds an M.A. in English Studies and works as a Civil Servant when not crafting tales.





TENZIN TSUNDUE

Tenzin Tsundue is a Tibetan writer and activist, born and raised in India. He studied literature and philosophy at Madras University and the University of Bombay. The award-winning writer has five books to his credit, and his writing has been translated into over seventeen languages. His poetry book, *Kora*, is in its fifteenth edition. Tsundue combines activism and academia, and tours colleges and civil societies, giving talks on writing, exile, resistance, culture, and identity. His writing has inspired movies, poetry, plays, and books. Some of them have been anthologised and are being taught as part of the curriculum in universities in India and abroad. He is one of the most prominent voices and activists for the independence of Tibet. If his speaking tours took him all over India and 25 other countries, his protest actions landed him in jail 16 times, including once in Lhasa, Tibet. He sports a red bandana as a sign of his lifelong pledge to work for the freedom of his country. He lives solely off his writing by selling his self-published books. Tsundue lives in Dharamshala, India.





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SUDEEP CHAKRAVARTI

Sudeep Chakravarti is one of India's foremost authors and chroniclers, known for his landmark works of narrative non-fiction that explore history, culture, conflict, and the intersection of politics and development across the region.

His best-selling books include *The Bengalis: A Portrait of a Community*; *Plassey: The Battle that Changed the Course of Indian History*; *Red Sun: Travels in Naxalite Country*; and *Eastern Gate: War and Peace in Nagaland, Manipur and India's Far East*. His most recent work is *Fallen City: A Double Murder, Political Insanity, and Delhi's Descent from Grace*, a socio-political study of the infamous Billa and Ranga killings.

An extensively published columnist on South Asian affairs and security issues, Sudeep's career began at *The Asian Wall Street Journal*, and he subsequently held leadership positions at *Sunday Magazine*, *India Today Magazine*, the *India Today Group*, and *HT Media*.





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PIYA BAHADUR

Piya Bahadur is the Founder and CEO of MeraBills, an Android application that helps micro-entrepreneurs succeed by providing them the technology needed to manage their businesses better. She leads strategy and marketing at MeraBills and works closely with micro-credit organizations and NGOs in the digital inclusion/financial literacy space. Previously, Piya was the Regional Director of the United States-India Education Foundation (USIEF), where she established USIEF's Hyderabad offices and oversaw operations across Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Odisha. She also worked at the Wadhvani Centre for Entrepreneurship Development at the Indian School of Business (Hyderabad), which gives her a multi-faceted understanding of the micro-business landscape and a keen awareness of the kinds of support needed by micro-entrepreneurs.





BENYAMIN

Benyamin (born Benny Daniel in 1971) is an Indian novelist and short story writer who writes in Malayalam, with his works translated into more than ten languages, including English and Arabic. He has authored thirty books covering a wide range of themes in various genres, including short stories, novels, travelogues, and memoirs, several of which are bestsellers. He has won many prestigious awards, including the Sahitya Akademi Award, JCB Prize 2018, and Crossword Book Award. He has travelled to more than forty countries





PRIYA GANAPATHY

With a media career spanning three decades, Priya Ganapathy has dabbled in print, TV, Internet, radio, and theatre. A features writer with the Indian Express and TOI, a columnist with DNA, Priya has freelanced for Inside Outside, Good Housekeeping, and Magna, among other publications. She was Consulting Editor for Stark World encyclopedia-cum-guide, Big Book Bengaluru and Karnataka. As RJ on Radio City Bangalore, India's first private FM station, Priya was the voice and brain behind quirky radio icons Lingo Leela (International Emvie Award winner) and Sister Stella. She has acted in Kannada TV serials, plays, and the National Award-winning English film Stumble. She scripted the docu-film Rockumentary on Banjara Hills, winner of two international Golden Aster awards. Besides hosting cultural and corporate events like Bangalore Habba, Emerging Kerala, Ad Club Awards and Karnataka Tourism Investor Meet, Priya is a voiceover artist for documentaries, TV shows and films. Adjudged one of Bangalore's Top 32 Woman Achievers, Priya is a gypsy at heart and enjoys travelling to new places, discovering people and telling their stories.



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ANURAG MALLICK

From advertising copy, web content, rock lyrics, jingles, radio, TV and film scripts to travel articles, Anurag Mallick has dabbled in various forms of writing. His foray into tourism began early with developing The Drifter on Oyeindia.com, a travel channel dedicated to offbeat budget travel in India. A widely published travel writer, he has contributed to several Outlook Traveller guides like Weekend Breaks from Bangalore, Kerala Guide, 100 Holidays in the Hills and Trekking Guide to India. As part of rock band Document: Done, Anurag was Spoken Word & Lyricist and hosted a Sunday request show Paaji Please on Radio City Delhi. He plays a key role in the development strategy and communication of Wild World India, a Delhi-based wildlife and travel company ranked among the Best Travel Outfitters on Earth 2009 by National Geographic Adventure. Anurag was an assistant writer and did a cameo in Priyadarshan's film Aakrosh and has written several screenplays.





KAREN ANAND

Widely regarded as one of India's first food gurus, Karen Anand has been influencing the way people eat and perceive good food in India for over thirty years.

3 successful TV shows on food and travel, Karen is also a prolific writer and has published numerous books including the bestselling *Good Food Good Living* and *Simple Cooking for Smart Men*, and co-authored *The Penguin Food Lovers Guide to India and Nepal*. Her twelve-book series entitled *Simple Cooking* was nominated for the *Gourmand World Cookbook Awards* in Paris. Karen continues to write extensively about food, with a column appearing in the *Sunday Telegraph* and articles for *Conde Nast Traveller*.

She is the recipient of the *Trophée de l'Esprit Alimentaire* (Food & Spirit Award) for Culture from the French Government and the winner of the French Ambassador's Travel Writer Award.

Karen also runs a successful gourmet food business and consults for luxury hotels and restaurants internationally. Between all this, she ensures there is always time to cook.





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KRITIKA GOEL

Kritika Goel is a travel content creator and storyteller who shares her adventures with a global community through YouTube and Instagram. Known for her authentic and relatable style, she highlights not just iconic landmarks but also the hidden gems that make travel special. Kritika has collaborated with leading tourism boards and global brands, and her journeys have taken her across Europe, South America, Australia, and beyond. Through her work, she hopes to inspire others to step out of their comfort zones and embrace the joy of discovering new cultures and experiences.





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ANAND HARIDAS

Anand Haridas is a versatile writer, media person, and translator who transitioned into creative work after nearly 15 years as a reporter with The Hindu.

He is a prolific translator, known for bringing significant Malayalam works to English, including 'Kumaru' (based on Kumaranasan) and 'Shavamtheenikal' (a reportage on the Emergency period). His translation of the play 'Kaali Natakam' was published in the Kendra Sahitya Akademi's Indian Literature and is now part of the post-graduate curriculum at multiple universities, underscoring his literary significance. Anand also co-wrote the film 'Viral Sebi'.

His poems appear regularly in publications, and he currently holds the position of Creative Head of Vallath Education, an acclaimed English language and literature organisation. Anand's background in journalism, translation, film, and poetry makes him an excellent and compelling speaker for literary festivals.





MADHU RAGHAVENDRA

Madhu Raghavendra is a poet, performance artist and curator, who has authored five books of poetry: *Make Me Some Love to Eat*, *Stick No Bills*, *Being Non-essential*, *Going Home* and *Seeking the Infinite*, published by Red River. He was a poet-in-residence at the International Writing Program Fellowship, University of Iowa, and the Charles Wallace Writing Fellowship, University of Stirling, Scotland. He collaborates with global artists to create cross-disciplinary poetry experiences, and his poems have been set to music in the United States, Finland and the Netherlands. He conducts poetry workshops for young adults, and uses poetry as a tool in development conversations. He has participated in PEN Emergency World Voices Congress of Writers at the United Nations Headquarters, New York. He curates the multidisciplinary Ajanta Ellora Arts Residency in Maharashtra.





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BINOO K. JOHN

Binoo K. John is a senior journalist who has worked with India Today, Indian Express, Mail Today and DNA, Mumbai. His published works include Entry from Backside Only: Hazaar Fundas of English, Under a Cloud: Life in Cherrapunji, the Wettest Place on Earth and a novel, The Last Song of Savio de Souza. He is also the founder-director of the Kovalam Literary Festival, Thiruvananthapuram. He lives in Delhi with his wife, Rebecca, and son, Zubin.





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SUMAA TEKUR

Sumaa Tekur is a Bengaluru-based writer and editor, and the author of three books published by Hay House. Her debut, *The Inner Light: A Beginner's Guide to Spirituality & Finding Peace*, is a primer for beginners on the spiritual path. Her second book, *Table for One: A Solo Living Manual for the Curious Indian Woman*, blends manifesto and memoir to explore the culture and politics of solo living. Her third, *The Monks Who Laughed When the Bumblebee Stung Me* (2024) recounts her solo travels to 18 countries. Her forthcoming book draws lessons from Indian mythology to understand love, loss, and separation in modern relationships. Suma's career has spanned leading publications, including *The Times of India*, *Deccan Herald*, *Femina*, and *DNA*. She holds a Master's in International Journalism from City St George's, University of London. She lives in Bengaluru, where she continues her creative and spiritual explorations.





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AFEEDHA SHERIN

Afeedha Sherin is a 22-year-old solo traveller from Malappuram, Kerala. What began as a childhood dream to see the Himalayas gradually shaped her into a traveller with a distinct approach, one rooted in independence, resilience, and openness to the unknown. At 22, she fulfilled that dream with a month-long solo journey through Spiti Valley, funding the trip entirely with savings she had set aside over nearly a decade. Her travels extend beyond India. In the same year, she undertook her first international trip to Mauritius, where she lived for a month with a local family. Immersing herself in their food, language, and daily routines, she prioritised cultural exchange and community living over conventional tourism. Among the highlights of this trip was the rare experience of swimming alongside 12 whales, an encounter that reflects her preference for travel defined by discovery and immersion rather than rigid plans.





GAURAV WASAN

Gaurav Wasan is the creator of Swad Official, a popular channel that showcases the best street food from India and around the world. Passionate about food since the age of nine, he turned this lifelong interest into a profession at 28, documenting street food vendors, culinary stories, and recipes for a wide audience. Today, with over seven million followers across social media, Gaurav has become one of the country's most recognised food voices. His work has earned him numerous awards in the food genre, including the title of India's most popular food vlogger.





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DEV JOSHI

Dev Joshi is a travel blogger and YouTuber who left his corporate career to pursue a life of full-time travel in 2015. By January 2016, he launched his travel blog as both a creative outlet and a means to sustain his nomadic lifestyle. In 2020, he began running a hotel in Manali and is now a part-time hotelier and part-time travel content creator.





ARIHANT BAID

Born and raised in Hyderabad, Arihant Baid is a Chartered Accountant by profession and a travel vlogger by passion. With a community of over 1.1 million followers on Instagram and 400,000 subscribers on YouTube, he shares stories of culture, history, and hidden gems from around the world. Arihant combines his analytical background with a love for exploration, inspiring audiences to plan meaningful and memorable journeys.





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ASHA THADANI

Asha Thadani is a photographic artist. Her work focuses on people who live below the shiny surface that many of us skate along. Asha's photographs are rooted in sociocultural/political themes that delve into the inner lives of remote indigenous tribes and marginalised communities who rarely find representation in mainstream media. For almost three decades, she has documented people at the lowest end of power hierarchies and the human-animal equation with the intent to start conversations about social disparities and the human condition. Nominated for the Henri Cartier-Bresson Award 2015, her work has been exhibited at Christie's Auction House, Paris and the Albert Kahn Museum, Paris. She has exhibited solo at the Piramal Gallery, Navjivan Trust, Ahmedabad, Travancore Palace, Delhi, NCPA, Mumbai, and in India Habitat Centre, New Delhi.





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DR. PRAKASH SONTAKKE

Dr. Prakash Sontakke is an internationally recognised, Grammy-winning slide guitar virtuoso, composer, and educator, making him an excellent choice for workshops and collaborations. With experience in diverse genres like classical, fusion, jazz, and Sufi music, his ability to bridge cultures and classical roots with innovation is evident in his extensive touring and collaborations with artists such as Iain Ballamy and Thomas Stronen. He is also known for his work where he collaborated on the Grammy Award-winning album "Winds of Samsara" and "Divine Tides," contributing as a co-composer, vocalist, and guitarist. Independent World Music Awards and Nashville Award: Sontakke holds the distinction of being the only Indian musician to win both the Independent World Music Awards (USA) and the Nashville Award for composers. His composition was chosen over maestro Ilaiyaraaja's entry for the latter award.



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ASHIM SHATSANG BOGRA

Ashim Shatsang Bogra, 32 years old, is a multi-faceted explorer of life itself. From humble beginnings in a remote Tangkhul Naga village in Manipur, she has evolved into an adventurous expeditionary cyclist, a certified yoga instructor, and a budding seamstress, with her own handcrafted home soft furnishings collection called 'SHIM'. In 2023–24, she cycled, unsupported, with her husband, Dhruv Bogra, across more than 3,000 kilometres of mountainous Himalayan roads from Kibithu/Kaho in Arunachal Pradesh to Kunzum La in Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, becoming the first Indian woman to do so. During the course of this nine-month-long expedition, she gained an elevation of more than 225,000 ft. and cycled to many high passes, carrying 30 kg of gear, playing a primary role in camp set-ups, and foraging the forests for plants to cook.





DHRUV BOGRA

Dhruv Bogra, 57 years old, is an expeditionary cyclist, author, amateur nature and adventure photographer, motivational speaker, and ICF-certified transformation coach. He has cycled over 50,000 kilometres in the last decade, of which more than 20,000 kilometres are on bicycle tours. Dhruv is also currently the Country Director of Forever New and a business leader with 35 years of experience in the retail sector in India. His maiden book, 'Grit, Gravel and Gear', chronicles the 400-day solo bicycling journey from the Arctic to the Andes in 2016–17. It was among the top 100 titles in Crossword Bookstores in 2019 and received strong reviews from leading dailies and publications. His second book, 'Away', shares thrilling accounts of his week-long bicycle expeditions in the Indian Himalayas. In 2023–24, Dhruv and his wife Ashim toured the length of the Indian Himalayas on bicycles, unsupported — from Kaho in Arunachal Pradesh to Kunzum La in Spiti, a journey of 3,000 kilometres over nine months. He is now working on his third book based on that odyssey.





ULLEKH N. P.

Ullekh N. P. is a writer, journalist, and political commentator based in New Delhi. He is the executive editor of a newsweekly, Open, and author of three nonfiction books: War Room: The People, Tactics and Technology Behind Narendra Modi's 2014 Win, The Untold Vajpayee: Politician and Paradox and Kannur: Inside India's Bloodiest Revenge Politics. His book on Cuba, Mad About Cuba: A Malayali Revisits the Revolution, part travelogue and part political commentary, was released in November 2024.





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DEPINDER CHAUDHRY

Depi's lifelong passion for the outdoors, sparked during his school days at the Lawrence School, Sanawar, persisted even through his engineering degree, MBA, and an 11-year corporate career. He then transitioned to pursuing this love full-time, becoming an author of the influential guidebook, *Trekking Guide to the Western Himalayas*.

He expanded his work by creating a massive 17x17 foot trekking map and venturing into 3D printing to bring the Himalayas to life. An avid adventurer, Depi attempted a trans-Himalayan trek from Kashmir toward the Nepal border, stopping on day 68 due to extreme weather.

Inspired by the need for conservation and disturbed by urban pollution, he established a sustainable sanctuary on the remote banks of the Ganga in Uttarakhand, challenging construction norms. Depi continues his adventures by organising a biennial Kashmir to Kathmandu cycling tour. In his spare time, he also transforms scrap materials into unique art pieces. His blend of adventure, literary work, and sustainable living makes his story highly appealing to travellers, readers, and enthusiasts.





SRUTHI BHATTATHIRI

Sruthi Bhattathiri is a recent graduate with a deep passion for literature and cultural studies. She holds a Bachelor's degree in Humanities from Azim Premji University and a Master's in English Literature from Manipal University. Sruthi enjoys experimenting with different forms of writing: she has tried out brief advertising stints in agencies like Ogilvy, written book reviews for online news portals, alongside her academic and research-oriented writing. She is deeply interested in Malayalam folk and horror narratives, and as part of her research has interviewed noted cinema professionals such as director Fazil. Sruthi hopes to pursue a PhD and continue honing her critical voice to contribute meaningfully to literary and cultural conversations. She is also a trained Western vocalist who has performed at venues such as the Alliance Française.





NIRMALA GOVINDARAJAN

Nirmala Govindarajan is a versatile author, journalist, and social sector documentarian, known for pioneering the Writer's Yatra and Rhythm Yoga in offbeat locations.

Her literary work focuses on powerful social issues. Her novel *Taboo* (Picador, Pan Macmillan), inspired by trafficked girls, received critical acclaim with nominations for the Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize and other awards. Her novel *Hunger's Daughters* explores young breadwinners in the hinterlands, with both books being translated into Tamil and Sinhala. Her earliest novel, *The Community Catalyst*, is part of the research collections at the New York Public Library.

Currently, she is working on a new novel, *Bloody Marie*, inspired by witch-hunting. A former literary editor and curator, she recently served as Curatorial Lead for literature festivals in the USA.





SABIN IQBAL

Sabin Iqbal is a journalist, novelist and literary curator. He is the Global Director of Asian Literary Festivals and Prizes. He curated six editions of the Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters. His novels are *The Cliffhangers* (Aleph in India & *Chopaki z Klifu* in Polish by Wydawnictwo Poznanskie), *Shamal Days* (HarperCollins), *Tales from Qabristan* (Penguin Random House, and *A Calamitous Afternoon* (Westland Books). Former Editorial Director of Kochi-Muziris Biennale, Sabin has worked with *Business India*, *Outlook*, *Tehelka*, *Vibrant Keralam*, *Yentha.com*, *Sports Today*, *The Gulf Today*, and *Emirates News*. He lives in Dubai.





FAIZAL KHAN

Faizal Khan is a culture and travel writer based in Delhi, born in Changanacherry, Kerala. The son of famous footballer Mohammed Usman, he is a long-time contributor to The Economic Times Travel, with extensive writing on Kerala.

His global reporting includes travel articles from South Africa's Garden Route, the Arctic Circle in Finland, and major cities like Rio de Janeiro, Venice, and Brussels. He has covered major international events, including the 2010 and 2014 FIFA World Cups and international film festivals in Cannes, Toronto, and Tokyo.

He also participated in the 8,000 km IASEAN-India car rally. Khan contributes regularly to The Financial Express and The Hindustan Times.





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C RAHIM

C Rahim is a noted Malayalam writer, media person, and environmentalist based in Thiruvananthapuram. In a career spanning over three decades, Rahim has authored nearly 25 books, which include more than half a dozen books on ornithology and the environment. His *Dakshina Indiyale Pakshikal* (Birds of South India) is a hugely acclaimed work and was included in the state government's Reading Week contest. A winner of the state government awards for the best writer on environmental topics and documentaries featuring environmental issues, he has been widely recognised for his exemplary works on environmental conservation activities like the founding of the Snake Bird Foundation and conducting bird surveys at various places in the state.





V. MUZAFER AHAMED

V. Muzafer Ahamed is an acclaimed Indian travel writer, best known for his deep explorations of the Arab desert and his powerful storytelling that blends adventure, culture, and reflection. With a literary career spanning decades, he has authored over 20 books, with half of them dedicated to travel writing.

His seminal travelogue, 'Marubhoomiyude Athmakatha' (The Autobiography of the Desert), won the Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award in 2010. Another significant work, 'Maru Marangal' (The Story of the Desert), also received a major award. These two desert travelogues were later translated into English as 'Camels in the Sky: Travels in Arabia' (Oxford University Press India), making his work accessible to a global audience.

Muzafer Ahamed's literary impact crosses borders: 'Camels in the Sky' was used as a textbook at Troy University, USA, appealing to academic and global readers. Beyond the desert, his writing delves into diverse subjects, including Indian spiritual traditions and cultural heritage, making him a compelling speaker at literary festivals and a must-read for serious travel enthusiasts.



SANIL V

Sanil V is Professor of philosophy at the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, New Delhi, India. He obtained his bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering and worked as a scientist in Defense Research and Development Organisation. In 1995, he obtained his PhD in Philosophy from Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur. His recent publications include *Kolayude Choreography* (Choreography of Murder), *Public Sphere from Outside the West* (end. Bloomsbury, London) He teaches courses on Art and Technology, Philosophy of Mind and Cognition, Philosophical Perspectives on Fascism, and Philosophy and Film.

He was the Rama Watumull Distinguished Visiting Scholar in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Charles Wallace Fellow at the Department of Philosophy, University of Liverpool, U.K and Directeur d'études Associées, at Maison des sciences de l'homme Paris, Research Excellence Fellow, CEU Budapest, Scholar in Residence, Kerala Council for Historical Research. He also writes and publishes in Malayalam.





REMYA S ANAND

Remya S. Anand is an ardent traveller, travel writer, and poet from Cochin, Kerala. Her evocative travelogues blend adventure with deep cultural immersion, weaving tales that capture the essence of diverse landscapes and human connections.

Driven by an insatiable curiosity, Remya has extensively explored the length and breadth of India and visited over 27 countries. Her narratives vividly transport readers through bustling markets and serene landscapes, fostering an appreciation for shared human experiences. She has documented her journeys across popular media, including print publications like Manorama Traveller and Mathrubhumi Yathra, as well as television channels like TV and All India Radio.

Based in Cochin, Remya holds a role in the Revenue Department at the High Court. Beyond her writing and travel adventures, she finds solace in the art of garden styling. Her combination of government service, prolific writing, and extensive travel makes her an intriguing voice for literary festivals, travel readers, and global enthusiasts.





DILEEP R

Dileep R teaches philosophy at Government Brennen College, Kerala. He has worked as a commissioning editor at DC Books and Penguin Books India. He has published four books in Malayalam : Navacharithravadam (New Historicism), Thandedangal (On Tribal Social Movements in Kerala), Ranimar Padminimar: Malayalisthreekalude Kaivitta Sancharangal (Ranimar Padminimar: Travels of Malayali Women) and E Learning: Enth, Enthinu? He is the editor of Praxis - Insight Publica book range, which includes ten original titles in Malayalam. Praxis series aims at the democratisation of knowledge production by going beyond the limits set by Eurocentric paradigms.

His published work includes "Beyond Binaries: Sreenarayana and The Political" in India and Its Intellectual Traditions: Of Love, Advaita, Power and Other Things, edited by Vinay Lal (Oxford University Press, 2023).





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DR. PRAMOD PAYYANUR

Dr Pramod Payyanur is a leading figure in contemporary Malayalam theatre, cinema, and stage productions. A graduate in Malayalam Literature, he went on to earn his BA in Drama Direction with first rank from the School of Drama, an MA in Professional Arts from Pondicherry University, and a PhD in Tagore in Global Theatre. Known for his experimental approach, he first gained attention by staging M.T. Vasudevan Nair's *Iruttinte Aathmavu* in a sandwich stage format during his student days. Pramod has directed adaptations of works by writers including Basheer, O.V. Vijayan, Padmarajan, Chekhov, Camus, and Shakespeare earned acclaim for his ability to bring literature vividly to the stage. His film debut, *Balyakaalasakhi*, starring Mammooty, was celebrated in festivals and won several awards. His multimedia productions—such as *Randamoozham*, *Nanmayude Apaara Theeram*, and *Pravasa Malayalam*—explore Kerala's cultural history and social imagination.

Currently serving as Member Secretary of Bharat Bhavan, the cultural exchange centre of the Government of Kerala, his contributions have won him multiple state drama awards, a Guinness World Record for Viswaguru, and recognition as a Socio-Cultural Youth Icon.





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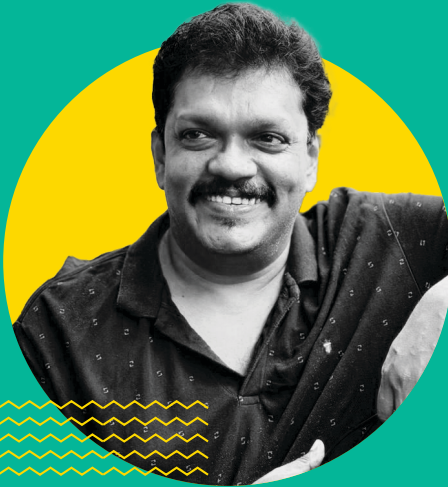
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RANJINI KRISHNAN

Ranjini Krishnan is a researcher, writer and entrepreneur based out of Kerala, India. Ranjini's research is on questions around psychology, culture and gender. Ranjini is the founder of bodytree.in, a mindful personal care brand that tries to bring care back to personal care. She is also the founder of Sradha Culture Lab, a knowledge initiative around psychology. Ranjini is a visiting faculty of Psychology at KREA University. She is the researcher, co-writer and producer of the National Award winning documentary, A Pestering Journey (2010). She is the co-scriptwriter writer of the feature film Kanyaka Talkies (2013) that won the award for best screenplay in New York Indian Film Festival (2013) She is also the recipient of Malayalam short story awards.





MANU REMAKANT

Manu Remakant, Professor and Head of the PG Department of English at SN College, Chempazhanchy, is also a freelance writer who contributes stories regularly to various national and international magazines.

His hugely popular vlog, 'A Cup of Kavitha' has been introducing world poetry to Malayalee audience for the last eight years.

Manu Remakant has authored four books on the national forests of Kerala for the Department of Tourism, Government of Kerala. The Sanctuary for the Soul series includes books on Eravikulam National Park, Periyar Tiger Sanctuary, Parambikkulam National Park, and Silent Valley National Park.

Recently Mathrubhumi Books published his first Malayalam book - Branded Batura - which became a best seller.





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BALAN MADHAVAN

Balan Madhavan is a highly sought-after travel and architectural photographer who skillfully balances commercial assignments—including award-winning campaigns for Kerala Tourism—with his personal passion, nature photography.

Balan's images are responsible for attracting millions of tourists to Kerala. Globally recognised for his dedication to conservation, he is one of only five Senior Fellows from Asia in the International League of Conservation Photographers (ILCP), an elite group that includes numerous National Geographic contributors. He also served on ILCP's Board of Directors and is a UN award winner in nature photography. His work has also included films and photographs for the UNDP's IHRMLP.

A prolific visual author, Balan has produced images for 12 Coffee-Table Books. He is also a dedicated teacher, leading hundreds of photography workshops and photo tours for both amateurs and professionals, making him a valuable resource for aspiring vloggers and travel enthusiasts.





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SHAMEEL NAHAS

Born and raised in Varkala, Shameel Nahas knows these cliffs, beaches, and villages like the back of his hand. A true travel enthusiast, he has lived in four countries, speaks five languages, and carries a deep curiosity for people and cultures wherever he goes.

Shameel loves meeting new people and creating connections through shared experiences. For him, guiding a trail is not just about the path—it's about the stories, the laughter, and the small discoveries along the way. His roots in Varkala give him an insider's perspective, while his global experiences bring a fresh, open-minded outlook to every journey.

When not exploring the outdoors, Shameel works as a market research consultant, a role that reflects his knack for observation and understanding different perspectives. Warm, approachable, and passionate about both his hometown and the wider world, Shameel ensures that every trail is memorable—not just for the places you see, but for the moments you share.





SHAMEER MACHINGAL

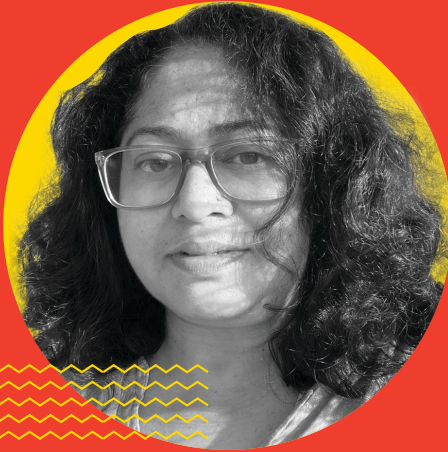
Shameer is a digital visual storyteller and trainer. Shameer has been working in the media sector for two decades. Shameer is active in mobile journalism, conducting research and training. He has been experimenting with AI Visual Grammar for digital video production for 8 years. Shameer visualises a dynamic and active world powered by digital media storytelling. He was honoured with the Girish Omallur Award in 2010 for excellence and innovation in visual media. Another notable recognition was the P.J. Antony National Documentary Award in 2015. He has also won the State School Arts Festival Award in 2016, the Thrissur Press Club TV Achuthawarrier Award in 2017, and the State Government TV Camera Category Special Jury Award in 2019.





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RESHMA BHARADWAJ

Assistant Professor at Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady, Reshma took her PhD in *Ways of Being: Ontological Insurrections by Little Selves in Keralam* from the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Bergen, Norway.

Editor of "Mithyakalkkappuram" (on homosexuality in Kerala) and translator of *Romantic Encounters of a Sexworker* by Nalini Jameela. Her recent publications also include a book chapter, *Death, Friendship and Migration of Queer People: Revisiting the Countryside of Keralam*.





K. R. MEERA

K. R. Meera is one of Kerala's most influential writers and journalists, known for her thought-provoking works that challenge traditional power structures and engage deeply with political and social issues. Her exceptional contributions to literature have earned her some of the most prestigious accolades, including the Kendra Sahitya Akademi Award, Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award, PUCL Human Rights National Award for Journalism, Odakkuzhal Award and Vayalar Award solidifying her status as a leading voice in contemporary Indian literature.

Meera was born in Sasthamkotta, Kollam district in Kerala. She is an alumna of D.B College, Sasthamcotta and Gandhigram Rural Institute, Dindigul, Tamil Nadu. In 1993, she joined as a journalist in Kottayam-based Malayalam daily Malayala Manorama. During her career as a journalist, K. R. Meera uncovered several noteworthy stories, earning her the Chowara Parameswaran Award and the Deepalaya National Journalism Award for Child Rights.





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SANGEETHA VALLAT

Sangeetha Vallat, a seeker of stories, is the author of Platform Ticket (Penguin Random House) a memoir of her ticketing days in Railways. She is passionate about books, travel, friends and conversations. Relinquishing a memorable career spanning fourteen years in the Indian Railways, she now lives in Dubai with her husband. Her short stories are featured in several anthologies and online journals. Platform Ticket is longlisted for the Bangalore Literature Festival's AttaGalatta Book Prize.





ARYAKRISHNAN R

Aryakrishnan R is an artist based in Kochi. They were awarded the Young Curators Award 2016–17 by the Kochi Biennale Foundation and were a resident at the Sommerakademie Paul Klee in Switzerland.

Their work has been showcased both in India and internationally, including exhibitions at Clark House, Mumbai (2017); Kochi-Muziris Biennale (2018); Nottingham Art Mela, Nottingham (2020); Queer Arts Festival, Vancouver (2022); and Grand Palais, Bern (2024); Kaalo, Nepal (2025).





SADAM HANJABAM

Sadam Hanjabam is the Founder of Ya_All: The Youth Network. He is also the curator of Asia's first all transmen football team. Ya_All was listed among 10 Global Initiatives led by queer people fighting for an inclusive cause around the globe by the United Nations Envoy on Youth. Saddam was acknowledged by Dettol among 100 Protectors recently and included among 50 Stories of Kindness by UNESCO. His story has been documented by Apple TV in a docu-series called The Me You Can't See, co-produced by Oprah Winfrey and Prince Harry, as well as the Amazon Prime series "Rainbow Rishta". He is a TEDx Speaker, UNDP Youth CoLab Fellow and Transforming Communities for Inclusion Fellow.





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DR. VENU VASUDEVAN

A doctor by training, Dr Venu Vasudevan is a distinguished IAS officer (1990 batch) with extensive experience in the ministries of art, culture, and tourism in Kerala and the Central Government. As Director and later Tourism Secretary for Kerala, Dr. Vasudevan was the visionary behind many transformative initiatives. He is the founder of the Kerala Travel Mart, the country's biggest international travel fair. During his tenure as Director General of the National Museum, Delhi, he spearheaded a major organisational overhaul, including the reopening of galleries and the refashioning of spaces.

After retiring as the Chief Secretary for the Government of Kerala, Dr Vasudevan was appointed as the chairperson of Kochi Biennale Foundation and, more recently, as the Director and Curator of the Mathrubhumi International Festival of Letters (MBIFL) 2026.

A keen trekker and an active thespian, his visitor-first approach has ensured the remarkable success of his many projects.





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INDU KRISHNA

Indu Krishna is a trailblazer who redefined travel for women in Kerala. In 2015, she launched Escape Now—an empowering online community designed to fuel women's wanderlust and encourage independent exploration. Thanks to her efforts, over 7,500 women have discovered the confidence to travel solo, participating in more than 400 adventures across India and abroad. Indu's platform equips members with practical resources and opportunities to earn through travel, making every journey a catalyst for personal and financial growth. As a state resource person for Responsible Tourism Kerala, she also drives sustainable and culturally respectful travel practices.





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KRIPA SURESH

Kripa Suresh is an emerging photojournalist and an ardent traveller, currently interning with The Hindu in Trivandrum. She is an internationally educated photographer, having completed her postgraduate studies in photojournalism at Speos, Paris, after receiving the prestigious French government's Charpak Master Scholarship. Kripa's talent has earned her significant recognition, including being a three-time winner of the Kerala University Photography Competition and securing first place at the National Level Photography Competition. She has also been highlighted as one of Sony's young photographers.

Her powerful visual work has been exhibited internationally in locations including Stockholm, New York, and Greece, making her a compelling figure for art-focused travellers and vloggers. Kripa holds an undergraduate degree in English Language and Literature and received the Cambridge Outstanding Learner's Award during her schooling, highlighting a foundation in both visual and textual storytelling.



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DR. GINU ZACHARIA OOMMEN

Dr. Ginu Zacharia Oommen is a Kerala-based public intellectual and one of India's leading experts on migration, currently serving as the Chairperson of the Kerala State Food Commission.

Dr. Oommen has an extensive international academic background, making him a compelling figure for global travelers and cultural commentators. He has held numerous distinguished positions worldwide, including a Visiting Professorship at the Fondation Maison des Sciences de l'Homme (FMSH), Paris (2016), and fellowships in France, Germany (Zentrum Moderner Orient in Berlin), and Sweden (Uppsala University). He has also served as a consultant for international organizations like the World Bank. His expertise now benefits the International Institute for Migration and Development and the Middle East Institute.





VIDHU VINCENT

Vidhu Vincent is an award-winning film director, writer, and former journalist from Kollam, Kerala.

After a career as a reporter, producer, and acclaimed documentarian, with award-winning works like 'Vrithiyude Jathi', Vidhu made history with her debut feature film, *Manhole* (2016). The film earned her the Kerala State Film Award for Best Director, making her the first woman ever to achieve this distinction. *Manhole* also won the Silver Crow Pheasant and the FIPRESCI Prize at the International Film Festival of Kerala (IFFK). She followed this success with films like *Stand Up* (2019) and *Viral Sebi* (2022).

Her talent extends to writing; in 2020, she received the prestigious Kerala Sahitya Akademi Award for her travelogue, 'Daivam Olivil Poya Naalugal' (The Days When God Went into Hiding). Vidhu's unique blend of journalism, filmmaking, and award-winning travel writing makes her an exceptional voice for literary fests, cultural enthusiasts, and travel readers.





ADARSH ONNATT

Adarsh Onnatt is a distinguished writer, literary critic, and journalist known for his insightful analysis of cultural, social, and political issues across both English and Malayalam media.

Adarsh began his career in mainstream media, working as a journalist with The Times of India. His reporting and thought-provoking commentary have since appeared in leading Malayalam publications, including Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi, and Samakalika Malayalam, as well as in Tehelka magazine. This broad media presence makes him a recognised figure in contemporary Indian discourse.

Beyond journalism, Adarsh is a respected literary critic celebrated for his meticulous engagement with cultural texts. He is also recognised as a translator, actively helping to bring diverse voices across linguistic barriers. His commitment to critical inquiry, spanning journalism, criticism, and translation, makes Adarsh Onnatt a compelling and influential speaker and a source of deep, engaging commentary for discerning readers.





ANUMOL

Anumol is a celebrated actress in Malayalam and Tamil cinema, known for bringing quiet strength and layered nuance to every role. Her deep love for place and perspective also fuels Anuyathra, her walk-and-talk travel series that captures Kerala's soul through food, culture, people, and path. With over 6 million followers across platforms, Anumol is not just a performer but a wanderer with a storyteller's gaze, forever seeking what lies beyond the obvious.





CHEF SANZA SANDILE

Chef Sanza Sandile is the founder of the famed Johannesburg Yeoville Dinner Club, a space for tasting Pan African futures while sharing a dinner table. Each night, he opens a carefully curated table in his spot on ever-buzzing Rockey Street that serves as the temporary home for the stories his guests bring to it: Safe, savoury and clever. Dubbed a gastronomic smuggler and the “El Bulli of Yeoville”, Sanza Sandile affirms the dignity of encounters by his unique twist to otherwise well-known African dishes, such as vegan Egusi or okra stews. His mixology of flavours, tastes and stories speaks to his early career as a radio DJ and selector at YFM and other radio stations of crucial importance in the sonic history

of South Africa. His home, inspiration and utopia is Yeoville, the famed Johannesburg suburb called the “most diverse neighbourhood in Africa” in a recent feature in the Economist (2019). It is here in Yeoville that he gathers ideas for dishes based on stories of migration and belonging, and taps into the wealth of knowledge of the local, abundant food market and its protagonists. All comes together at the table of the Yeoville Dinner Club, which is both an archive of routes and stories, soon to be turned into a book.





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