

Kerala

Includes >>

Thiruvananthapuram
(Trivandrum) 922
Kovalam 928
Varkala 932
Kollam (Quilon) 936
Alappuzha (Alleppey). 938
The Western Ghats 945
Munnar 948
Parambikulam Wildlife
Sanctuary 951
Kochi (Cochin) 952
Thrissur (Trichur)967
Kozhikode (Calicut)970
Lakshadween 978

Best Places to Eat

- » Dal Roti (p961)
- » Grand Pavilion (p962)
- » Avisha Manzi (p976)
- » Pachyderm Palace (p973)
- » Rose Garden (p949)

Best Places to Stay

- » Malabar House (p957)
- » Brunton Boatyard (p957)
- » Varikatt Heritage (p923)
- Tranquil (p973)
- » Neeleshwar Hermitage (p978)

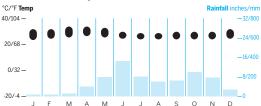
Why Go?

Kerala's thoughtful pace of life is as contagious as the Indian head-wobble – just setting foot on this swathe of soul-quenching green will slow your stride to a blissed-out amble. One of India's most beautiful and successful states, Kerala is a world away from the frenzy of elsewhere, as if India had passed through the Looking Glass and become an altogether more laid-back place.

Besides its famous backwaters, rice paddies, coconut groves, elegant houseboats and delicately spiced, taste-budtingling cuisine, Kerala also proffers azure seas, white crescents of beach, and evocative ex-colonial trading towns. Then there are the mountainous Ghats carpeted by spices and tea plantations, home to wild elephants, exotic birds and the odd tiger; and crazily vibrant traditions such as Kathakali – a blend of religious play and dance; *kalarippayat* – a gravity-defying martial art, and *theyyam* – a trance-induced ritual. The main problem a visitor might find here is choosing where to linger the longest.

When to Go

Thiruvananthapuram



Jan-Feb

Perfect weather. Ernakulathappan Utsavam festival in Kochi. **Apr** You can see Kathakali at Kottayam and Kollam festivals, and the elephant procession in Thrissur.

Aug-Sep
Tail-end of the
monsoon period:
prime time for
ayurvedic
treatments

MAIN POINTS OF ENTRY

Thiruvanthapuram (Trivandrum), Kozhikode (Calicut) and Kochi (Cochin) are Kerala's air transport hubs; these and other towns are connected to everywhere else in India by bus and train.

Fast Facts

- » Population: 33.4 million
- » Area: 38,864 sq km
- » Capital: Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum)
- » Main language: Malayalam
- » Sleeping prices: \$ below ₹800, \$\$ ₹800 to ₹3000, \$\$\$ above ₹3000

Planning Your Trip

- » High season in the backwaters and beach resorts is around November to March; between mid-December and mid-January, prices creep up further. There are great deals during the monsoon (June to September).
- » Most Kerala national parks close for one week for a tiger census during the months of January or February. Check with Kerala Tourism for exact dates.

Resources

- » Kerala Tourism (www .keralatourism.org) Kerala Tourist Board site.
- » Manorama Online (www .manoramaonline.com) Local newspaper with an English edition on-line.

Food

Delicious breakfast dishes include *puttu* (rice powder and coconut, steamed in a metal or bamboo holder) eaten with steamed bananas and or with a spicy curry, *idlis* (spongy, round, fermented rice cakes) and *sambar* (fragrant vegetable dhal), dosas with coconut chutney, *idiyappam* (rice noodles) or *paalappam* (a kind of pancake) served with a meat or fish stew. *Appam* is a soft pancake made from toddy-fermented rice batter, with a soft spongy centre and crispy edges, also eaten with a coconut-mellowed stew.

The state's spice plantations, coconut-palm groves and long coastline shape the local cuisine, with deliciously delicate dishes such as fish *molee* (in coconut milk) or the spicy Malabar chicken curry. Dishes are mostly cooked in coconut oil.

For dessert, *payasam* is made of brown molasses, coconut milk and spices, garnished with cashew nuts and raisins.

DON'T MISS

Fort Cochin is an extraordinary town, resonant with 500 years of colonial history.

Floating along **Kerala's backwaters** on a houseboat, handmade in the style of traditional rice barges, or a canoe, is one of India's most magical experiences.

The plantation-cloaked hills of **Munnar** are a sight to soothe the soul, high in the lush mountains of Kerala's Western Ghats

Top State Festivals

- » Ernakulathappan Utsavam (Jan/Feb, Shiva Temple, Ernakulam, Kochi, p956) Eight days of festivities culminating in a parade of 15 splendidly decorated elephants, music and fireworks.
- » Thirunakkara Utsavam (Mar, Thirunakkara Shiva Temple, Kottayam, p943) All-night Kathakali dancing on the third and fourth nights of this 10-day festival; processions of elephants mark the finale.
- » Pooram Festival (Apr, Asraman Shri Krishna Swami Temple, Kollam, p937) A 10-day festival with full-night Kathakali performances and a procession of 40 ornamented elephants.
- » Thrissur Pooram (Apr/May, Vadakkumnathan Kshetram Temple, Thrissur, p967) The elephant procession to end all elephant processions.
- » Nehru Trophy Snake Boat Race (2nd Sat in Aug, Alappuzha, p938) Most popular of Kerala's boat races.
- » Onam (Aug/Sep, statewide) Kerala's biggest cultural celebration, when the entire state celebrates the golden age of mythical King Mahabali for 10 days.



Kerala Highlights

1 Launch off in a houseboat or canoe from Alleppey, Kottayam or Kollam, slow down, and take a blissedout glide on Kerala's fabled backwaters (p940)

2 Spot wild elephants at **Wayanad** (p972) amid spectacular mountain scenery and epic spice fields 3 Watch days slip slide away as you amble around the breathtaking beach resort of Varkala (p932) and have some laid-back fun in Kovalam (p928)

4 Hunker down in a beautifully remote resort and trek through the tea plantations around **Munnar** (p948)

5 Explore the golden-sand, unspoilt beaches around **Kannur** (p975) and **Bekal** (p977)

6 Feel the history in lovely, calm **Fort Cochin** (p957) in Kochi

History

Traders have been drawn to the scent of Kerala's spices for more than 3000 years. The coast was known to the Phoenicians, the Romans, the Arabs and the Chinese, and was a transit point for spices from the Moluccas (eastern Indonesia).

The kingdom of Cheras ruled much of Kerala until the early Middle Ages, competing with kingdoms and small fiefdoms for territory and trade. Vasco da Gama's arrival in 1498 opened the floodgates to European colonialism as Portuguese, Dutch and English interests fought Arab traders, and then each other, for control of the lucrative spice trade.

The present-day state of Kerala was created in 1956 from the former states of Travancore, Kochi and Malabar. A tradition of valuing the arts and education resulted in a post-Independence state that is one of the most progressive in India.

In 1957 Kerala had the first freely elected communist government in the world, which has gone on to hold power regularly since. The participatory political system has resulted in a more equitable distribution of land and income, and impressive health and education statistics (see boxed text, p932). Many Malayalis (speakers of Malayalam, the state's official language) work in the Middle East and their remittances play a significant part in the economy.

SOUTHERN KERALA

Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum)

20471 / POP 889,191

For obvious reasons, Kerala's capital Thiruvananthapuram is still often referred to by its colonial name: Trivandrum. Most travellers merely springboard from here to the nearby beachside resorts of Kovalam and Varkala, though laid-back, hill-enclosed Trivandrum, with its bevy of Victorian museums in glorious neo-Keralan buildings, is deserving of more time, if you can spare it. All you have to do is get off Trivandrum's racing-drag of a main street to find yourself immersed in old Kerala: surrounded by pagoda-shaped buildings, red-tiled roofs and narrow, winding lanes.

Sights & Activities

Zoological Gardens
& Museums

Yann Martel based the animals in his *Life* of *Pi* on those he observed in Trivandrum's **zoological gardens** (②2115122; admission ₹10, camera ₹25; ⊗9am-6pm Tue-Sun). Here are shaded paths meandering through woodland and lakes, where animals, such as tigers, macaques and birds frolic in massive open enclosures that mimic their natural habitats. There's a **reptile house** where cobras frequently flare their hoods – just don't

ask what the cute guinea pigs are here for.

ZOO, MUSEUMS

The park contains a gallery and two museums. Housed in an 1880 wooden building designed by Robert Chisholm, a British architect whose Fair Isle-style version of the Keralan vernacular shows his enthusiasm for local craft. The Napier Museum (admission ₹10; ⊕9am-5pm Tue & Thu-Sun, 1-5pm Wed) has an eclectic display of bronzes, Buddhist sculptures, temple carts and ivory carvings. The carnivalesque interior is stunning and worth a look in its own right. The dusty Natural History Museum (admission ₹10; @9am-5pm Tue & Thu-Sun, 1-5pm Wed) has hundreds of stuffed animals and birds, and a fine skeleton collection. The Shri Chitra Art Gallery (admission ₹5; ⊕9am-5pm Tue & Thu-Sun, 1-5pm Wed) has paintings by the Rajput, Mughal and Tanjore schools, and works by Ravi Varma.

Shri Padmanabhaswamy Temple (⊗Hindus only 4am-7.30pm) This 260-year-old temple is Trivandrum's spiritual heart, spilling over 2400 sq m. Its main entrance is the 30m-tall, seven-tier eastern *gopuram* (gateway tower). In the inner sanctum, the deity Padmanabha reclines on the sacred serpent and is made from over 10,000 *salagramam* (sacred stones) that were purportedly, and no doubt slowly, transported from Nepal by elephant.

The path around to the right of the gate offers good views of the *gopuram*.

Puthe Maliga Palace Museum (Indian/foreigner ₹10/30; ⊕9am-lpm & 3-4.30pm) The 200-year-old palace of the Travancore maharajas has carved wooden ceilings, marble sculptures and even imported Belgian glass. Inside you'll find Kathakali images, an armoury, portraits of Maharajas, ornate thrones and other artefacts.

The annual **classical music festival** is held here in January.

Ayushmanbhava Ayurvedic

Centre AYURVEDA, YOGA (24712556060: www.avushmanbhava.com: Pothujanam) Offers treatments such as 60-minute massage (₹500), and daily therapeutic yoga classes (beginners 6.30am). Three kilometres west of the town centre, a one week package of treatments here costs ₹4700.

Courses

Margi Kathakali School MARTIAL ARTS, DRAMA (2/2478806; Fort) Conducts courses in Kathakali (p976) and Kootiattam (traditional Sanskrit drama) for beginner and advanced students. Fees average ₹300 per two-hour class. Visitors can peek at uncostumed practice sessions held 10am to noon Monday to Friday. It's in an unmarked building behind the Fort School, located 200m west of the fort.

CVN Kalari Sangham

MARTIAL ARTS (22474182; www.cvnkalari.in; South Rd; 15-day/ 1-month course ₹1000/2000) Offers threemonth courses in kalarippayat (p976) for serious students with some experience in martial arts. Contact **Sathyan** (2)2474182; sathyacvn@vsnl.net) for details. On Monday to Saturday at 6.30am to 8.30am, training sessions are open to visitors.

✓ Tours

KTDC (Kerala Tourist Development Corporation) runs several tours, all leaving from the Tourist Reception Centre at the KTDC Hotel Chaithram on Central Station Rd. The Kanyakumari Day Tour (per person ₹550; ⊗8am-9pm Tue-Sun) visits Padmanabhapuram Palace (p932), Kanyakumari in Southern Tamil Nadu and the nearby Suchindram Temple. The Narsa Darsan: Daily Half-day Tour (per person ₹250; ⊗7.30am-1pm & 1.30-7pm Tue-Sun) visits Trivandrum's major sights.

La Sleeping

TOP Varikatt Heritage HOMESTAY \$\$\$ (2336057; www.varikattheritage.com; Punnen Rd; r ₹4000-5000) Trivandrum's most charismatic place to stay is the 250-year-old house of Colonel Roy Kuncheria. It's a wonderful bungalow flanked by verandas and a cinnamon tree, orchids in hanging pots. Every antique has a family story attached to it. Lunch and dinner available (₹300).

Graceful Homestay HOMESTAY \$\$ (2444358; www.gracefulhomestay.com; Philip's Hill; downstairs s/d ₹1300/1500, upstairs s/d ₹2000/2500 incl breakfast; @♠) In Trivandrum's leafy suburbs, this is owned by Sylvia and run by her brother Giles, and is an attractive house set in a couple of hectares of garden opposite AJ Hall. The pick of the rooms has an amazing covered terrace overlooking palm trees.

YMCA International Guesthouse HOSTEL \$ (2330059; YMCA Rd; s/d ₹485/620) Our valueometer went off the scale when we saw this place - one of the less institutional among its brethren; rooms are spacious, spotless and come with tiled bathrooms and TV. Both men and women accepted.

Wild Palms Home Stay HOMESTAY \$\$ (2471175; www.wildpalmsonsea.com; Mathrubhumi Rd; s ₹1495-1795, d ₹1795-2195; **③**) Trading on its touches of character and quiet setting, this is overpriced. Still, nowhere else has a Venus de Milo statue greeting vou in the front garden. The ornate, comfortable family home here has well-furnished though faded rooms. The best has a terrace.

Sunday B&B **GUESTHOUSE \$** (≥09746957056; opp Airport; s/d ₹400/500) This was fantastically well placed for a dawn flight, opposite the former international terminal. The terminal's move a few kilometres away has made it a little less convenient, but it's still handy, well priced and friendly with nicely kept, clean rooms with hot water.

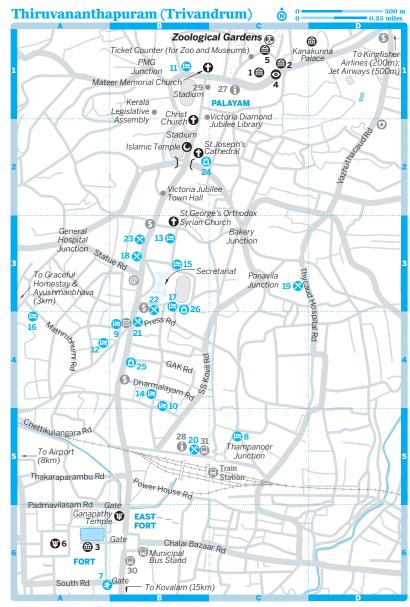
Muthoot Plaza

HOTEL \$\$\$ (**2**2337733; www.themuthootplaza.com; nen Rd; s/d from ₹5800/6700, ste from ₹9500; **寒**@♠) Even though the arctic-level AC would make penguins shiver, this ultrachic business-focused hotel is still a great place to stay. The plush rooms are stuffed with pillows, couches and all mod cons.

Greenland Lodge

HOTEL \$ (**2**2328114; Thampanoor Junction; s/d ₹323/485, with AC ₹900/990;
Close to the muted mayhem of the train station, Greenland lays out lots of serenity-inducing pastel colours to greet you. Inside, the rooms are spacious and come with hybrid squat/sit-down toilets. It's efficiently run, but expect to pay a hefty two-night deposit.

Princess Inn HOTEL \$ (2339150; Manjalikulam Rd; s/d ₹290/480, r with AC ₹650; ★) In a modern (read: '80s) glassfronted building, the Princess Inn promises a relatively quiet sleep in clean surrounds, plus satellite TV and immaculate green-tiled bathrooms.



KTDC Mascot Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(2318990; www.ktdc.com; Mascot Sq; s/d from ₹4000/4500; ***@? *** Period touches, massive hallways and an imposing reception lend this place an aura of old-world charm. It has a monster pool and ayurvedic spa.

Hotel Regency

(2330377; www.hotelregency.com; Manjalikulam Cross Rd; s/d ₹540/788, with AC ₹900/1407; 🕸) Offers small, cosy rooms with satellite TV, a leafy entryway, lots of hush and plenty of smiles at reception.

Thiruvananthapuram (Triva	ndrum)	
⊚ Top Sights	S Eating	
Zoological GardensC1	18 Ananda Bhavan	B3
	Ariya Nivas	(see 8
⊚ Sights	19 Aroma	C3
1 Napier MuseumC1	Connemara Market	(see 24
2 Natural History MuseumC1	Indian Coffee House	(see 27
3 Puthe Maliga Palace Museum	20 Indian Coffee House	B5
4 Reptile HouseC1	21 Kalavara Family Restaurant	B4
5 Shri Chitra Art Gallery	22 New Mubarak	B3
6 Shri Padmanabhaswamy Temple A6	23 Pizza Corner	B3
3 Activities, Courses & Tours	Shopping	
7 CVN Kalari SanghamA6	24 Connemara Market	B2
	25 Sankers Coffee & Tea	B4
Sleeping	26 SMSM Institute	B3
8 Greenland Lodge		
9 Hotel GeethB4	Information	
10 Hotel RegencyB4	27 Tourist Facilitation Centre	C
11 KTDC Hotel MascotB1	28 Tourist Reception Centre	B5
12 Kukie's Holiday InnA4		
13 Muthoot PlazaB3	Transport	
14 Princess InnB4	Air India	(see 11
15 Varikatt Heritage B3	29 Airtravel Enterprises	B:
16 Wild Palms Home Stay A4	30 East Fort Bus Stand (Buses &	
17 YWCA International	Taxis to Kovalam)	B6
GuesthouseB3	31 KSRTC Bus Stand	B5

Kukie's Holiday Inn

GUESTHOUSE \$

(⊋2478530; Lukes Lane; s/d ₹220/275) At the end of a small lane in an appealingly quiet spot, this is centred around a little courtyard and offers bare-bones accommodation at rock-bottom prices. Rooms have hard beds and a cold water tap in the bathroom.



For some unusual refreshments with your meal, look out for *karikku* (coconut water) and *sambharam* (buttermilk with ginger and chilli).

INDIAN \$ Station (Central Station Rd; dishes ₹12-50; ⊗7am-11pm); Zoo (Museum Rd; ⊗8.30am to 6pm) The Central Station Rd link of the chain serves its yummy coffee and snacks in a crazy redbrick tower that looks like a pigeon coop from outside, and has a spiralling interior lined inside by bench tables. You have to admire the hard-working waiters. It's a must-see. There's another, more run-of-the-mill branch near the museum.

Kalavara Family Restaurant

INDIAN 66

(Press Rd; dishes ₹60-140; ⊙lunch & dinner) A bustling favourite of Trivandrum's middle class, this is decorated by curious half-awnings and serves up scrummy Keralan fish dishes. Our money's on the fish *molee* (fish in coconut sauce: ₹130).

Aroma

INDIAN \$\$

(②4076000; Magic Days, Vanross Jn; dishes ₹50-100; ⊙lunch & dinner) A smart hotel restaurant with a smashing buffet for lunch and dinner, as well as à la carte.

New Mubarak

MALABAR \$

off Statue Rd; dishes ₹20-60) A grand-sounding name for an ungrand restaurant, tucked away on a narrow lane off Statue Rd. However, it's a great place to sample Malabar Muslim cuisine such as crab masala or fresh fish cooked in coconut oil.

Ariya Nivaas

INDIAN \$

(Manorama Rd; meals ₹45; ⊗7am-9pm) Close to the train station and convenient for a quick feed between trains, this popular thali (traditional 'all-you-can-eat' meal) place gets positive reports.

Pizza Corner

PIZZERIA \$

(MG Rd; small pizzas ₹85-170; ⊕11am-11pm) A bit of East meets West, with tasty pizzas sporting everything from traditional toppings (margherita) to Indian twists (eg Punjabi chicken tikka).

Ananda Bhavan

INDIAN \$

(2477646; MG Rd; dishes ₹22-31; Slunch & dinner) A classic sit-down-and-dig-in-withyour-hands-type situation.



Shopping

Wander around Connemara Market (MG Rd) to see vendors selling vegetables, fish, live goats, fabric, clothes, spices and more bananas than you can poke a hungry monkey at.

SMSM Institute

(YMCA Rd; ⊗9am-8pm Mon-Sat) No, it's not dedicated to the study of text messaging, but a Kerala Government-run handicraft emporium with an Aladdin's cave of wellpriced goodies.

Sankers Coffee & Tea

FOOD & DRINK

(2330469: MG Rd: ⊕9am-9pm Mon-Sat) You'll smell the fresh coffee well before vou reach this dainty shop. It sells Nilgiri Export OP Leaf Tea (₹260 per kilo) and a variety of coffees and nuts.



1 Information

ABC Internet (Capital Centre; MG Rd; per hr ₹20; ⊗8.30am-9pm) One of several good internet places in this small mall.

KIMS (Kerala Institute of Medical Sciences; 2447676: Kumarapuram) About 3km northwest of Trivandrum. For medical problems.

Main post office (22473071; MG Rd)

Thomas Cook (2338140-2; MG Rd; ⊗10.30am-6pm Mon-Sat) Changes cash and travellers cheques.

Tourist Facilitation Centre (2321132: Museum Rd; ⊗24hr) Supplies maps and brochures.

Tourist Reception Centre (KTDC Hotel Chaithram; 22330031; Central Station Rd; ⊗7am-9pm daily). Arranges KTDC-run tours.



Getting There & Away

Air

Between them. **Air India** (2317341: Mascot Sq), Jet Airways (22728864; Sasthamangalam Junction) and Kingfisher Airlines (≥18002333131; Star Gate Bldg; TC 9/888, Vellayambalam) fly to Mumbai (from ₹5200), Kochi (from ₹2300), Bengaluru (Bangalore: from ₹5400), Chennai (Madras; from ₹3800) and Delhi (from ₹7500).

There are regular flights from Trivandrum to Colombo and Male.

All airline bookings can be made at the efficient Airtravel Enterprises (3011412; www. ategroup.org; New Corporation Bldg, MG Rd).

Bus

For buses operating from the **KSRTC bus stand** (22323886), opposite the train station, see the table, p926.

For Tamil Nadu destinations, the State Express Transport Corporation (SETC) buses leave from the eastern end of the KSRTC bus stand.

Buses leave for Kovalam beach (₹15. 30 minutes, every 20 minutes) between 5.40am and 10pm from the southern end of the East Fort bus stand on MG Rd.

Buses leaving from Trivandrum (KSRTC Bus Stand):

MAJOR TRA	INS FROM T	RIVANDRUM		
DESTINATION	TRAIN NO & NAME*	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	DEPARTURES (DAILY)
Bengaluru	6525 Bangalore Express	307/833/1144	18	12.55pm
Chennai	2696 Chennai Express	166/799/1230	16½	5.10pm
Coimbatore	7229 Sabari Express	191/505/691	9¼	7.15am
Delhi	2625 Kerala Express	595/1616/2220	50	11.15am
Mangalore	6347 Mangalore Express	257/693/949	14½	8.45pm
*Sleeper/3AC/2	2AC			

THE INDIAN COFFEE HOUSE STORY

The Indian Coffee House is a place stuck in time. Its India-wide branches feature old India prices and waiters dressed in starched white with peacock-style headdresses. It was started by the Coffee Board in the early 1940s, during British rule. In the 1950s the Board began to close down cafes across India, making employees redundant. At this point, the communist leader Avillyath Kuttiari Gopalan Nambiar began to support the workers and founded with them the India Coffee Board Worker's Co-operative Society. The intention was to provide them with better opportunities and promote the sale of coffee. The Coffee House has remained ever since, always atmospheric, and always offering bargain snacks and drinks such as Indian filter coffee, rose milk and idlis. It's still run by its employees, all of whom share ownership.

DESTINATION	FARE (₹)	DURA- TION (HR)	FREQUENCY
Alleppey	97	3½	every 15min
Chennai	430	17	10 daily
Ernakulam (Kochi)	135	5	every 20min
Kanyakumari	56	2	6 daily
Kollam	42	11/2	every 15min
Kumily (for Periyar)	126	8	2 daily
Madrai	195	7	9 daily
Munnar	193	7	2 daily
Neyyar Dam	20-26	11/2	every 40min
Puducherry	375	16	1 daily
Thrissur	187	71/2	every 30min
Udhagaman- dalam (Ooty)	365	14	1 daily
Varkala	36	1¼	hourly

Train

Trains are often heavily booked, so it's worth visiting the reservation office (≥139; ⊗8am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) at the train station. See the table below for major long-distance services.

Within Kerala there are frequent trains to Varkala (2nd class/AC chair ₹36/279, one hour), Kollam (₹40/309, one hour) and Ernakulam (₹74/259, 4½ hours), with trains passing through either Alleppey (₹59/347, three hours) or Kottayam (₹62/396, 3½ hours). There are also numerous daily services to Kanyakumari (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹140/272/396, 21/2 hours).

Getting Around

The **airport** (2501424) is 8km from the city and 15km from Kovalam; take local bus 14 from the East Fort and City Bus stand (₹6). Prepaid taxi vouchers from the airport cost ₹250 to the city and ₹400 to Kovalam.

Autorickshaws are the easiest way to get around, with short hops costing ₹10-20.

Around Trivandrum

NEYYAR DAM LION SAFARI PARK

This sanctuary, rebranded as the Lion Safari Park (2272182, 9744347582; Indian/foreigner ₹140/230; ⊗9.30am-5pm Tue-Sun), 35km north of Trivandrum, lies around an idyllic lake created by the 1964 Nevyar Dam. The fertile forest lining the shoreline is home to gaurs. sambar deer, sloth, elephants, lion-tailed macagues and the occasional tiger.

The park is usually visited via 1½-hour lion safaris (⊗9.30am-3.30pm) included in the admission fee, via boat and bus. This includes a 20-minute trek. Nearby there's a Crocodile Protection Centre, admission to which is also included. Get here from Trivandrum's KSRTC bus stand by frequent bus (₹20 to ₹26, 1½ hours). A taxi is ₹800 return (with two hours' waiting time) from Trivandrum, ₹1200 from Kovalam. The KTDC office in Trivandrum also run tours to Neyyar Dam (₹300).If you have your own transport, you can visit the park without a tour, which may enhance your chances of seeing wildlife.

SIVANANDA YOGA VEDANTA DHANWANTARI ASHRAM

Just before Neyvar Dam, this superbly located **ashram** (2)/fax 0471-2273093; www. sivananda.org/ndam), established in 1978, is renowned for its hatha yoga courses. Courses start on the 1st and 16th of each month, run for a minimum of two weeks and cost ₹700 per day for accommodation in a double room

(₹500 in dormitories). Low season (May to September) rates are ₹100 less. There's an exacting schedule (5.30am to 10pm) of yoga practice, meditation and chanting, though with plenty of breaks between sessions; and students rave about the food (included in the rates). Bookings are required. Monthlong yoga-teacher training and ayurvedic massage courses are also available.

Kovalam

2 0471

Once a calm fishing village clustered around its crescents of beach, nowadays Kovalam is Kerala's most developed resort. It's a touristy place and the shore is built up with hotels, but it remains an appealing place to have some fun by the sea, though it has more than its fair share of resident touts and tourist tat.

Dangers & Annoyances

Bikini-clad women are likely to attract male attention, though this is definitely more of an annoyance than a danger. Cover up with a sarong when you're out of the water.

There are strong rips at both ends of Lighthouse Beach that carry away several swimmers every year. Swim only between the flags in the area patrolled by lifeguards - green flags show the area is safe, red flags warn of danger zones.

Kovalam has frequent blackouts and the footpaths behind Lighthouse Beach are unlit, so carry a torch (flashlight) after dark.

Sights & Activities

Lighthouse

(Indian/foreigner ₹10/25, camera/video ₹20/25; ⊗3-5pm) Check out the endless views along the coast by climbing Kovalam's lighthouse. Not recommended if you suffer from vertigo, or for small children.

Santhigiri

MASSAGE

(②2482800; www.santhigiriashram.org; nr Lighthouse Beach; ⊗8am-8pm) Try this place for excellent massages and ayurvedic treatments. For ₹750/900 for 60/90 minutes you can have a four-handed massage while listening to the sound of the waves outside. Twenty-one-day panchakarma (internal purification) costs ₹64,250, including accommodation in big, airy rooms, and food.

Sleeping

Kovalam is chock-a-block with hotels, though budget places here cost more than usual and are becoming a dying breed. Beachfront properties are the most expensive and have great sea views. Look out for



GUESTHOUSE \$\$

smaller places tucked away in the labyrinth of paths behind the beach among the palm groves and rice paddies; they're much better value. For more top-end accommodation choices, see the Around Kovalam section.

TOP Beach Hotel II

HOTEL \$\$\$ www.thebeachhotel-kovalam.com; (**2**2481937: r ₹3000, with AC ₹4000; 🕸) The Beach Hotel's upmarket new cousin, this is a stylish hotel with the best views on the seafront. Rooms have plate-glass windows opening onto terraces, and the decor is simple chic, with printed sheets and curtains and white walls. It's home to the new Oasia terrace restaurant.

Treetops

GUESTHOUSE \$\$ (≥2481363; treetopsofkovalam@yahoo.in; r ₹900; (a) Indeed in the treetops, this friendly expat-owned place is a breath of fresh air, hidden away from the hustle. The three bright, sparkling-clean rooms have hanging chairs on the terraces, the view from the roof is awesome, and there's a yoga centre next door.

Paradesh Inn

GUESTHOUSE \$\$ (9995362952; inn.paradesh@yahoo.com; Paradesh House, Avaduthura; s/d ₹1250/1350; @) Next door to Treetops, tranquil Italian-run Paradesh Inn resembles a Greek island hideaway - a whitewashed building highlighted in blue. Each of the six fan-cooled rooms has a hanging chair outside, there are sweeping views from the rooftop and fab breakfasts.

Beach Hotel

(22481937; www.thebeachhotel-kovalam.com; s/d ₹1500/2500;) Brought to you by the longrunning German Bakery, this uberhip beachfront property has rooms designed with minimalist flair, ochre tones and finished with smart, arty touches. Plus Waves restaurant is just upstairs.

Leela

HOTEL \$\$\$ (**2**480101; www.theleela.com; r from ₹14,000; **※@**♠**②** The only top-end option in town, the Leela is located in extensive grounds on the headland north of Hawah beach. There are three swimming pools, an ayurvedic centre, a gym, two private beaches, several restaurants and more. Rooms are sumptu-

ous, with period touches, colourful textiles

Sea Flower

and Keralan artwork.

HOTEL \$

(2480554: www.seaflowerbeachresort.com; r downstairs ₹750, upstairs ₹900) Next door to Beach Hotel II, this dowdier place offers similar views at smaller prices. Rooms are simple and plain but freshly painted.

Dwaraka Lodge

GUESTHOUSE \$

(2480411; d ₹450-500) With regular licks of paint helping to cover up the war wounds of this tired old-timer, friendly Dwaraka is the cheapest ocean-front property. There's nothing flash inside, just clean sheets and a basic bathroom.

Hotel Greenland

GUESTHOUSE \$

(22486442; hotelgreenlandin@yahoo.com; r ₹500-1000) Family run and as friendly as they

Kovalam

Activities, Courses & Tours 1 Santhigiri	
Sleeping	
2 Aparna	
Beach Hotel	. (see 16)
3 Beach Hotel II	C3
4 Dwaraka Lodge	B2
5 Green Valley Cottages	СЗ
6 Hotel Greenland	C3
7 Hotel Sky Palace	C3
8 Jeevan Ayurvedic Beach Resort	СЗ
9 Leela	A1
10 Maharaju Palace	C3
11 Moon Valley Cottage	СЗ
12 Paradesh Inn	
Sea Flower	(see 3)
Treetops	. (see 12)

13	Varmas Beach Resort	C3
S E	ating	
	Devi Garden Restaurant	
15	Fusion	ВЗ
16	Waves	СЗ
17	Malabar Cafe	ВЗ
18	Suprabhatham	СЗ
19	Swiss Cafe	ВЗ
Info	rmation	
20	Tourist Facilitation Centre	A1
21	Upasana Hospital	B2
Trar	ısport	

22 Autorickshaw & Taxi Stand.....B2 23 Bus Stand A1

come. The refurbished rooms in this multilevel complex have lots of natural light – some even have small kitchenettes for self-catering. Will cook up yummy food on request.

Green Valley Cottages

(②2480636; indira_ravi@hotmail.com; r ₹500-1000) Also way back amongst the trees, this serene complex is the place to revel in serious shush time. The rooms are simple, but have good views from the terraces in front. They also have a house for rent, a short heft up the hill, for a ₹1000 per night.

Maharaju Palace GUESTHOUSE \$\$ (22485320; www.maharajupalace.in; d ₹1800) More of a quiet retreat than a palace, this place has more character than most, with wooden furnishings, including the odd fourposter, and different coloured mosquito nets. The breakfast terrace is hung with

Hotel Sky Palace GUESTHOUSE \$ (1.29745841222; r downstairs/upstairs ₹500/900) This little two-storey place lies down a small lane; rooms are well kept, with a mix of colours and dark masculine tiling about the place; the ground-floor rooms are cheaper, but the same.

chintzy chandeliers.

Varmas Beach Resort

(②2480478; vijayavarmabeachresort@hotmail.

com; Lighthouse Rd; s/d ₹1800/3000, with AC

₹2500/5500; (※) Has a wood-panelled, Keralastyle facade and breezy rooms with exceptional views and comfy sitting areas on private balconies. However, this still doesn't justify these prices – try it off-season.

Jeevan Ayurvedic Beach Resort RESORT \$\$ (2480662; www.jeevanresort.net; d from ₹2400, with AC ₹3700; (25) Expect inoffensively decorated, decent-sized rooms with bathtubs and an alluring, clean pool. Upstairs rooms have balconies with sea views.

Moon Valley Cottage GUESTHOUSE \$ (29446100291; sknairkovalam@yahoo.com; d from ₹500, upstairs apt ₹1000) There's nothing but swaying palms around here, the rooms are a decent size and it's a peaceful spot.

Aparna GUESTHOUSE \$\$
(②2480950; www.aparnahotelkovalam.com; s/d
₹1500/1750) Aparna has just a handful of cute, oddly shaped little rooms. All are cosy with private balconies, nice sea views and welcome sea breezes.



Each evening, dozens of open-air restaurants line the beach promenade displaying the catch of the day – just pick a fish, settle on a price (per serve around ₹150, tiger prawns over ₹400) and decide how you want it prepared. Menus and prices are largely indistinguishable – it's more about which ambience takes your fancy. Unlicensed places will serve alcohol in mugs, or with the bottles hidden discreetly out of sight.

Malabar Cafe INDIAN \$\$

(mains ₹90-300) The busy tables tell their own story: this place, with its plastic chairs, candlelight at night, and view through pot plants to the crashing waves offers tasty food and good service.

Suprabhatham

KERALAN \$

(meals ₹45-80) This cosy little veggie place dishes up excellent, dirt-cheap and truly authentic Keralan cooking in a rustic setting. Out in the palm groves, it's secluded and intimate, and you can dine under the stars to a nightly orchestra of crickets.

Waves (mains ₹100-480) With its broad, burntorange balcony, ambient soundtrack, and wide-roaming menu proffering everything

wide-roaming menu proffering everything from weisskraut mit chinnken (roast cabbage and bacon) to Thai curries, this is a foreign-tourist magnet.

Swiss Cafe

CAFE \$\$

(mains ₹70-410) While the setting here is lovely, with an upstairs balcony and lots of wicker seating, the menu offers much the same choices as everywhere else, with a few token Swiss dishes (eg schnitzel) thrown in.

Fusion FUSION \$\$

(mains ₹120-440) This funky eatery has an inventive East-meets-West menu, with dishes such as oven-roasted tomatoes with spice crust on ginger cashew-nut noodles or lobster steamed in vodka. Also serves French press coffee and herbal teas.

Devi Garden Restaurant

INDIAN \$

(NUP Beach Rd; mains ₹50-150; ⊗7.30am-11pm) Garden is overstating it, but this tiny, family-run eatery whips up great veg and nonveg Indian food for refreshingly reasonable prices.

Entertainment

During high season, an abridged version of Kathakali is performed most nights –

enquire about locations and times at the Tourist Facilitation Centre.



Information

Almost every shop and hotel will change money. In Kovalam there's a National Bank of India and near the hospital a CBS **ATM** taking Visa cards. Otherwise, there are Federal Bank and ICICI ATMs at Kovalam Junction. There are lots of small internet cafes (per hr ₹30-50).

National Bank of India (⊗10.30am-1.30pm Mon-Fri, @10.30am-noon Sat) Near the Leela resort. Changes cash.

Post office (Kovalam Beach Rd; ⊗9am-1pm Mon-Sat)

Tourist Facilitation Centre (22480085; 9.30am-5pm) Helpful, inside the entrance to the Kovalam Beach Resort.

Upasana Hospital (2480632) Has Englishspeaking doctors who can take care of minor injuries.



Getting There & Away

BUS Buses connect Kovalam and Trivandrum every 20 minutes between 5.30am and 10.10pm (₹9, 30 minutes); catch them from the entrance to Leela resort. There are two buses daily to Ernakulam (₹140, 5½ hours), stopping at Kallambalam (for Varkala, ₹50, 1½ hours), Kollam (₹70, 2½ hours) and Alleppey (₹110, four hours). There's another 6.30am bus to Ernakulam via Kottayam that bypasses Varkala.

TAXI A taxi between Trivandrum and Kovalam beach is around ₹400.

MOTORBIKE HIRE Voyager Travels (≥9847065093) rents out scooters/Enfields for around ₹400/550 per day. It has no fixed office address.

Around Kovalam

SAMUDRA BEACH

Samudra beach, about 4km north of Kovalam by road, has seen a growing number of resorts edge out what was a small fishing village. Although more peaceful, the beach is steep and rough, and only accessible for swimming in December and January.

Set amid more than 5 hectares of lolling green grounds, **Taj Green Cove** (22487733; www.tajhotels.com; r ₹12,500-30,000; *@෧ඁ෧), the Kovalam branch of a swanky Indian hotel chain, has smashing individual chalets with sunken baths, an enticing infinity pool, several restaurants (one on the beach) and a spa.

PULINKUDI & CHOWARA

Around 8km south of Kovalam, amid endless-seeming swaying palms, colourful village life, and some empty golden-sand beaches, are some tantalising high-end alternatives to Kovalam's crowded centre.

For those serious about avuryedic treatment, Dr Franklin's Panchakarma Institute (2480870; www.dr-franklin.com; Chowara; s from €38, d €55; @�) is a reputable and less expensive alternative to the flashier resorts. Daily treatment with full board costs €56. Accommodation is tidy and comfortable but not resort style. There are therapy packages for whatever ails you, including spine problems, purification/detox treatments, as well as general rejuvenation and stress relief.

Surya Samudra Private Retreats (22480413; www.suryasamudra.com; Pulinkudi; r incl breakfast ₹14,100-42,900; 🕸 🛎) proffers A-list-style seclusion, with 22 transplanted traditional Keralan homes, with four posters and open-air bathrooms, set in a palm grove above sparkling seas. There's an infinity pool carved out of a single block of granite, avurvedic treatments, and spectacular outdoor yoga platforms.

In ayurvedic plant-filled gardens, Somatheeram (22266501; www.somatheeram. org; Pulinkudi; s/d from €72/80; 🕸 🛎) is a good place to have an ayurvedic and yogic sojourn. The setting is paradisaical and rooms range from simple cottages to more luxurious houses. You can pay for treatments separately, or there are various packages (rejuvenation, slimming, etc).

Bethsaida Hermitage (2267554: www.bethsaidahermitage.com; Pulinkudi; AC s/d from €40/60, with sea view from €70/80; 🕸) is a resort with a difference: this is a charitable organisation that helps support two nearby orphanages and an old people's home. It's also an inviting, somehow old-fashioned beachside escape, with sculpted gardens, a friendly welcome, and putting-green perfect lawns. It offers a variety of cottages, from large rooms with golden friezes to spacious, cool Kerala-style huts.

Thapovan Heritage Home (22480453; www.thapovan.com; s/d from ₹2650/3100) offers a midrange alternative next to a beautiful stretch of beach (no pool, AC or TV). There's a choice between pricier Keralan teak cottages, with wood-lined, slightly dated interiors, or some cheaper, plainer rooms, including a few overlooking the beach just a few paces away. Available ayurvedic treatments range from one-hour massages to 28-day treatment marathons.

Padmanabhapuram Palace

With a forest's worth of intricately carved ceilings and polished-teak beams, this palace (☑04651-250255; Indian/foreigner ₹25/200, camera/video ₹25/1500; ⊙9am-1pm & 2-4.30pm Tue-Sun) is considered the best example of traditional Keralan architecture today. Parts of it date back to 1550; as the egos of successive rulers left their mark, it expanded into the magnificent conglomeration of 14 palaces it is today.

Asia's largest wooden palace complex, it was once the seat of the rulers of Travancore, a princely state taking in parts of Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Constructed of teak and granite, the exquisite interiors include carved rosewood ceilings, Chinese-style screens, and floors finished to a high black polish.

Padmanabhapuram is about 60km southeast of Kovalam. Catch a local bus from Kovalam (or Trivandrum) to Kanyakumari and get off at Thuckalay, from where it's a short autorickshaw ride or 15-minute walk. Alternatively, take one of the tours organised by the KTDC from Trivandrum, or hire a taxi (about ₹1500 return from Trivandrum or Kovalam).

Varkala

20470 / POP 42,273

Perched almost perilously along the edge of dizzying cliffs, Varkala has a naturally beautiful setting and is a low-key resort that's geared to a backpacker demographic. A strand of golden beach nuzzles Varkala's cliff edge, where restaurants play innocuous trance music and stalls sell the types of things every traveller might need: ethnic T-shirts, baggy trousers and silver jewellery. Even though this kind of tie-dye commercialism can grate on the nerves, Varkala is still a great place to watch the days slowly turn into weeks. The beach is a holy place, where Hindus come to make offerings for dead loved ones, assisted by priests who set up shop beneath the Hindustan Hotel. You can while away days watching the mix of fishermen, Hindu rituals, volleyball-playing visitors, locals gazing at the sea and strolling backpackers that make up the traffic on the beach.

Dangers & Annoyances

The beaches at Varkala have strong currents; even experienced swimmers have been swept away. This is one of the most dangerous beaches in Kerala, so be careful and swim between the flags or ask the lifeguards where's the safest place to swim.

If women wear bikinis or even swimsuits on the beach at Varkala, they are likely to feel uncomfortably exposed to stares – note that local people don't strip down on the beach. Wearing a sarong when out of the water will help avoid offending local sensibilities or attracting unwelcome attention, though it's worth noting that police patrol the beaches to keep male starers a-walkin' and the hawkers at bay. It pays to dress sensitively, especially if you're going into Varkala town.

It seems as if every man and his dog has an ayurvedic-related product or treatment to sell – many aren't qualified practitioners. Ask for recommendations before you go to get herbalised.

LEADER OF THE PACK

In 1957 Kerala democratically elected a communist government – the first place in the world to do so. Kerala's unique blend of democratic-socialist principles has a pretty impressive track record.

Kerala has been labelled 'the most socially advanced state in India' by Nobel prizewinning economist Amartya Sen. Land reform and a focus on infrastructure, health and education have played a large part in Kerala's success. The literacy rate (91%) is one of the highest of any developing nation, though a strong history of education stretches back centuries to the days of magnanimous rajas and active missionaries. The infant mortality rate in Kerala is one-fifth of the national average, while life expectancy stands at 73 years, 10 years higher than the rest of the country.

The picture is not all rosy, however. Lack of any industrial development or foreign investment means that the ambitions of many educated youth are curtailed. This might explain why Kerala also has the highest suicide rates and liquor consumption statistics in the country. A big hope for the economy's future is the recent boom in tourism, with Kerala emerging as one of India's most popular new tourist hot spots. So, thanks for coming, and congratulations on being a part of the solution.

Sights

Janardhana Temple

HINDU TEMPLE Varkala is a temple town, and Janardhana Temple is the main event - its technicolour Hindu spectacle sits hovering above Beach Rd. It's closed to non-Hindus, but you may be invited into the temple grounds where there is a huge banyan tree and shrines to Ayyappan, Hanuman and other Hindu deities.

Sivagiri Mutt

(202807; www.sivagiri.org) Sivagiri Mutt is the headquarters of the Shri Narayana Dharma Sanghom Trust, the ashram devoted to Shri Narayana Guru (1855-1928), Kerala's most prominent guru. This is a popular pilgrimage site and the resident swami is happy to talk to visitors.



Yoga is offered at several guesthouses for ₹200 to ₹300 per session. **Boogie boards** can be hired from places along the beach for ₹100; be wary of strong currents.

Laksmi's

MASSAGE

(29895948080: Clafouti Beach Resort: manicure/ pedicure from ₹400/600, henna ₹300, massage ₹800; ⊗9am-7pm) This tiny place offers treatments such as threading and waxing as well as massages (women only).

Olympia House

MASSAGE

(≥9349439675; massages ₹600) Mr Omanakuttan is a qualified massage instructor, in both avurveda and other schools.

Eden Garden

MASSAGE

(22603910; www.eden-garden.net; massage from ₹1000) Offers a more upmarket ayurvedic experience, and offers single treatments and packages.

Sleeping

Most places to stay are crammed in along the north cliff; some open only for the tourist onslaught in November. Lessdeveloped Odayam beach, about 1km further north of Varkala's black beach, is a tranquil alternative.

The commission racket is alive and well make sure that your rickshaw takes you to the place you've asked for.

TOP Pink Aana

RESORT \$

(≥9746981298; www.pinkaana.at; r ₹650-800) On the quiet Odayam Beach north of Varkala, there are just four wooden bungalows at the 'Pink Elephant'. Made of coconut wood and bamboo, with private verandas, they're sparse but stylish, great value, and the best choice on this beach. There's a restaurant (meals around ₹200). Get here before the beach is ruined by any more buildings.

Villa Jacaranda

GUESTHOUSE \$\$\$

(2610296; www.villa-jacaranda.biz; d incl breakfast ₹4600-5600) The ultimate in understated luxury, this romantic retreat has just a handful of huge, bright rooms in a large house, each with a balcony and decorated with a chic blend of minimalist modern and period touches. The delicious breakfast is served on your veranda.

Eden Garden

RESORT \$\$

(**2**2603910; www.edengarden.in; r from ₹1200, luxury ste ₹5500) Overlooking peaceful paddy fields, this place has rooms with high wooden ceilings and attractive wooden furniture. set around a lush lily pond. Suites are organically shaped like white space-mushrooms, but inside they are romantic and fantastical, with intricate paintwork, round beds, and mosaic circular baths. A recommended avurvedic resort is based here.

Taj Gateway Hotel

(26673300; www.tajhotels.com/gateway; ₹4400/5200; ***@≥**) Rebranded, revamped, refurbished, the Taj Varkala is looking hot especially the new rooms, with beds covered in gleaming linen and mocha cushions, and with glass shower cubicles in the bathrooms, complete with electric blinds. There's a fantastic pool (nonguests ₹400).

Jickv's

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(**2**2606994; www.jickys.com; s ₹400, d ₹600-1750, cottage ₹900-1000) Way back in the palm groves, family-run Jicky's remains friendly as they come. The regular rooms are lovely and fresh, surrounded by lots of leafiness. and there are now also two double cottages, and some larger rooms for three to four in two smaller whitewashed, woodenshuttered buildings.

Puthooram

RESORT \$\$

(≥3202007; www.puthooram.com; r ₹500-2000, with AC ₹2500-3000) If garden gnomes were on holiday, they'd probably come here, to stay in Puthooram's wood-lined bungalows set around a charming little garden. Rooms with sea view are pricier.

Villa Anamika

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(2600096; www.villaanamika.com; r ₹500-2500, cottages ₹3500; 🕸) This Keralan-German-run



place has spacious rooms, all neatly furnished with homely decorations and art by owner Chicku. The pricier rooms have sea views, and the trim little garden out the back is a bonus.

Guest House Varkala

(☑2602227; d ₹220, with AC ₹440) A government-run guesthouse with several rooms in huge Keralan-styled bungalows that were once part of a palace complex. Though Spartan, each bargain-basement abode is finished with lots of polished wood and has incredibly high ceilings.

New Heaven (②9846074818; newheavenbeachresort@yahoo. com; r₹900-1000) New Heaven has easy access to Black Beach and great top-floor views. Bedrooms are roomy, basic and a tad drab, with big blue bathrooms and hanging

wicker chairs out the front for lazing.

Sea Pearl Chalets

RESORT \$\$

(22660105; www.seapearlchalets.com; d from ₹1500) Precariously perched on Varkala's southern cliff, these small, basic, podlike huts have unbeatable views and are surrounded by prim lawns. Definitely worth checking out before they tumble into the ocean

Kerala Bamboo House

RESORT \$\$

(☑9895270993; www.keralabamboohouse.com; huts d₹1500-2000) For that bamboo-hut experience, this popular place squishes together dozens of pretty Balinese-style huts in a cliff-top compound and a carefully maintained garden. Some of the huts are nicer than others (ie some have muralled outdoor showers and are wood-lined, some don't), so look at a few. Cheaper ones don't have hot water.

Sea Breeze GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(②2603257; www.seabreezevarkala.com; r ₹1500, with AC ₹2200-3000; ♠) The large, orderly, if dull rooms in this pink building all offer sea views and share a large veranda – perfect for nightly sunset adulation.



Most restaurants in Varkala offer the same mishmash of Indian, Asian and Western

Varkala	
⊚ Sights	
1 Janardhana TempleD3	
Astivities Courses 9 Tours	
Activities, Courses & Tours	
Eden Garden (see 4)	
2 Laksmi's	
3 Olympia HouseB2	
Sleeping	
4 Eden GardenC3	
5 Guest House VarkalaC2	
6 Jicky'sB2	
7 Kerala Bamboo HouseA2	
8 New HeavenA1	
Puthooram(see 9)	
9 Santa Claus Village Resort	
10 Sea Breeze A1	
11 Sea Pearl ChaletsB3	
12 Taj Gateway HotelC3	
13 Villa AnamikaA2	
Eating	
14 Café del MarB2	
15 Hungry Eye KitchenA2	
16 Juice ShackB2	
17 Nothin' DoingB3	
18 Oottupura Vegetarian	
RestaurantB2	
19 SreepadmanD3	
20 Trattorias	
Transport	
21 Autorickshaw Stand	
22 Autorickshaw StandB3	

fare to a soundtrack of easy-listening trance; they open from around 8am to 11pm. Join in the nightly Varkala saunter till you find a place that suits. Those who are unlicensed will usually serve alcohol discreetly.

Café del Mar

MULTICUISINE \$\$ (dishes ₹110-400) This is the kind of place you return to for its efficient service, good coffee, whirring fans, great position overlooking the cliffs, and the specials of the day chalked up on a board outside.

Trattorias MULTICUISINE \$\$ (meals ₹80-200) Smarter than most Trattorias has an Italian coffee machine and the usual wide-ranging menu, but specialises in pasta and even has some Japanese dishes.

Nothin' Doing INDIAN \$\$ (Hindustan Hotel: mains ₹120-280: ⊗7am-10.30am, noon-3pm & 7-10.15pm) The rooftop

restaurant topping this carbuncle offers tasty enough nonveg and veg fare, but the real reason to come here is the view from the balcony (with just a couple of tables) over the action of the beach.

Oottupura Vegetarian Restaurant INDIAN \$ (mains from ₹35) Bucking the trend and serving only veggie options, this budget eatery has a respectable range of yummy dishes, including breakfast puttu (flour with milk, bananas and honey).

Sreepadman

SOUTH INDIAN \$

(thali ₹30) For dirt-cheap and authentic Keralan fare - think dosas (paper-thin lentil-flour pancakes) and thalis - where you can rub shoulders with rickshaw drivers rather than tourists, hit Sreepadman. This is a hole-inthe-wall with a view: there is neat seating out the back.

Hungry Eye Kitchen

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(meals ₹70-160) The multilevel design of Hungry Eye means everyone gets uninterrupted sea views. That food is a speciality - the kitchen can whip up red and green curries as well as the usual Varkala suspects.

Juice Shack

CAFE \$

(juices ₹50, snacks ₹30-150; ⊕7am-7pm) A funky little health-juice bar that has a buffet on Wednesday and Saturday (₹250).

T Entertainment

Kathakali performances are organised during high season - look out for notices locally.

1 Information

A 24-hour ATM at the temple junction takes Visa cards, and there are more ATMs in Varkala town. Many of the travel agents lining the cliff do cash advances on credit cards and change travellers cheques. Internet cafes (per hr around ₹40) dot the cliff top - save emails often, as power cuts are not uncommon.

Post office (⊗10am-2pm Mon-Sat) North of Temple Junction.

Getting There & Away

There are frequent trains to Trivandrum (2nd class/AC chair ₹21/140, one hour) and Kollam (₹17/140, 30 minutes), as well as three daily services to Alleppey (₹35/153, two hours). It's feasible to get to Kollam in time for the morning backwater boat to Alleppey (p940), From Temple Junction, three daily buses pass by on their way to Trivandrum (₹30, 1½ to two hours), with one heading to Kollam (₹25, one hour).

1 Getting Around

It's about 2.5km from the train station to Varkala beach, with rickshaws going there for ₹40 to ₹50. Local buses also travel regularly between the train station and the temple junction (₹4).

Many places along the cliff hire out scooters/ Enfields for ₹250/350 per day.

Kollam (Quilon)

20474 / POP 380,100

Small but busy, untouristy Kollam (Quilon) is the southern approach to Kerala's backwaters. One of the oldest ports in the Arabian Sea, it was once a major commercial hub that saw Roman, Arab, Chinese and later Portuguese, Dutch and British traders jostle into port – eager to get their hands on spices and the region's cashew crops. The centre of town is reasonably hectic, but surrounding it are the calm waterways of Ashtamudi Lake, fringed with coconut palms, cashew plantations and traditional villages.

Sights

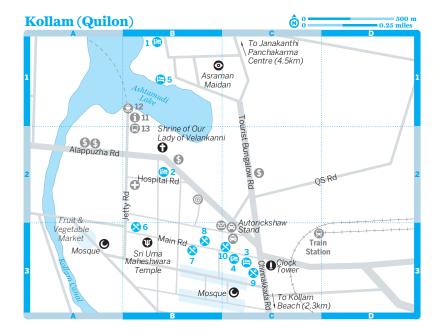
The best thing to do from Kollam is explore the backwaters around **Munroe Island** (see Tours, p936). There's a rowdy **fish market** at Kollam Beach where customers and fisherfolk alike pontificate on the value of the day's catch; there's also an evening fish market from 5pm to 9pm. The **beach** (long, but nothing special) is 2km south of town, a ₹30 rickshaw ride away.



Janakanthi Panchakarma Centre AYURVEDA (2763014; www.santhigiri.co.in; Vaidyasala Nagar, Asraman North) An ayurvedic centre with more of an institutional than a spa vibe, 5km from Kollam, popular for its sevento 21-day treatment packages – accommodation is available for ₹500 a night. You can also just visit for a rejuvenation massage (₹750). An autorickshaw from Kollam should cost around ₹140.

Tours

(per person ₹400; ⊗9am-1.30pm & 2pm-6.30pm)
Excellent tours through the canals of Munroe Island and across Ashtamudi Lake are organised by the DTPC (District Tourism Promotion Council). You're first driven 25km to the starting point, then take a three-hour trip via punted canoe. On these excursions (with knowledgeable guides) you can observe daily village life, see *kettuvallam* (rice barge) construction, toddy (palm beer) tapping, coir-making (coconut fibre).



prawn and fish farming, and do some birdwatching on spice-garden visits.

Houseboat cruises

BOATING

(2/4 people 24hr cruise ₹4000/4500, Kollam to Alappuzha cruise ₹10,000/12,000) The DTPC organises these houseboat cruise packages.



The **Pooram festival** is held in Kollam every April; the **Ashtamudi Craft & Art festival** (December/January) is every two years.

Sleeping

The DTPC office keeps a list of **homestays** in and around Kollam.

Valiyavila Homestay
(②2701546, 9847132449; www.kollamlakeview resort.com; Panamukkom; r ₹1000-2000, with AC ₹2500; № ②) This has an amazing location, crowning a breezy peninsula surrounded by leisurely backwaters on three sides. The four enormous rooms come with lots of windows to enjoy the views and the breeze. It's a good choice for families. Call ahead for a boat pick-up, catch a public ferry from Kollam (₹3), or grab an autorickshaw (₹100) to get here. The tourist boat from Alleppey also stops here before it docks at Kollam.

Get here before 2013, when it's set to close. The host, Joseph Prabath, has set up

Kollam (Quilon) Sleeping 1 Government Guest House...... B1 2 Hotel Sudarsan.....B2 3 Karuna ResidencyC3 4 Kodiylil ResidencyC3 Nani Hotel (see 9) 5 Tamarind.......B1 Eating 6 Fayalwan HotelB3 7 Hotel Guru Prasad.....B3 8 Indian Coffee House......B3 Kedar Restaurant(see 2) 9 Prasadam......C3 10 Vijayalaxmi Cashew Co......C3 Transport 12 Boat Jetty.....B1 13 KSRTC Bus Stand.....B2

Ashtamudi Villas (www.ashtamudivillas.com; d ₹1000), simple brick huts set on the water's edge, among nodding palms, which are much closer to town.

Nani Hotel
(②2751141; Chinnakada Rd; r₹1050, with AC ₹1600-3000; №②) This boutique business hotel is a surprise in Kollam's busy centre, and exceptionally good value. Built by a cashew magnate, it's gorgeously designed and mixes traditional Keralan elements and modern lines for a sleek look. Even the cheaper rooms have flat-screen TVs, feathery pillows and

Tamarind HOTEL \$\$ (2745538; r with AC ₹1400; ★) Overlooking the backwaters, across the lake from the ferry terminal, this has big, airy, bright orange,

slightly tired rooms, with great views.

sumptuous bathrooms.

Government Guest House (J2743620; s/d ₹220/440) In a colonial-era relic that's all whitewashed walls, tall varnished shutters and dusty grandeur, this guesthouse offers crumbling rooms with high ceilings and wooden floors. They're a bargain, but isolated 3km north of the centre on Ashtamudi Lake. Book ahead.

Hotel Sudarsan

HOTEL \$\$

(②2744322; Alappuzha Rd; www.hotelsudarsan. com; s/d with AC from ₹900/1000, deluxe ₹1200/1400; ⓐ) Sudarsan is welcoming enough, set around a car-park-courtyard, but rooms are plain and dull, if comfortable. Those at the front are noisy. There's a good restaurant.

Kodiylil Residency

GUESTHOUSE \$

(②3018030; Main Rd; s/d ₹440/550, with AC ₹800/900; ♠) Bright red hallways are moodily lit, if at all, and the rooms here come in shades of lime that could do with a lick of paint. Shame about the lack of windows.

Karuna Residency

GUESTHOUSE \$

(☑3263240; Main Rd; s/d ₹350/450, r with AC ₹700; ♠) This little budgeteer is starting to show its age, but is still maintained in decent condition. The central location close to the train station is probably its biggest asset.

X Eating

Dracadam

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(2)2751141; Chinnakada Rd; mains ₹60-150) The restaurant at the swish Nani Hotel has a comely setting amid intricate copper-relief

artwork depicting Kollam history. The meals are well prepared and include tasty thalis.

Kedar Restaurant

INDIAN \$\$

(Hotel Sudarsan: meals ₹90-150:

7am-11pm) This small glass-walled eatery is recommended for its tasty veg and nonveg cuisine, including special chicken masala.

Favalwan Hotel

INDIAN \$

(Main Rd; meals ₹10-40) This is a real Indian working-man's diner, packed to the rafters come lunchtime. There are concrete booths and long benches for sitting and tucking in – try the mutton biryani (₹45).

Hotel Guru Prasad

INDIAN \$

(Main Rd; meals ₹24) In a neat colonial building still clinging to remnants of a once-cheery paint job, this busy lunchtime place draws the punters with dirt-cheap set meals.

Indian Coffee House

INDIAN \$

(Main Rd) Reliable for a decent breakfast and strong coffee.

Vijavalaxmi Cashew Co FOODSTUFFS \$ (Main Rd; ⊕10am-7pm) A major exporter of Kollam's famous cashews; quality nuts are around ₹260 per 500g.

Information

DTPC information centre (22745625; info@ dtpckollam.com; @8am-7pm) Helpful; near the KSRTC bus stand and boat jetty.

Post office (22746607; Alappuzha Rd) Silver Net (per hr ₹25: 10.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) The most convenient of numerous internet cafes at the Bishop Jerome Nagar Complex.

UAE Exchange (22751240-1; Alappuzha Rd; ⊕9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri. to 4pm Sat. to 1.30pm Sun) For changing cash and travellers cheques.



Getting There & Away

Boat

See p940 for information on cruises to Alleppey. From the main boat jetty there are frequent public ferry services across Ashtamudi Lake to Guhanandapuram (one hour). Fares are around ₹10 return, or ₹3 for a short hop.

Bus

Kollam is on the Trivandrum-Kollam-Alleppey-Ernakulam bus route, with superfast/fast buses departing every 10 or 20 minutes to Trivandrum (₹44/42, 1¾/two hours), Alleppey (₹55/52, two/2½ hours) and Ernakulam (Kochi, ₹90/85, 31/4/31/2 hours). Buses depart from the **KSRTC bus stand** (2752008) near the boat jetty.

Train

There are frequent trains to Ernakulam (2nd class/AC chair ₹61/210, 3½ hours, six daily) and Trivandrum (₹40/165, one hour) via Varkala (₹36/165, 30 minutes). A couple of trains daily go to Alappuzha (Alleppey; ₹59/202, 1½ hours).

Around Kollam

KRISHNAPURAM PALACE MUSEUM

Two kilometres south of Kayamkulam (between Kollam and Alleppey), this restored **palace** (**2**0479-2441133; admission ₹10, camera/ video ₹25/250; ⊕9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat) is a fine example of grand Keralan architecture. Now a museum, inside are paintings, antique furniture, sculptures, and a renowned 3m-high mural depicting the Gajendra Moksha (the liberation of Gajendra, chief of the elephants) as told in the Mahabharata. The **Bharni Utsavam festival** is held at the nearby Chettikulangara Bhaghavathy Temple in February/March.

Buses (₹25) leave Kollam every few minutes for Kayamkulam. Get off at the bus stand near the temple gate, 2km before the palace.

Alappuzha (Alleppey)

20477 / POP 282,700

Hmm, those Venice comparisons might work if Venice shrank, acquired a few breeze-block buildings, and imported some tooting rickshaws.

But step out of the hectic centre, and Alappuzha is graceful and greenery-fringed, set around its grid of canals. Explore the vast watery highways of the region and you'll experience one of Kerala's most mesmerisingly beautiful and relaxing experiences.

It's the gateway to the fabled backwaters, a sprawling network of canals - float along and gaze over rice fields of succulent green, curvaceous rice barges, and village life along the banks. Most people in town would like to organise vou some houseboat or canoe action. It's also home to the famous Nehru

Trophy Snake Boat Race.

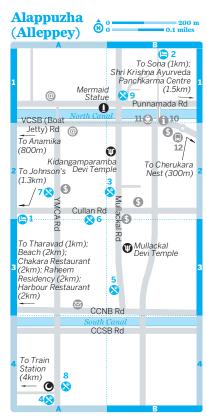


Activities

Avurveda: Shri Krishna Avurveda Panchkarma Centre

AYURVEDA

(23290728, 9847119060; www.krishnayurveda. com) For ayurvedic treatments; one-hour rejuvenation massages are ₹600. It's near the Nehru race finishing point.



Tours

Any of the dozens of travel agencies in town. guesthouses, hotels, or the KTDC can arrange canoe-boat tours of the backwaters; also see p940.

La Sleeping

For lovely canalside lazing, try the relaxed sleeping options on the backwaters a few kilometres north of Alleppey; all can arrange town pick-ups and drop offs.

The rickshaw-commission racketeers are at work here; ask to be dropped off at a landmark close to your destination if you're having problems getting where you want to go.

TOP Raheem Residency HOTEL \$\$\$ (2239767; www.raheemresidency.com; Beach Rd; renovated 1860s heritage home is a delight to visit, let alone stay in. The 10 rooms here have been restored to their former glory and

Alappuzha (Alleppey)
Sleeping
1 Dream NestA2
2 Palmy Residency B1
S Eating
3 Indian Coffee HouseB2
4 Indian Coffee HouseA4
5 Kream KornerB3
6 Kream KornerA2
7 Royale Park HotelA2
8 ThaffA4
9 Thaff B1
Information
10 DTPC Tourist Reception
CentreB1
Transport
11 Boat JettyB1
12 KSRTC Bus StandB2

have bathtubs, antique furniture and period fixtures. The common areas are airy and comfortable, there are pretty indoor courtvards, a well-stocked library, a great little pool and an excellent restaurant.

Palmy Residency

GUESTHOUSE \$ (2235938; www.palmyresort.com; Opposite Matha Jetty, Finishing Point Rd; r₹350) Run by the friendly folk of Palmy Resort, this has to be the best deal in town. It's in a brand-new building in a fab location - just over the new Matha footbridge from the bus station, but set back from the road amid lush greenery. Rooms are spa-

Cherukara Nest

HOMESTAY \$

(2251509; www.cherukaranest.com; d incl breakfast ₹750, with AC ₹1200; 🕸 @) Set in welltended gardens, with a pigeon coop at the back, this lovely heritage home has the sort of welcoming family atmosphere that makes you miss your grandma. There are four large characterful rooms, each sporting lots of polished wood touches and antediluvian doors with ornate locks. Great value.

cious and floored in Italian marble.

Palmy Lake Resort

HOMESTAY \$

(≥2235938; www.palmyresorts.com; Punnamada Rd East; cottages d ₹750) With six handsome cottages, some in bamboo and some in concrete. there's loads of charm and peace at this stunning value homestay, 3.5km north of Alleppey. It's set among palm groves near the backwaters, with gracious owner Bigi and his wife Macy providing delicious meals on request.

THE BACKWATERS

The undisputed main attraction of a trip to Kerala is travelling through the 900km network of waterways that fringe the coast and trickle inland. Long before the advent of roads, these waters were the slippery highways of Kerala, and many villagers still use paddlepower as their main form of transport. Trips through the backwaters traverse palm-fringed lakes studded with cantilevered Chinese fishing nets, and wind their way along narrow, shady canals where coir (coconut fibre), copra (dried coconut kernels) and cashews are loaded onto boats. Along the way are isolated villages where farming life continues as it has for eons. For information on the northern backwaters, see p978.

Tourist Cruises

The popular tourist cruise between Kollam and Alleppey (₹400) departs at 10.30am, arriving at 6.30pm, daily from August to March and every second day at other times. Generally, there's a 1pm lunch stop (with a basic lunch provided) and a brief afternoon chai stop. The crew has an ice box full of fruit, soft drinks and beer to sell, Bring sunscreen and a hat,

It's a scenic and leisurely way to get between the two towns, but the boat travels along only the major canals - you won't have many close-up views of the village life that makes the backwaters so magical. Some travellers say they found the eight-hour trip boring.

Another option is to take the trip halfway (₹200) and get off at the Matha Amrithanandamayi Mission (20476-2897578; www.amritapuri.org; Amrithapuri), the incongruously pink ashram of Matha Amrithanandamavi, One of India's few female gurus, Amrithanandamayi is also known as Amma (Mother), or 'The Hugging Mother,' because of the darshan (audience) she offers, often hugging thousands of people in marathon all-night sessions. The ashram runs official tours at 5pm each day. It's a huge complex, with about 2000 people living here permanently - monks, nuns, students and families, both Indian and foreign. It offers food, ayurvedic treatments, yoga and meditation, as well as souvenirs; everything from books to postcards of Amma's toes. Amma travels around for much of the year, so you might be out of luck if in need of a cuddle.

Visitors should dress conservatively and there is a strict code of behaviour. With prior arrangement, you can stay at the ashram for ₹150 per day (including simple vegetarian meals) and pick up an onward or return cruise a day or two later. Alternatively, you can take the free ferry to the other side of the canal and grab a rickshaw to Karunagappally, 10km away (around ₹170), from where you can catch buses to Alleppey (₹35, 1½ hours).

Houseboats

Renting a houseboat designed like a kettuvallam (rice barge) could be one of your most expensive experiences in India, but it's usually worth every rupee. Drifting through quiet canals lined with coconut palms, eating delicious Keralan food, meeting local villagers and sleeping on the water - it's a world away from the clamour elsewhere.

Houseboats cater for couples (one or two double bedrooms) and groups (up to seven bedrooms!). Food (and an onboard chef to cook it) is generally included in the quoted cost. Houseboats can be chartered through a multitude of private operators in Kollam (book ahead here as there are fewer boats) and Alleppey. This is the biggest business in Kerala:

Tharavad

HOMESTAY \$\$ (242044: www.tharavadheritageresort.com: West of North Police Station; d ₹1000, with AC ₹2000; 🕸) Between the town centre and beach, in a quiet canalside location, this ancestral home (the owner's grandfather was an ayurvedic doctor) has lots of glossy teak and antiques, five characterful rooms, and well-maintained gardens.

Gowri Residence

(2236371; www.gowriresidence.com; r ₹600-900, with AC ₹1200; 🕸) This rambling complex has traditional wood-panelled rooms in the main house, several types of bungalows made from either stone, wood, bamboo or thatch, and a towering treehouse. Good food is served, and there's an aviary that even includes an emu.

Sona

GUESTHOUSE \$\$ (2235211; www.sonahome.com; Lakeside, Finishing Point; r ₹800, with AC ₹1100) Run by the affable Joseph, this old heritage home has slightly shabby but high-ceilinged rooms with

some operators are unscrupulous. The quality of boats varies widely, from rust buckets to floating palaces – try to check out the boat before agreeing on a price. Travel-agency reps will be pushing you to book a boat as soon as you set foot in Kerala, but it's better to wait till you reach a backwater hub: choice is greater in Alleppey (500 boats and counting), and you're much more likely to be able to bargain down a price if you turn up and see what's on offer.

In the high season you're likely to get caught in backwater-gridlock - some travellers are disappointed by the number of boats on the water. It's not possible to travel by houseboat between Alleppey and Kollam, or between Alleppey and Kochi. Expect a boat for two people for 24 hours to cost about ₹4500-6000; for four people, ₹5500-8000; more for larger boats or for AC. Shop around to negotiate a bargain – though this will be harder in the busier seasons. Prices triple from around 20 December to 5 January.

Village Tours & Canoe Boats

More and more travellers are opting for village tours or canal-boat trips. Village tours usually involve small groups of five to six people, a knowledgeable guide and an open canoe or covered kettuvallam. The tours (from Kochi, Kollam or Alleppey) last from 21/2 to six hours and cost between ₹300 and ₹650 per person. They include visits to villages to watch coir-making, boat building, toddy (palm beer) tapping and fish farming. On longer trips a traditional Keralan lunch is often provided. The Munroe Island trip from Kollam (p936) is an excellent tour of this type; the tourist desk in Ernakulam also organises recommended tours.

In Alleppey, rented canoe boats offer a nonguided laze through the canals on a small, covered canoe for up to four people (two people for two/four hours ₹150/₹600) – a great way to spend a relaxing afternoon.

Public Ferries

If you want the local backwater transport experience, there are State Water Transport boats between Alleppey and Kottayam (₹10 to ₹11, 2½ hours) depart Alleppey at 7.30am, 9.35am, 11.30am, 2.30pm and 5.15pm; they leave Kottayam at 6.40am, 11.30am, 1pm, 3.30pm and 5.15pm. The trip crosses Vembanad Lake and has a more varied landscape than the Alleppey cruise.

Environmental Issues

Pollution from houseboat motors is becoming a major problem as boat numbers swell every season. The Keralan authorities have introduced an ecofriendly accreditation system for houseboat operators. Among the criteria an operator must meet before being issued with the 'Green Palm Certificate' are the installation of solar panels and sanitary tanks for the disposal of waste – ask operators whether they have the requisite certification. There's been talk of running boats on cleaner natural gas, though we've yet to see this being implemented. Consider choosing one of the few remaining punting, rather than motorised, boats if possible.

faded flowered curtains, and four-poster beds overlooking a well-kept garden.

Malayalam

RESORT \$\$ (2234591; malayalamresorts@yahoo.com; Punnamada; r ₹1200) With one of best locations in Alleppey, this little family-run pad has four cute cottages that practically play footsies with the backwaters. It's a bit hard to find: walk past the Keraleevam resort reception and along the canal bank.

Palm Grove Lake Resort

(2235004: www.palmgrovelakeresort.com: Punnamada; cottages d ₹1750, with AC ₹3500) Close to the starting point of the Nehru Trophy Snake Boat Race on Punnamada Lake, this isolated option has stylish, airy double cottages set amid palms, on the lake. Each plainly furnished but appealing hut has a secluded veranda, eye-catching, if jaded, outdoor showers and lake views.

Johnson's **GUESTHOUSE \$** (2245825; www.johnsonskerala.com; r ₹400-650) On a quiet street just west of town. this is a backpackers' favourite in a quirky

modern mansion. Captained by the zealous Johnson Gilbert (who is keen to sell his pricey houseboat tours), this rambling residence is filled with funky furniture and loads of plants. A cheaper bamboo hut (₹250) is in the garden.

Dream Nest

GUESTHOUSE \$ (≥9895543080; www.thedreamnest.com; Cullen Rd; d & tr ₹500-600; ***@**) With a cheery welcome, this offers fairly clean, spacious, if drab rooms in a central villa, and a slightly blokish atmosphere. There's a nothingspecial terrace out the back where you can hang out and shoot the breeze.



Royale Park Hotel

(YMCA Rd; meals ₹90-200; ⊕7am-10pm; 🔊) There is an extensive menu at this swish hotel restaurant, and the food is excellent, including scrumptious veg thalis for ₹100. You can order from the same menu in the upstairs bar and wash down your meal with a cold Kingfisher.

Chakara Restaurant MULTICUISINE \$\$\$ (2230767; Beach Rd; mini Kerala meal ₹350, mains ₹420; ⊗1-3pm & 7-9.30pm) The restaurant at Raheem Residency is Alleppey's finest, with seating on a bijou open rooftop with views over to the beach. The menu creatively combines traditional Keralan and European cuisine. Local Indian wine is available.

Harbour Restaurant MULTICUISINE \$\$ (2230767; Beach Rd; meals ₹90-120; ⊗10am-10pm) This beachside, casual little brick hut is run by the swish Raheem Residency. It's more casual and budget-conscious than the hotel's restaurant, but promises equally well prepared cuisine, and is good to drop by for a cold beer (large Kingfisher ₹110).

Kream Korner MULTICUISINE \$ (Mullackal Rd; dishes ₹20-80; ⊕8.30am-10pm) This relaxed airy place is popular with Indian and foreign families and offers a tasty menu. There's another, pint-sized branch on Cullan Rd.

Thaff INDIAN \$ (YMCA Rd; meals ₹35-110) An absurdly popular joint that has scrumptious Indian bites, with some Arabic flavours mixed in, to boot. It does succulent roast spit-chicken, scrumptious shawarma and brain-freezing ice-cream shakes. There's another location on Punnamada Rd.

Vembanad Restaurant

INDIAN \$

(Alleppey Prince Hotel; AS Rd; mains ₹50-170) Reliable dining pool-side; occasional live music, located 3km northwest of town.

Indian Coffee House

CAFE \$

(snacks around ₹10) Branches on Mullackal Rd, YMCA Rd, and Beach Rd - the latter is a pavilion in a great, breezy beachside location.



INDIAN \$\$

1 Information

DTPC Tourist Reception Centre (2253308: www.alappuzhatourism.com: \@8.30am-6pm) Remarkably rudimentary tourist info.

Mailbox (2339994: Boat Jetty Rd: per hr ₹40;

8am-9.30pm) Internet access.

National Cyber Park (2238688: YMCA Compound; per hr ₹30; ⊗10am-9pm) Internet access.

Tourist Police (**2**2251161; ⊗24hr) Next door to the DTPC.

UAE Exchange (22264407; cnr Cullan & Mul-Sun) For changing cash and travellers cheques.

Getting There & Away

Ferries run to Kottavam from the boat ietty on VCSB (Boat Jetty) Rd; see the boxed text, p940.

From the KSRTC bus stand, frequent buses head to Trivandrum (₹97, 3½ hours, every 20 minutes), Kollam (₹54) and Ernakulam (Kochi, ₹39, 1½ hours). Buses to Kottayam (₹30, 1¼ hours, every 30 minutes) are much faster than the ferry. One bus daily leaves for Kumily at 6.40am (₹110, 5½ hours). The Varkala bus (₹97, 3½ hours) leaves at 10.40am daily.

Train

There are several trains to Ernakulam (2nd class/AC chair ₹59/202, 1½ hours) and Trivandrum (₹59/202, three hours) via Kollam (₹45/165, 1½ hours). Four trains a day stop at Varkala (2nd class/AC chair ₹50/178, two hours). The train station is 4km west of town.



Getting Around

An autorickshaw from the train station to the boat jetty and KSRTC bus stand is around ₹50. Several guesthouses around town hire out scooters for ₹200 per day.

Around Alleppey

Kerala's backwaters snake in all directions from Alleppev and, while touring on a houseboat is a great experience, taking time to slow down and stay in a village can be just as rewarding.

Just 10km from Alleppey, Green Palms **Homes** (20477-2724497; www.greenpalmshomes. com; Chennamkary; r without bathroom incl full board ₹2250, r ₹3250-4000) is a series of homestays that seem a universe away, set in a picturesque backwater village, where you will sleep in basic rooms in villagers' homes among rice paddies. It's splendidly quiet, there are no roads in sight and you can take a guided walk (₹200), hire bicycles (₹50 per hour) and canoes (₹100 per hour) or take cooking classes with your hosts (₹150). Book ahead.

To get here, call ahead and catch one of the hourly ferries from Alleppey to Chennamkary (₹5, 1¼ hours). Please remember this is a traditional village; dress appropriately.

Kottayam

20481 / POP 172.867

Sandwiched between the Western Ghats and the backwaters, Kottayam is renowned for being the centre of Kerala's spice and rubber trade rather than for its aesthetic appeal. For most travellers it's a hub town, well connected to both the mountains and the backwaters.

Kottayam has a bookish history: the first Malayalam-language printing press was established here in 1820, and this was the first district in India to achieve 100% literacy. A place of churches and seminaries, it was a refuge for the Orthodox church when the Portuguese began forcing Keralan Christians to switch to Catholicism in the 16th century.

The Thirunakkara Utsavam festival is held in March at the Thirunakkara Shiva Temple.

La Sleeping

Accommodation options are pretty dire in Kottayam - you're better off heading to Kumarakon for some great top-end hotels. Also try checking for homestays at the DTPC office (22560479), which range from basic (₹1000 per person full board) to deluxe (up to US\$100).

Homestead Hotel

HOTEL \$ (22560467; KK Rd; s/d from ₹350/548, d with AC ₹1500; **③**) Easily the pick of the budget litter, this place has painstakingly maintained rooms in a blissfully quiet building off the street. The foyer sports '60s-style decor that's accidentally stumbled into vogue again, and Thali and Meenachil restaurants are right out the front. Book ahead.

Windsor Castle

(22363637; www.thewindsorcastle.net; MC Rd; s/d from US\$80/100, cottages US\$155; 🕸 🛎) This grandiose carbuncle has some of the better rooms in Kottayam - spacious and with bathtubs, and some with attractive river views, but overpriced. You may as well go for the deluxe dark wood-furnished cottages, strewn around the private backwaters. There's a pleasant restaurant overlooking

Pearl Regency

landscaped waterways.

HOTEL \$\$

(2561123; www.pearlregencyktm.com; TB Junction, MC Rd; s/d from ₹1900/2200; *@) This business-focused contender has roomy-butdull, comfily inoffensive abodes. It's efficient, decent value, and a passable stay if you're stuck in Kottayam.

Ambassador Hotel

HOTEL \$

(2563293; KK Rd; www.fhrai.com; s/d from ₹376/550) A respectable budget sleeping option, the rooms here are spartan but fairly clean, spacious and quiet. It has a bakery, bar, an adequate restaurant, and a boatshaped fish tank in the lobby.

X Eating

SOUTH INDIAN \$

(1st fl, KK Rd; meals ₹53-63; ⊗8am-8.30pm) A lovely, spotlessly kept 1st-floor room, with slatted blinds, this place is a swankier version of the typical Keralan set-meal place. The food here is great, including Malabar fish curry (₹45) and thalis (₹70-85).

Meenachil

MULTICUISINE \$

(2nd fl, KK Rd; dishes ₹60-110; @noon-3pm & 6-10pm) This is our favourite place in Kottayam to fill up on scrumptious Indian and Chinese fare. The family atmosphere is friendly, the dining room modern and tidy and the menu expansive.

Nalekattu

SOUTH INDIAN \$\$

(Windsor Hotel: MC Rd: dishes ₹140-190: Slunch & dinner) The traditional Keralan restaurant at the Windsor Castle overlooks some neat backwaters and serves tasty Keralan specialities like chemeen (mango curry) and tharavu mappas (duck in coconut gravy). There's also a recommended buffet at ₹249.

Hotel Suryaas

(Baker Junction, SB Rd; dishes ₹38-50; ⊗8am-10pm) It's no surprise this dark and cosy, vintage wood-lined dining room is packed to the rafters with hungry families come mealtime - the North and South Indian food here is excellent.

Indian Coffee House

INDIAN \$

(TB Rd) We just can't get enough of this South Indian institution serving the whole gamut of tasty Indian snacks.

1 Information

The KSRTC bus stand is 1km south of the centre: the boat jetty is a further 2km (at Kodimatha). The train station is 1km north of Kottavam. There's a handful of ATMs around.

DTPC office (22560479; dtpcktm@sancharnet.in; ⊕10am-5pm Mon-Sat) At the boat jetty. **UAE Exchange** (2303865; 1st fl. MC Rd; ⊕9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-1pm Sun) Changes cash and travellers cheques.

Getting There & Away Boat

Ferries run to Alleppey; see the boxed text, p940.

Bus

The KSRTC bus stand has buses to Trivandrum (₹93, four hours, every 20 minutes), Alleppey (₹31, 1¼ hours, every 30 minutes) and Ernakulam (Kochi, ₹42, two hours, every 20 minutes). There are also frequent buses to nearby Kumarakom (₹8, 30 minutes, every 15 minutes), to Thrissur (ordinary ₹79, four hours), Calicut (₹162, seven hours, 13 daily), Kumily for Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary (₹69, four hours, every 30 minutes) and Munnar (₹100, five hours, five daily). There are also buses to Kollam (₹60, four daily) and Varkala (₹78, three hours).

Train

Kottavam is well served by frequent trains running between Trivandrum (2nd class/AC chair ₹62/214, 3½ hours) and Ernakulam (₹40/165, 11/2 hours).



Getting Around

An autorickshaw from the jetty to the KSRTC bus stand is around ₹30, and from the bus stand to the train station about ₹20. Most trips around town cost ₹20.

Around Kottayam

KUMARAKOM

20481

Kumarakom, 16km west of Kottayam and on the shore of Vembanad Lake, is an unhurried backwater town with a smattering of dazzling top-end sleeping options. You can arrange houseboats through Kumarakom's less-crowded canals, but expect to pay considerably more than in Alleppey.

Arundhati Roy, author of the 1997 Booker Prize-winning The God of Small Things, was raised in the nearby Aymanam village.

Sights & Activities

Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary NATURE RESERVE (Indian/foreigner ₹5/45; ⊕6am-6pm) This reserve on the 5-hectare site of a former rubber plantation is the haunt of a variety of domestic and migratory birds. October to February is the time for travelling birds like the garganey teal, osprey, marsh harrier and steppey eagle; May to July is the breeding season for local species such as the Indian shag, pond herons, egrets and darters. Early morning is the best viewing time.

Buses between Kottayam's KSRTC stand and Kumarakom (₹8, 30 minutes, every 15 minutes) stop at the entrance to the sanctuary.

Sleeping

RESORT \$\$

Cruise 'N Lake (2525804; www.homestaykumarakom.com; Puthenpura Tourist Enclave; r ₹1000-1500, with AC ₹1500-2000; ★) As any estate agent will tell you, it's all about location, location, location. Crowning the tip of a small peninsula surrounded by backwaters on one side and a lawn of rice paddies on the other, this is the ideal affordable getaway. The rooms are plain, but it's lovely and secluded out here, surrounded by bucolic villages where houseboats are made by hand. To get to it, go several kilometres past the sanctuary and take a left, it's then 2km down a dirt road. Management can arrange pick-ups from Kottayam, and houseboats are available from here.

Coconut Lagoon

RESORT \$\$\$

(**2**0484-3011711; www.cghearth.com; breakfast & tax from ₹13.000: *@ Spread languidly over 9 hectares of grounds, this luxurious resort offers the ultimate in seclusion: it's accessible only by private boat. Surrounded by backwaters and with perfect sunsets guaranteed, the different tharawad (ancestral home) cottages on offer here are variously filled with polished wood, classy antique-style furnishings and neat open-air bathrooms. This place might be familiar to those who have read Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things.

Tharavadu Heritage Home GUESTHOUSE \$\$\$ (22525230; www.tharavaduheritage.com; r from ₹1200, with AC ₹2000; ★) Tharavadu means 'large family house', an apt description. Rooms are either in the superbly restored 1870s teak family mansion or in equally comfortable individual creekside cottages. All abodes are excellently crafted and come with arty touches - some have glistening teak beams while others have big bay windows and relaxing patios. It's 4km before the bird sanctuary.

ETTUMANUR

The Shiva Temple at Ettumanur, 12km north of Kottavam, has inscriptions dating from 1542, but parts of the building may be even older. The temple is noted for its exceptional woodcarvings and murals similar to those at Kochi's Mattancherry Palace. The annual **festival**, involving exposition of the idol (Shiva in his fierce form) and elephant processions, is held in February/March.

SREE VALLABHA TEMPLE

Devotees make offerings at this temple, 2km from Tiruvilla, in the form of traditional, regular all-night Kathakali performances that are open to all. Tiruvilla, 35km south of Kottayam, is on the rail route between Ernakulam and Trivandrum. Around 10km east of here, the Aranmula Boat Race is held in August/September.

THE WESTERN GHATS

Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary

204869

South India's most popular wildlife sanctuary, Periyar (224571; www.periyartigerreserve. org; Indian/foreigner ₹25/300; ⊗6am-6pm) encompasses 777 sq km and a 26-sq-km artificial lake created by the British in 1895. The vast region is home to bison, sambar, wild boar, langur, 900 to 1000 elephants and 35 to 40 tigers. Firmly established on both the Indian and foreigner tourist trails, the place can sometimes feel a bit like Disneylandin-the-Ghats, but its mountain scenery and jungle walks make for an enjoyable visit. Bring warm and waterproof clothing.

Kumily, 4km from the sanctuary, is a growing strip of hotels, spice shops and Kashmiri emporiums. Thekkady is the sanctuary centre with the KTDC hotels and boat jetty. Confusingly, when people refer to the

sanctuary they tend to use Kumily, Thekkady and Periyar interchangeably.

Sights & Activities

Various tours and trips enable you to visit the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary. Most hotels and agencies around town can arrange allday 4WD Jungle Safaris (per person ₹1600-2000; ⊕5am-6.30pm), which cover over 40km of trails in jungle bordering the park. Tours include meals as well as a paddleboat trip.

You can arrange elephant rides (per 30min ₹350) at most hotels and agents in town. If you want the extended elephant experience, you can pay ₹2500 for a 2½-hour ride that includes elephant feeding and cleaning. Cooking classes (around ₹250) are offered by many local homestays.

Forest Department boats

BOATING (per adult/child ₹40/20; ⊗departures 7.30am, 10am, 11.30am, 1.30pm & 3.30pm) These smaller, more decrepit boats offer a chance to get a bit closer to the animals than on KTDC trips, and are driven by sanctuary workers who may offer commentary. Entry to the park doesn't guarantee a place on the boat; get to the ticket office (\$\infty\$6.30am-4pm) 1\frac{1}{2} hours before each trip to buy tickets. The first and last departures offer the best prospects for wildlife spotting, and October to March are generally the best times to see animals.

KTDC boat trips

BOATING

(lower/upper deck ₹75/150) ⊗departures 2hr tours 7.30am & 3.30pm, 1hr tours 10am, 7am, 11.30am & 1.30pm) One- or two-hour trips around the lake are the usual way of touring the sanctuary. They can be enjoyable, though often packed, rowdy and not ideal for wildlife-spotting.

Ecotourism Centre OUTDOOR ADVENTURES (224571; www.periyartigerresereve.org; Thekkady Rd; ⊗9am-5pm) A number of more adventurous explorations of the park can be arranged by the Ecotourism Centre, run by the Forest Department. These include border hikes (₹750; 8am to 5pm), three-hour elevated cloud walks (₹200), 4 to 5km nature walks (₹100), full-day bamboo rafting (₹1000) and 'jungle patrols' (₹500), which cover 4 to 5km and are the best way to experience the park close up, accompanied by a trained tribal guide. Trips usually require a minimum of four or five people. There are also two-day 'tiger trail' treks (per person ₹3000, solo ₹5000), which are run by former poachers and cover 20 to 30km. On any of the tours, you can request special birdwatching guides.

Spice Gardens & Plantations **GARDENS** Interesting spice tours cost around ₹450/750 by autorickshaw/taxi (two to three hours) and can be arranged by most hotels. If you want to see a tea factory in operation, do it from here - tea-factory visits are not permitted in Munnar.

If you'd rather do a spice tour independently, you can visit a few excellent gardens outside Kumily. The one-hectare Abraham's Spice Garden (2222919; tours ₹100; Highrange Spices (▶222117; tours ₹100; ⊗7am-6pm), 3km from Kumily, has 4 hectares where you can see ayurvedic herbs and vegetables growing. A rickshaw to either spice garden and back will be around ₹250. About 13km away from Kumily is a working tea plantation (⊗8am-5pm) where you can wander around the grounds and see displays of the tea-making process for free.

Santhigiri Avurveda

(223979; Vandanmedu Junction) An excellent and authentic place for the ayurvedic experience, offering top-notch massage (₹650 to ₹1500), sirovasthi (₹1200) and long-term treatments lasting seven to 14 days.

La Sleeping

INSIDE THE SANCTUARY

The Ecotourism Centre can arrange park accommodation in a basic tent/bamboo cottage (d incl breakfast ₹1000/1500), and the KTDC runs three steeply priced hotels in the park. It's a good idea to make reservations (at any KTDC office), particularly for weekends. Note that there's effectively a curfew at these places - guests are not permitted to roam the sanctuary after 6pm.

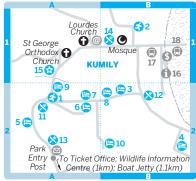
Lake Palace

HOTEL \$\$\$ (223888: www.ktdc.com: r incl all meals ₹16.000-25,000) Located on an island in the middle of the Periyar Lake, this is the best value of the government hotels inside the park. It is a stunningly restored old palace that has six charismatic rooms, all decorated with flair using antique furnishings and a selection of modern conveniences (like flat-screen TVs). Staying in the midst of the sanctuary gives you the best chance of seeing wildlife, from your private terrace. Transport is by boat across the lake.

KUMILY

Green View Homestay HOMESTAY \$\$ (≥224617; www.sureshgreenview.com; Rd: r incl breakfast ₹600-1750) Grown from its

Kumily & Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary



humble homestay origins to be practically hotel-size today, Greenview is a smashing place that manages to retain its personal and friendly family welcome, and continues to get rave reviews. The buildings house several classes of immaculately maintained rooms with private balconies, bamboo or wood furniture and loads of greenery. Vegetarian meals (₹65) and cooking lessons (₹250) are available.

Claus Garden

HOMESTAY \$\$ (222320; www.homestay.in; r ₹800-1000) Set well away from the hustle and bustle, this lovely big building has gently curving balconies, warm, bright colours in spades, and is surrounded by a lush green garden. The excellent rooms are spacious and have neat touches like colourful blankets, rugs, and artwork. Two doubles sharing one bathroom would be an ideal family choice (₹2000). Top

HOTEL \$\$\$

Spice Village

value.

(20484-3011711; crs@cghearth.com; Thekkady Rd; villas ₹12,000-22,000; ع) This place has captivating, spacious cottages that are smart yet cosily rustic, in pristinely kept grounds. Its restaurant does lavish lunch and dinner buffets (₹1000 each) and you can find the Wildlife Interpretation Centre (⊕7.30am-9.30pm) here, which has a resident naturalist showing slides and answering questions about the park.

Mickey Homestay

GUESTHOUSE \$ (223196; www.mickeyhomestay.com; Bypass Rd; r ₹350-850) Mickey has just a handful of intimate rooms in a family house, all with

Kumily & Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary Activities, Courses & Tours Chrissie's Cafe..... (see 3) Coffee Inn (see 5) 2 Santhigiri Ayurveda.....B1 12 Ebony's Cafe.....B2 Sleeping 14 Shri Krishna.....B1 3 Chrissie's Hotel......B2 4 Claus Garden B2 ♠ Entertainment 15 Kerala Cultural Centre A1 7 Green View Homestay...... A2 Information 8 Mickey Homestay..... B2 16 DTPC Office......B1 Ecotourism Centre.....(see 1) 10 Tranquilou.....B2 **Transport** Eating 18 Tamil Nadu Bus Station......B1

homely touches that make them some of the most comfortable in town. Balconies have rattan furniture and hanging bamboo seats and the whole place is surrounded by greenery.

Chrissie's Hotel

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(②224155; www.chrissies.in; Bypass Rd; r ₹1600-2000) This four-storey building behind the popular expat-run restaurant of the same name somehow manages to blend in with the forest-green surrounds. The chic rooms are spacious and bright, with cheery furnishings, lamps and colourful pillows – the more expensive ones, with balconies, are much better than the cheaper ground-floor options.

Coffee Inn

GUESTHOUSE \$

(D222763; coffeeinn@sancharnet.in; Thekkady Rd; huts ₹250-700, r from ₹1000) With rustic bamboo huts, tree houses and cottages in a garden overlooking the sanctuary, Coffee Inn has swankier digs in its main building, where the wood-lined rooms have a cosy, characterful feel, several offering balconies with sweeping views. However, some readers say the rooms can be musty.

Tranquilou

HOMESTAY \$\$

(⊉223269; Bypass Rd; r ₹1000-1200;@) Friendly family homestay huddled among some hush; the two doubles that adjoin a shared sitting room are a good family

option. **El-Paradiso**

HOMESTAY \$\$

(⊋22350; www.goelparadiso.com; Bypass Rd; r ₹1250; ⓐ) This family homestay has fresh rooms, with balconies with hanging

chairs, or opening onto a terrace overlooking greenery at the back.



There are plenty of good cheap veg restaurants in the bazaar area.

Periyar Cafe

INDIAN \$

(meals ₹40-140) Painted in kindergartenbright colours and papered with zinging advertisements, this cheery diner serves up loads of North and South Indian dishes at sensible prices. Near the park entrance, it's perfect for an early breakfast or quick lunch between animal-spotting trips.

Chrissie's Cafe

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Bypass Rd; snacks ₹50-80, meals ₹110-180) A perennially popular haunt, this airy 1st-floor cafe satisfies travellers with cakes and snacks, excellent coffee, and well-prepared Western faves like pizza and pasta.

Ebony's Cafe

MULTICUISINE \$

(Bypass Rd; meals ₹70-100) This small, friendly 1st-floor joint serves up a tasty assortment of Indian and Western food with a smile and a background of traveller-friendly music.

Shri Krishna

INDIAN \$

(Bypass Rd; meals ₹35-85) A great local favourite, serving up spicy pure veg meals including several takes on thali.

Coffee Inn

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(meals ₹75-200) This laid-back restaurant serves just a few Indian and Western meals. The food is reasonable and the spice-garden setting is nice, but be warned, it can take a while to arrive: bring a book.

Ambadi Restaurant

INDIAN \$\$ (dishes ₹80-100) At the hotel of the same

name, this popular place serves OK North and South Indian dishes (more importantly, Kingfisher beer, ₹100) in a smart, breezy indoor dining room.

😭 Entertainment

Kerala Cultural Centre CULTURAL PROGRAM (≥9446072901: admission ₹150) For **Kathakali** performances, visit this centre, which comprises the Mudra Kathakali Centre, for shows at 4.30pm and 7pm (make-up starts 30 minutes before each show; visitors can attend and it's very photogenic), and the Kerala Kalari Centre, for hour-long Kalaripayattu demonstrations (admission ₹200) at 6pm daily.



Information

DTPC office (222620; ⊕10am-5pm Mon-Sat) Behind the bus stand, not as useful as the Ecotourism Centre.

Ecotourism Centre (224571; ⊕9am-5pm) For park tours and walks.

Kumily Internet (222170; Thekkady Junction; per hr ₹40; ⊗9am-9.30pm)

State Bank of Travancore (@10am-3.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) Changes travellers cheques and currency; has an ATM accepting foreign cards.

Wildlife Information Centre (▶222028: 6am-6pm) Above the boat jetty in Thekkady.



Getting There & Away

Buses originating or terminating at Periyar start and finish at Aranya Nivas, but they also stop at the Kumily bus stand, at the eastern edge of town.

Eight buses daily operate between Ernakulam (Kochi) and Kumily (₹110, five hours). Buses leave every 30 minutes for Kottayam (₹69, four hours), with two direct buses to Trivandrum at 8.45am and 11am (₹145, eight hours) and one daily bus to Alleppey at 1.10pm ($₹85, 5\frac{1}{2}$ hours).

Tamil Nadu buses leave every 30 minutes to Madurai (₹42-56, four hours) from the Tamil Nadu bus stand just over the border.



Getting Around

Kumily is about 4km from Periyar Lake; you can catch the bus (almost as rare as the tigers), take an autorickshaw (₹40) or set off on foot; it's a pleasant, shady walk into the park. Bicycle hire is available from many guesthouses.

Munnar

304865 / ELEV 1524M / POP 68,000

Wander just a few kilometres outside the scruffy little hill station of Munnar and you'll be engulfed in a sea of a thousand shades of green. The lolling hills all around are covered by a sculptural carpet of teatrees, and the mountain scenery is magnificent - you're often up above the clouds, watching veils of mist cling below the mountaintops. Once known as the High Range of Travancore, today Munnar is the commercial centre of some of the world's highest tea-growing estates.

Sights & Activities

The main reason to be in Munnar is to explore the lush, tea-filled hillocks that surround it. Hotels, homestays, travel agencies, autorickshaw drivers and practically every passer-by will want to organise a day of sightseeing for you: shop around.

Tata Tea Museum

MUSEUM

(230561; adult/child ₹75/35; ⊗10am-4pm Tue-Sun) Located around 1.5km north of town, this museum is, unfortunately, about as close as you'll get to a working tea factory around Munnar. It's a slightly sanitised version of the real thing, but it still shows the basic process. A collection of old bits and pieces from the colonial era, including photographs and a 1905 tea-roller, are also kept here. The short walk to here from town is lovely, passing some of the most accessible tea plantations from Munnar town.



了 Tours

The DTPC runs a couple of fairly rushed full-day tours to points around Munnar. The 6pm) visits Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary, several viewpoints, waterfalls, plantations, a sandalwood forest and villages. The Tea Valley tour (per person ₹300; ⊗10am-6pm) visits Echo Point, Top Station and Rajamalai (for Eravikulam National Park), among other places. You can hire a day's taxi to visit the main local sights for around ₹1100 - there's a taxi office in Munnar.

La Sleeping

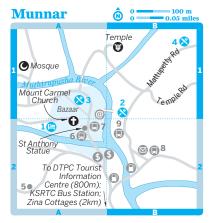
The best options are mostly outside Munnar town centre.

AROUND TOWN

TOP Zina Cottages

HOMESTAY \$

(230349: r incl tax ₹800-1000) On the outskirts of town but immersed in lush tea plantations, the 10 rooms in this hospitable homestay are an outstanding deal. Frilly touches in the rooms and stunning vistas



come as standard, as do the local information and hospitable cups of tea provided by the legendary Mr Iype, from the Tourist Information Service, who has been namechecked in travel books by Devla Murphy and Bill Aitken. However, wild boars mean going out for a wander after 7pm is a no-no.

JJ Cottage

(230104;jjcottagemunnar@sancharnet.in;d₹350-800) The mothering family at this superb place will go out of its way to make sure your stay is comfortable. The varied and uncomplicated rooms are ruthlessly clean, bright and have TV and geysers. The one deluxe room has frilly pink curtains and sweeping

Green View

views.

GUESTHOUSE \$ (230940; greenview_munnar@sify.com; d ₹400-600) With a friendly welcome, this tidy house next door to JJ Cottage has fresh budget rooms. And the young owner is setting up a new place - Green Woods Anachal (d₹750) outside Munnar that's a budget option out in the tea plantations; there are four rooms.

Westwood Riverside Resort

(230884-6; www.westwoodmunnar.com; Alwaye-Munnar (AM) Rd; r incl breakfast & dinner ₹3000-5000) It doesn't appear promising from outside, but inside is surprisingly nice, with lots of polished wood floors, heartfelt murals on the walls, and rooms that are plain, spotless and inviting – the pick have river views.

Kaippallil Homestay

GUESTHOUSE \$ (230203; www.kaippallil.com; r ₹200-600) Up the hill and away from (most of) the clatter of the bazaar, Kaippallil is the best budget

Munnar
Sleeping
1 Kaippallil HomestayA2
S Eating
2 Eastend B1
3 Rapsy Restaurant
4 SN AnnexeB1
Information 5 Forest Information CentreA2
Transport
Autorickshaw Stand(see 9)
6 Buses to CoimbatoreA2
7 Buses to Ernakulam, Kottayam
& TrtivandrumA2
8 Buses to Kumily & MaduraiB2
9 Buses to Top StationB2

bet in town, though by no means a 'homestay'. A new part to the building is unfinished, giving it a half-built look, but the rooms are reasonably clean and have balconies and sweeping views. Two basic but characterful small rooms in a neighbouring cottage are the cheapest option.

MUNNAR HILLS

TOP Rose Gardens HOMESTAY \$\$\$

(204864-278243; www.rosegardens.com; NH49 Rd, Karadipara; r ₹3500) Around 10km south of Munnar. Despite its handy location on the main road, with good bus connections, this is a peaceful spot overlooking Tomy's idyllic plant nursery, with over 240 types of plants. Rooms are large and comfortable, and the family are charming. Rajee's home cooking is delicious, the coffee home-grown, the honey from their hives. Cooking lessons are free, including fresh coconut pancakes for breakfast and delicately spiced Keralan dishes for dinner.

Dew Drops

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(20484-2216455; wilsonhomes2003@yahoo.co.in, www.dewdropsmunnar.com; Kallar; r incl breakfast ₹1200) Set in the thick forest around 20km south of Munnar, this fantastic, remote place lies on 97 hectares of spice plantation and farmland. The resplendent building is expertly constructed, with seven bright, simple rooms. Each room has a veranda on which you can sit and enjoy the hush, and the small restaurant has expansive views. The peace here is zen. It's 20km from Munnar; call for a pick-up (₹50 per person).

British County

GUESTHOUSE \$\$ (22371761; touristdesk@satyam.net.in; ET City Rd, Anachal person full board ₹2000) Around 11km southeast of Munnar, with its veranda facing a stunning panorama, this appealing little guesthouse has two nice fresh rooms with views. There's a simple little treehouse for rent too, and steps lead down into the vallev. A taxi from Munnar will cost ₹400. This is the overnight base for the Tourist Desk's Munnar Hillstation Tour from Kochi.

Bracknell Forest

GUESTHOUSE \$\$\$ (≥231555: www.bracknellforestmunnar.com: Ottamaram; r ₹5000; 🗟) A remote-feeling 9.5km south of Munnar, this place houses neat, handsome rooms with balconies and great views overlooking a lush valley. It's surrounded by deep forest on all sides. Breakfast and a few hours trekking are included: meals cost ₹350 - the small restaurant has wraparound views. A transfer from Munnar costs ₹400.

Windermere Estate

RESORT \$\$\$ (reservations 0484-2425237; www.windermere munnar.com; Pothamedu; AC r ₹6900-14,800; 🕸) Windermere is a boutique-meets-countryretreat 4km south of Windermere. There are farmhouse rooms and newer, swankier cottages with spectacular views, surrounded by shush and 26 hectares of cardamom and coffee plantations. Book ahead.

Eating

Early-morning food stalls in the bazaar serve breakfast snacks and cheap meals.

SN Annexe

INDIAN \$\$

(AM Rd; meals ₹55-130; ⊗7am-10pm) SN restaurant's little sis has a nice deep-orange look with slatted blinds at the windows. It's madly popular with families for its great range of thalis: take your pick from special, Rajasthani, Gujarati, Punjabi and more, plus a dazzling array of veg dishes.

Eastend

INDIAN \$\$

(Temple Rd; dishes ₹120-170; ⊗noon-3.30pm & 6.30-10.30pm) In the same-named hotel, this frilly-curtained, smartish place is the best place in town to head for nonveg Indian dishes, with Chinese, North and South Indian and Kerala specialities on the menu.

Royal Retreat

(Kannan Devan Hills; www.royalretreat.co.in; dishes ₹50-75; ⊗7am-9.30pm) This longstanding favourite has reliably tasty and fresh Indian cooking served in nicely twee rooms with checked tablecloths, in a hotel set amid gardens. Try specialities such as Alleppey fish curry and bhindi masala (okra curry).

Rapsy Restaurant

INDIAN \$

(Bazaar; dishes ₹30-80; ⊗6am-10pm) This holein-the-wall is packed at lunchtime, with locals lining up for Rapsy's famous paratha or biryani (from ₹40). It also makes a decent stab at fancy international dishes like Spanish omelette and Israeli shakshuka (scrambled eggs with tomatoes and spices).

SN Restaurant

INDIAN \$

(AM Rd; meals ₹35-90; ⊗6am-10pm) Just south of the tourist office, SN is a cheery place with an attractive red interior, which seems to be perpetually full of people digging into masala dosas (₹35) and other Indian veg and nonveg dishes.

Information

There are ATMs near the bridge, south of the bazaar.

DTPC Tourist Information Office (231516: Alway-Munnar Rd; ⊗8.30am-7pm) Marginally

Forest Information Centre (2231587; enpmunnar@sifv.com:

⊗8am-5pm)

Olivia Communications (per hr ₹35:

9am-10.30pm) Surprisingly fast internet.

State Bank of Travancore (≥ 230274: ⊕10am-3.30pm Mon-Sat, to noon Sun) Has an ATM.

Tourist Information Service (▶230349. 9447190954) Joseph lype is a walking Swissarmy knife of Munnar information - he no longer has an office in town, but will supply information on trekking, taxis and so on, if you call.

Getting There & Away

Roads around Munnar are in poor condition and can be affected by monsoon rains, so bus times may vary. The main KSRTC bus station (AM Rd) is south of town, but it's best to catch buses from stands in Munnar town (where more frequent private buses also depart).

There are around 10 buses a day to Ernakulam (Kochi, ₹80, 5½ hours) and a few services to Kottayam (₹85/101 ordinary/super fast, five hours), and Trivandrum (₹191, nine hours).



Getting Around

DTPC rents out bicycles for ₹15/150 per hour/ day. **Gokulam Bike Hire** (29447237165; per day ₹250; ⊗7.30am-7pm) has several motorbikes for hire, as does SN Restaurant (per day ₹250).

Autorickshaws ply the hills around Munnar with bone-shuddering efficiency; they charge up to ₹650 for a full day's sightseeing.

Around Munnar

ERAVIKULAM NATIONAL PARK

Sixteen kilometres from Munnar, Eravikulam National Park (Indian/foreigner ₹15/200; ⊕8am-5pm Mar-Dec) is home to the endangered, but almost tame, Nilgiri tahr (a type of mountain goat). From Munnar, an autorickshaw/taxi costs ₹250/500 return; a government bus takes you the final 4km from the checkpoint (₹20).

CHINNAR WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

About 10km past Marayoor and 60km northeast of Munnar, this wildlife sanctuary (www.chinnar.org; Indian/foreigner ₹10/100, camera/video ₹25/150; ⊗7am-6pm) hosts deer, leopards, elephants and the endangered grizzled giant squirrel. Trekking (3hr trek ₹150) and tree house (s/d ₹1000/1250) or hut (s/d ₹1500/1800) accommodation within the sanctuary are available, as well as ecotour programs like river-trekking, cultural visits, and waterfall treks (around ₹150). For details contact the Forest Information Centre in Munnar. Buses from Munnar can drop you off at Chinnar (₹35, 1½ hours), or taxi hire for the day will cost around ₹1100.

TOP STATION

Come here, on Kerala's border with Tamil Nadu, for spectacular views over the Western Ghats. From Munnar, four daily buses (₹35, from 7.30am, 1½ hours) make the steep 32km climb in around an hour, or you could book a return taxi (₹750).

THATTEKKAD BIRD SANCTUARY

A serene 25-sq-km park in the foothills of the West Ghats, cut through by two rivers and two streams, Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary (20485-2588302: Indian/foreigner ₹10/100. camera/video ₹25/150; ⊕6.30am-6pm) is home to over 320 fluttering species - unusual in that they are forest, rather than water birds - including Malabar grey hornbills, Ripley owl, jungle nightjar, grey drongo, darters and rarer species like the Sri Lankan frogmouth. There are kingfishers, flycatchers, warblers, sunbirds and flower peckers (who weigh only 4g). There's lots of other wildlife, including the occasional elephant, leopard, bear, snakes (including cobras), sambar monkey and flying squirrels, and 120 species of butterflies. You can arrange two- or three-hour **treks** (up to 5/10 people per person ₹500/250). To stay in the **Treetop Machan** (Indian/Foreigner dm ₹80/150, d incl meals ₹1500-2500) in the sanctuary, contact the **assistant wildlife warden** (☑0485-2588302) at Kothamangalam. Another option is the **homestay** (☑9947506188; per person incl meals ₹750) of the enthusiastic Ms Sudah.

For more luxury, visit the lovely Birds **Lagoon Resort** (20485-2572444; www.birds lagoon.com; Palamatton, Thattekkad; s/d incl breakfast €60/70, with AC from €65/75; **※ ②**). Set deep in the villages near Thattekkad, this low-key resort lies on a seasonal lake among spacious and manicured grounds. The basic rooms here are roomy and comfy, with lots of wood trim and lamp lighting. The whole place feels refreshingly remote and is particularly popular with visiting ornithologists. It's 16km from Kothamangalam. There's also the tented Hornbill Camp (20484 2092280; www.thehornbillcamp.com; d full board ₹5000) with accommodation in large permanent tents, in a sublimely peaceful location, cooled by fans and facing the Periyar River. Kayaking, cycling and a spice-garden tour are included in the price. It's around 8km from Thattekkad by road.

Thattekkad is on the Ernakulam–Munnar road. Take a direct bus from either Ernakulam (₹29, two hours) or Munnar (₹50, three hours) to Kothamangalam, from where a Thattekkad bus travels the final 12km (₹6, 25 minutes).

Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary

Possibly the most protected environment in South India – it's nestled behind three dams in a valley surrounded by Keralan and Tamil Nadu sanctuaries – Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary (www.parambikulam.org; Indian/foreigner ₹10/100, video/camera ₹100/25; ⊗7am-6pm) constitutes 285 sq km of Kiplingstorybook scenery and wildlife-spotting goodness. It's home to elephants, bison, gattr, sloths, sambar, crocodiles, tigers, panthers and some of the largest teak trees in Asia. The sanctuary is best avoided during monsoon (June to August) and it sometimes closes in March and April.

Contact the **Ecocare Centre** (**②**04253-245025) in Palakkad to arrange tours of the park, **hikes** (1-/2-day trek ₹3000/6000) and stays on the reservoir's freshwater island

(r ₹5000). There are 150 beds in tree-top huts (from ₹2500) throughout the park; book through the ecocare centre. Boating or rafting costs ₹600 for one hour.

You have to enter the park from Pollachi (40km from Coimbatore and 49km from Palakkad in Tamil Nadu. There are at least two buses in either direction between Pollachi and Parambikulam via Annamalai daily (₹15, 1½ hours). The nearest train station is Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, from where you can board buses to Pollachi.

CENTRAL KERALA

Kochi (Cochin)

20484 / POP 1.36 MILLION

Serene Kochi has been drawing traders and explorers to its shores for over 600 years. Nowhere in India could you find such a mix: giant fishing nets from China, a 400-yearold synagogue, ancient mosques, Portuguese houses, and crumbling remains of the British Raj. The result is an unlikely blend of medieval Portugal, Holland and an English village grafted onto the tropical Malabar Coast. It's a delightful place to spend some time and nap in some of India's finest heritage accommodation.

Mainland Ernakulam is the hectic transport and cosmopolitan hub of Kochi, while the historical towns of Fort Cochin and Mattancherry remain wonderfully serene - thick with the smell of the past.

While you're here, the perfect read is Salman Rushdie's the Moor's Last Sigh, which bases much action around Mattancherry and the Synagogue.

Sights

FORT COCHIN

TOP Mattancherry Palace PALACE

(Map p956; Dutch Palace; 2226085; Bazaar Rd; admission ₹5; ⊗8am-5pm) Admission is a bargain to this interesting building. Presented by the Portuguese in 1555, Mattancherry Palace was a generous gift presented to the Raja of Kochi, Veera Kerala Varma (1537-61), as a gesture of goodwill. More probably, it was a used as a sweetener to securing trading privileges. The Dutch renovated the palace in 1663, hence its alternative name, the Dutch Palace.

The star attractions here are the astonishingly preserved Hindu murals, depicting scenes from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and Puranic legends in intricate detail. The central hall on the 1st floor is now a portrait gallery of maharajas from 1864. There's an impressive collection of palanquins (handcarried carriages), bejewelled outfits and splendidly carved ceilings in every room. The ladies' bedchamber downstairs features a cheerful, impressively multitasking Krishna, using his eight hands and two feet to engage in foreplay with eight happy milkmaids, whilst also managing to play the flute. Photography is prohibited.

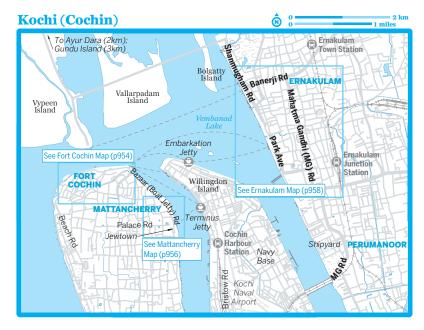
TOP Kerala Folklore Museum MUSEUM (0484-2665452; Folklore Junction, Theyara; admission ₹200; ⊗9.30am-7pm) This incredible place is well worth the journey - on the southeast outskirts of Ernakulam. It's a private museum created from ancient temples and beautiful old houses collected by its owner, an antique dealer, over three years. It includes over 5000 artefacts and covers three architectural styles: Malabar on the ground floor, Kochi on the 1st, Travanbur on the 2nd. There are 3000-year-old burial urns 'nannangadi', in which people were buried in the foetal position, and Where the Wild Things Are-style masks carved from jack-fruit trees. Upstairs is a beautiful woodlined theatre, with a 17th-century wooden ceiling, where performances (Indian/ foreigner ₹100/350: \$\infty\$6.30-8pm Sep-Mar\$) take place nightly. A rickshaw here should cost ₹70, or you can take any bus to Thivara from where it's a ₹20 rickshaw ride. An autorickshaw from Fort Cochin will cost ₹150.

Look out for the owner's new cultural museum, which is due to open in Mattancherry in a vast old godown (warehouse) close to the synagogue.

TOP Pardesi Synagogue & Jew Town

SYNAGOGUE

(Map p956; admission ₹5; ⊕10am-1pm & 3-5pm Sun-Thu, closed Jewish hols) Originally built in 1568, this synagogue was partially destroyed by the Portuguese in 1662, and rebuilt two years later when the Dutch took Kochi. It features an ornate gold pulpit and elaborate hand-painted, willow-pattern floor tiles from Canton, China, which were added in 1762. It's magnificently illuminated by chandeliers (from Belgium) and coloured-glass lamps. The graceful clock tower was built in 1760. There is an upstairs balcony for women who worshipped separately according to



Orthodox rites. Note that shorts or sleeveless tops are not allowed inside.

Jew Town AREA

The synagogue is smack in the middle of Jew Town (Map p956), a bustling port area and centre of the Kochi spice trade. Scores of small firms huddle together in old, dilapidated buildings and the air is filled with the biting aromas of ginger, cardamom, cumin, turmeric and cloves, though the lanes around the Dutch Palace and synagogue are packed with antique and tourist-curio shops rather than spices. Look out for the Jewish names on some of the buildings.

At the tip of Fort Cochin sit the unofficial emblems of Kerala's backwaters: cantilevered **Chinese fishing nets** (Map p954). A legacy of traders from the AD 1400 court of Kubla Khan, these enormous, spiderlike contraptions require at least four people to operate their counterweights at high tide. Unfortunately, modern fishing techniques are making these labour-intensive methods less and less profitable.

Indo-Portuguese Museum MUSEUM

(Map p954; 2215400; Indian/foreigner ₹10/25; ⊗9am-1pm & 2-6pm Tue-Sun) This museum in the garden of the Bishop's House preserves the heritage of one of India's earliest Catholic communities, including vestments, silver processional crosses and altarpieces from the Cochin diocese. The basement contains remnants of the Portuguese Fort Immanuel.

St Francis Church

IURCH

(Map p954; Bastion St) Believed to be India's oldest European-built church, it was originally constructed in 1503 by Portuguese Franciscan friars. The edifice that stands here today was built in the mid-16th century to replace the original wooden structure. Adventurer Vasco da Gama, who died in Cochin in 1524, was buried in this spot for 14 years before his remains were taken to Lisbon – you can still visit his tombstone in the church.

Dutch Cemetery

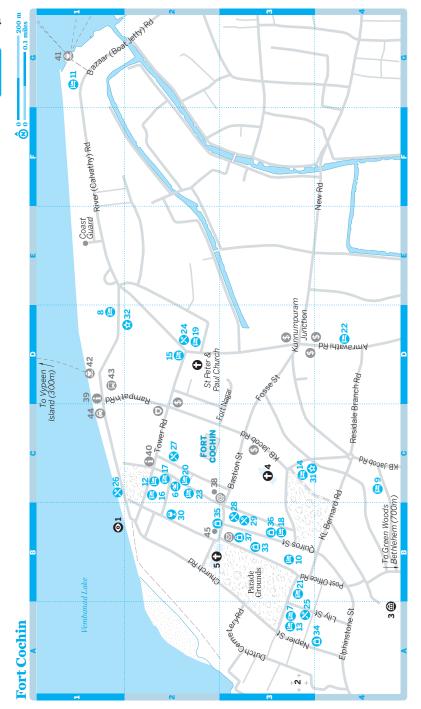
HISTORIC SI

(Map p954; Beach Rd) Consecrated in 1724, this cemetery contains the worn and dilapidated graves of Dutch traders and soldiers. Its gates are normally locked but a caretaker might let you in, or ask at St Francis Church.

Santa Cruz Basilica

CHURCH

(Map p954; cnr Bastion St & KB Jacob Rd) The imposing Catholic basilica was originally built on this site in 1506, though the current building dates to 1902. Inside you'll find artefacts from the different eras in Kochi and a striking pastel-coloured interior.



F O	rt Coemn			
ງ S	ights		27 Kashi Art Cafe	C2
1	Chinese Fishing Nets	B1	Malabar Junction	(see 13)
2	Dutch Cemetery	АЗ	Menorah Restaurant	(see 12)
3	Indo-Portuguese Museum	A4	Old Harbour Hotel	(see 16)
	Kashi Art Cafe	(see 27)	28 Shala	B3
4	Santa Cruz Basilica	C3	29 Teapot	B3
5	St Francis Church	B2		
			C Drinking	
<u> </u>	ctivities, Courses & Tours		30 XL	B2
	Ayush	(see 19)		
6	Grande Residencia Hotel	C2	★ Entertainment	
			31 Kerala Kathakali Centre	СЗ
S	leeping		32 Kerala Kathakali Centre (Old	
7	Bernard Bungalow	АЗ	Theatre)	D2
8	Brunton Boatyard	D1		
9	Daffodil	C4	Shopping	
10	Delight Home Stay	B3	33 Cinnamon	B3
11	Fort House	G1	34 Fabindia	A4
12	Koder House	C2	35 Idiom Bookshop	B2
13	Malabar House	АЗ	36 Niraamaya	B3
14	Mother Tree	C3	37 Tribes India	B3
15	Noah's Ark	D2		
16	Old Harbour Hotel	C2	Information	
17	Princess Inn	C2	38 Indoworld	C2
18	Raintree Lodge	B3	39 KTDC Tourist Reception Centre	D1
19	Royal Grace Tourist Home	D2	40 Tourist Desk Information	
20	Sonnetta Residency	C2	Counter	C2
21	Spencer Home	B3		
22	Tea Bungalow	D4	Transport	
23	Walton's Homestay	C2	41 Customs Jetty	G1
			42 Ferry to Vypeen Island	D1
S E	ating		43 Fort Cochin Bus Stand	D1
	Arca Nova	(see 11)	44 Tourist Taxi Stand	C1
24	Casa Linda	D2	45 Vasco Tourist Information	
25	Dal Roti	A3	Centre	B2
26	Fishmongers	C1		

GALLERY

Kashi Art Cafe

(Map p954; Burgher St; ⊗8.30am-7.30pm) The pioneer of Fort Cochin's art revival, Kashi displays changing exhibitions of local artists. There's another gallery on Bazaar Rd, which opens if there's an exhibition on.



Activities

Grande Residencia Hotel SWIMMING

(Map p954; Princess St, Fort Cochin) Nonguests can swim at the hotel's small pool for ₹350 per person.

Cherai Beach (Vypeen Island) SWIMMING For a dip in the ocean, you can make a day trip out to the lovely white-sand Cherai Beach (p966), a short journey by ferry to Vypeen Island.

Avur Dara AYURVEDA

(22502362; www.ayurdara.com; Murikkumpadam, Vypeen Island; ⊗9am-5.30pm) Run by third-generation ayurvedic practitioner Dr Subhash, this delightful waterside treatment centre specialises in long-term treatments. By appointment only. Massage and *sirodara* (steady stream of oil poured onto the forehead) costs ₹1000. It's 4km from the Vypeen Island ferry (autorick-shaw ₹35).

Ayush

AYURVEDA

(Map p954; **2**6456566; KB Jacob Rd, Fort Cochin; massage from ₹900; ⊗8am-8pm) Part of an



India-wide chain of ayurvedic centres, this place also does long-term treatments.

Kerala Ayurveda

SVM Ayurveda Centre

AYURVEDA

(Kerala Ayurveda Pharmacy Ltd; №9847371667; www.svmayurveda.com; Quiero St; massage from ₹600; ⊕9.30am-7pm) A small Fort Cochin centre, this offers relaxing massages and Hatha yoga (₹400, 1½ hours) daily at 8am. Longer rejuvenation packages are also available.

Courses

The Kerala Kathakali Centre (p963) has lessons in classical Kathakali dance, music and make-up (from ₹350 per hour).

For a crash course in the martial art of *kalarippayat*, head out to Ens Kalari (p963), a famed training centre, which offers short intensive courses from one week to one month.

Cook & Eat

COOKING

(☑2215377; simonroy@hotmail.com; Quiros St; classes ₹550; ②11am & 6pm) Mrs Leelu Roy runs a popular two-hour cooking class called 'Cook & Eat' in her great big family kitchen, teaching five dishes to classes of five to 10 people. Several of the homestays in towns are also happy to organise cooking classes for their guests.

Mattancherry
⊚ Sights
1 Mattancherry PalaceB2
2 Pardesi SynagogueB2
Sleeping
3 Caza MariaB2
S Eating
4 Café Jew TownB2
5 Caza MariaB2
6 Ginger HouseB2
7 Ramathula Hotel A1
8 Shri KrishnaA2
Shopping
9 NiraamayaB2
Transport
10 Mattancherry JettyB2

Tours

Most hotels and tourist offices can arrange a day trip out to the **Elephant training camp** (⊗7am-6pm) at Kudanadu, 50km from Kochi. Here you can go for a ride (₹200) and even help out with washing the gentle beasts if you arrive at 8am. Entry is free, though the elephant trainers will expect a small tip. A return trip out here in a taxi should cost around ₹700 to ₹1200.

Tourist Desk Information Counter

BOATING, WILDLIFE WATCHING

This private tour agency (p964) runs the popular full-day Water Valley Tour (day tour ₹650) through local canals and lagoons. A canoe trip through smaller canals and villages is included, as is lunch and hotel pickups. It also offers a Wayanad Wildlife tour (2 nights ₹5500), and Munnar Hillstation tour (1 night ₹2500). Prices include accommodation, transport and meals.

KTDC BOATING

The KTDC (p964) has **backwater tours** (½-day tour ₹450) at 8.30am and 2pm, and tourist **motor-boat tours** (2½hr tour ₹150) around Fort Cochin at 9am and 2pm. Its full-day **houseboat backwater trips** (day tour ₹800; ⊗8am-6.30pm) stops for you to see local weaving factories, spice gardens and, most importantly, toddy tapping!

Festivals & Events

The eight-day **Ernakulathappan Utsavam festival**, in January/February, culminates in

a procession of 15 decorated elephants, ecstatic music and fireworks.

Sleeping

Fort Cochin is an ideal place to escape the noise and chaos of the mainland – it's tranquil and romantic, with some excellent accommodation choices. This could be India's homestay capital, with hundreds of family houses offering near-identical, large and clean budget rooms.

Ernakulam is much cheaper and more convenient for onward travel, but the ambiance and accommodation choices there are less inspiring. Regardless of where you stay, book ahead during December and January.

FORT COCHIN

(Mapp954; ②2216666; www.malabarhouse.com; Parade Ground Rd; r€220, ste incl breakfast €300-360;
②②②) What may just be one of the fanciest boutique hotels in Kerala, Malabar flaunts its uberhip blend of modern colours and period fittings like it's not even trying. It has a restaurant and wine bar. While the suites are huge and lavishly appointed, the standard rooms are more snug. Also check out their lush retreat **Privacy at Sanctuary Bay**

(cottage/ste €220/360) or gorgeous ecofriendly

house boat, **Discovery** (d full board €450).

Brunton Boatyard

(Map p954; ②2215461; brunton boatyard@cg hearth.com; River Rd; r₹18,700-25,000; №@ №)

This imposing hotel faithfully reproduces 16th- and 17th-century Dutch and Portuguese architecture in its grand complex. All of the rooms look out over the harbour, and have bathtub and balconies with a refreshing sea breeze that beats AC any day.

Noah's Ark

(Map p954; ②2215481; www.noahsarkcochin.com; 1/508 Fort Kochi Hospital Rd; r₹2750-2900; 壓⑩)

An upmarket, huge modern house, with a sweeping spiral staircase from the reception room and a variety of gleamingly clean, appealing rooms (one with a balcony), plus a friendly welcome.

 out the back and a large secondhand bookshop downstairs. The bird-filled garden has one AC garden **cottage** (d ₹1200) available for rent.

Tea Bungalow

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p954; ☑3019200; www.teabungalow.in; 1/1901Kunumpuram;r₹7500;)Thismustard-coloured colonial building was built in 1912 as headquarters of a UK spice trading company before being taken over by Brooke Bond tea. Graceful rooms are decorated with flashes of strong colour and carved wooden furniture, and have Bassetta-tiled bathrooms.

Raintree Lodge

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(Map p954; 23251489; www.fortcochin.com; Peter Celli St; r₹2300; 1 The intimate and comfortable rooms at the Raintree flirt with boutique-hotel status. Each room has a great blend of contemporary style and carved wood furniture. Try to get an upstairs room with a (tiny) balcony.

Bernard Bungalow

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(Map p954; ②2216162; www.bernardbungalow.com; Parade Ground Rd; r ₹2500-3500; ③) This gracious place has the look of a 1940s summer cottage, housed in a fine 350-year-old house that boasts a large collection of interesting rooms. The house has polished floorboards, wooden window shutters, balconies and verandas, and is filled with lovely period furniture.

Sui House

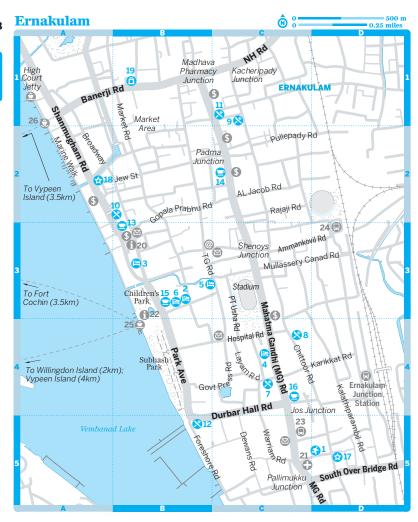
HOMESTAY \$\$\$

(②2227078; http://suihousecochin.com; Maulana Azad Rd; r incl breakfast & tax ₹4000; ② This is the home of the antique-dealer owner of gorgeous Caza Maria in Jew Town Rd. There are four mammoth turquoise rooms in this grand family villa. The sumptuous communal drawing room is filled with more antiques, and a hearty breakfast is served in the outdoor courtyard.

Old Harbour Hotel

HOTEL \$\$\$

(Map p954; 2218006; www.oldharbourhotel.com; Tower Rd; r incl tax ₹8250-14200; 全會全) Set around an idyllic garden, with lily ponds and a small pool, the dignified Old Harbour is housed in a 300-year-old Dutch/Portuguese heritage building. The elegant mix of period and modern styles and bright colour accents are luxurious without being over the top, lending the place a much more intimate feel than some of the more grandiose competition. There are 13 rooms here, some



facing directly onto the garden, and some with plant-filled, open-air bathrooms.

Mother Tree

HOMESTAY \$ (Map p954: ▶9447464906: www.hotelmothertree. com; KL Bernard Master Rd; r ₹700, with AC ₹1000; ★) There are just a few miniscule rooms in this compact homestay, but the immaculate cleanliness and neat rooftop chill-out space make this place worth seeking out.

Dream Catcher

HOMESTAY \$ (2217550: www.dreamcatcherhomestays.com; KB Jacob Rd; r from ₹600, d/tr AC from ₹2500/3500; **寒**) Tucked away on a narrow

laneway, this rambling old colonial house has budget rooms, an almost gothic sitting room and balconies lined with pot plants: it offers a backpacker-friendly welcome from the Portuguese-descended family.

Green Woods Bethlehem

HOMESTAY \$\$ (off Map p954; ≥3247791; greenwoodsbethle hem1@vsnl.net; opposite ESI Hospital; d incl breakfast ₹900) Owner Sheeba looks ready to sign your adoption papers the minute you walk through her front door. What might just be the cutest guesthouse in Kochi lies in a quiet

Ernakulam		
(Activities, Courses & Tours	15 Indian Coffee House	B3
1 Kerala Ayurveda	16 Indian Coffee House	C4
Sleeping	c Entertainment	
2 Bijus Tourist HomeB3	17 See India Foundation	D5
3 Government Guest HouseB3	18 Sridar Cinema	A2
4 Grand Hotel		
5 John's ResidencyB3	Shopping	
6 Saas TowerB3	19 DC Books	B1
	Information	
7 Andhra MealsC4	20 KTDC Tourist Reception Centre	B3
8 Aruvi Nature Restaurant	21 Medical Trust	C5
9 Frys Village RestaurantC1	22 Tourist Desk Information	
Grand Pavilion(see 4)	Counter	B3
10 South StarB2		
11 Spencer's Daily	Transport	
12 SubhikshaB5	23 Bus to Fort Cochin	C5
	24 KSRTC Bus Stand	D3
Drinking	25 Main Jetty	B4
13 Coffee BeanzB3	26 Ferry to Vypeen Island	A1
14 Indian Coffee House		

residential area cocooned in its own thick jungle of plants and palms. The rooms are humble but cosy; breakfast is served in the fantastic, leafy rooftop cafe, where cooking classes/demonstrations are often held.

Princess Inn

GUESTHOUSE \$

(Map p954; ②2217073; princessinnfortkochi@gmail.com; Princess St; r ₹400-800) Sticking to its budget guns, the friendly Princess Inn spruces up its dull, tiny rooms with cheery bright colours. The comfy communal spaces are a treat, and the three large, front-facing rooms are good value.

Delight Home Stay

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(Map p954; ②2217658; www.delightfulhomestay.com; Post Office Rd; r₹1400-1800, with AC ₹2500;
② And delightful it is. This grand house's exterior is adorned with frilly white woodwork, and the rooms are spacious and polished. It overlooks the parade ground and has a charming little garden, and an imposing sitting room covered in wall-to-wall teak.

Koder House

HOTEL SSS

(Map p954; 2217988; www.koderhouse.com; Tower Rd; r from ₹11,300 with AC; ★) A historic mansion overlooking the Chinese fishing nets, this fine heritage property has characterful rooms and an atmospheric, high-ceiling restaurant with whirring fans that serves nice food. Rooms are overpriced in season, but worthwhile at other times.

Spencer Home

GUESTHOUSE \$\$

(Map p954; 2215049; spencerhomstayfc@rediff mail.com; 1/298 Parade Ground Rd; d ₹1500-2500) This handsomely restored heritage home has top-value, snug rooms set around a charming little garden courtyard. It has great period highlights, like high wood-beam ceilings and amazingly intricate antique locks. Breakfast is served garden-side, in front of your room.

Fort House Hotel

HOTEL CO

(②2217103; www.hotelforthouse.com; 2/6A Calvathy Rd; r from ₹3800; ﴿ ②) With lush gardens, on the waterfront, this offers smart, chic rooms in soft earth and ochre colours and with solid wooden furnishings, opening onto a long veranda. There's a recommended waterside restaurant.

Costa Gama Home Stay

HOMESTAY \$

(D2216122; www.stayincochin.com; Thamaraparambu Rd; s/d from ₹400/650) Cosy little place that gets rave reviews. South off KB Jacob Rd.

Homested

HOMESTAY \$ (29388600512; http://homestedcochin.com; 1386 A Thamarakulam Rd; s/d ₹600/700, d with AC ₹900; ★) With three spic-and-span rooms in a well-kept family house tucked into one of Fort Cochin's backstreets, away

from the melee. **Daffodil**

HOMESTAY \$\$

(Map p954; 2218686; www.cochinhomestays. org; Njaliparambu Junction; s/d ₹1500/2000, with AC ₹2500/3000; **③**) Run by a local couple, this has big and brightly painted modern rooms, with an upstairs carved-wood Keralan balcony.

Royal Grace Tourist Home GUESTHOUSE \$ (Map p954; 2216584; Amaravathi Rd; r ₹400-600) This old-timer is one of the rare budget stalwarts still left in Fort Cochin. There are loads of rooms on offer in a large multistorey building, each with little more than a bed, four walls and a pintsized bathroom.

MATTANCHERRY & JEW TOWN

Caza Maria

HOMESTAY \$\$\$

(Map p956;

3258837; cazamaria@rediffmail.com; Jew Town Rd; r incl breakfast ₹4500; ₩) Right in the heart of Jew Town, this unique place has just two enormous, gorgeous heritage rooms overlooking the bazaar. Fit for a maharaja, the rooms feature an idiosyncratic style with each high-ceilinged room painted in bright colours, filled to the brim with antiques, and with tall windows looking onto the bustling market street below.

ERNAKULAM

TOP Olavipe

HOMESTAY \$\$

(20478-2522255; www.olavipe.com; Olavipe; s/d incl meals ₹5100/8500) This gorgeous 1890s traditional Syrian-Christian home is on a 16-hectare farm surrounded by backwaters, 28km south of Kochi, A restored mansion of rosewood and glistening teak, it has several large and breezy rooms beautifully decorated in the original period decor (only the ceiling fans are new). There are lots of shady awnings and sitting areas, a fascinating archive with six generations of family history, and the gracious owners will make you feel like a welcome friend rather than a guest. A taxi to/from Fort Cochin is less than ₹1000.

Grand Hotel

HOTEL \$\$

(Map p958; 2382061; www.grandhotelkerala. com; MG Rd; s/d from ₹1900/2200; 🕸) This 1960s hotel on Mahatma Gandhi (MG) Rd, with its polished original art deco fittings, oozes the sort of retro cool that modern hotels would kill to re-create. The spacious rooms have gleaming parquet floors and large modern bathrooms, and the fover has beautiful vintage furniture. Definitely fine enough to tempt a stay in Ernakulam.

John's Residency

HOTEL \$

(Map p958; 2355395; TG Rd; s/d from ₹310/380, with AC ₹1050; (*) With a cool, yellow foyer featuring interesting clutter such as vintage fans, this is a refreshing place to enter from the busy street. Rooms are small but decorated with flashes of colour: red curtains and bathrooms, that give them a funky feel that's a welcome surprise in this price bracket.

Government Guest House GUESTHOUSE \$\$ (Map p958: 2360502: Shanmughan Rd: s/d ₹980/1380; ★) We secretly love Kerala's government guesthouses - they usually manage to be the best deal in town. Right in the city's heart and near the sea, this eightstorey monolith of a building has huge, neat rooms. It probably won't win any style awards, but some of the upper-floor rooms have balconies with sweeping sea vistas.

Bijus Tourist Home

HOTEL \$

(Map p958; 2361661; www.bijustouristhome.com; Market Rd; s/d from ₹475/725, d with AC ₹1350; 🕸) This friendly, popular choice is handy for the main jetty and has reasonable, drab but clean rooms and a friendly welcome. Day tours to the elephant training camp from here are only ₹700.

Saas Tower

HOTEL \$

(Map p958: **2**365319: www.saastower.com: Cannon Shed Rd; s/d ₹500/800, with AC from ₹750/1400; №) It has 'facilities to match your fantasies' but this will only be the case if you fantasise about a low-end business hotel. with clean smart rooms filled with wooden furniture, handily located near the boat jetty.

X Eating & Drinking

Covert beer consumption is de rigueur at most of the Fort Cochin restaurants, and more expensive in the licensed ones (₹100 to ₹165).

FORT COCHIN

Behind the Chinese fishing nets are several fishmongers (Map p954; seafood per kg ₹200-400), from whom you can buy fish (or prawns, scampi, lobster), then take your selection to the nearby row of shacks where the folks there will cook it and serve it to you (cooking is an extra ₹100 per kg).

TOP Dal Roti

INDIAN \$\$

(Map p954; Lily St; meals ₹70-170; ⊗lunch & dinner) Friendly and knowledgeable owner Ramesh will hold your hand through his expansive North Indian menu, which even sports its own glossary, and help you dive in to his delicious range of vegetarian, eggetarian and nonvegetarian options. The setting is chic minimalist, with whitewashed walls and bench seating, helping you focus on the vummy dishes here.

Teapot

CAFE \$

(Map p954; Peter Celli St; snacks ₹40-60, meals ₹140-180) This atmospheric place is the perfect venue for 'high tea', with teas, sandwiches and full meals served in chic, airy rooms. Witty tea-themed accents include loads of antique teapots, tea chests for tables and a gnarled, tea-tree based glass table. The cheesecake is divine.

Shala

KERALAN \$\$

(Map p954; Peter Celli St; meals ₹180-220; ⊙noon-3.30pm & 6.30-11pm) With high ceilings, whirring fans, and white walls adorned with striking paintings, Shala is owned by the same management as Kailah Art Cafe, and serves well-presented meals that include a vegetable side dish and rice, such as coconut fish curry or vegetable of the day, all made by local women.

Solar Cafe

CAFE \$\$

(Bazaar Rd; meals ₹80-130; ⊗8am-8pm) This arty and funky cafe serves up organic breakfasts and lunches, with dishes such as fruit with wild honey and drinks such as cinnamon coffee, in a lime-bright, book-lined and friendly setting.

Arca Nova (2/6A Calvathy Rd; mains ₹225-290; ⊗12.30-2.30pm & 7.30-10.30pm) The waterside restaurant at the Fort House Hotel is a prime choice for a leisurely lunch (mosquitoes may join you for dinner), particularly specialising in fish, with dishes such as fish wrapped in banana leaf or spicy peppered fish, set in a serenely spacious covered area in the garden.

Casa Linda

MULTICUISINE \$\$

(Map p954; Dispensary Rd; mains ₹85-300) This modern dining room above the hotel of the same name might not be much to look at,

but it's all about the food here. Chef Dipu once trained with a Frenchman and whips up delicious local Keralan dishes alongside French imports like Poisson de la Provencale (fish fried in oil and herbs, Provence-style). The Keralan dry-fried coconut prawns, made to a loving mother's recipe, are scrumptious.

Kashi Art Cafe

CAFE \$\$

(Map p954; Burgher St; breakfast & snacks ₹60-95; ⊗8.30am-7.30pm) An institution in Fort Cochin, this place has a hip-but-casual vibe and solid wood tables that spread out into a semi-courtyard space. The coffee is as strong as it should be and the daily Western breakfast and lunch specials are excellent. A small gallery shows off local artists.

Menorah Restaurant

KERALAN \$\$

(Map p954; Korder House; dishes ₹175-275; ⊙lunch & dinner) In the gracious hall of Korder House, now a heritage hotel, with tall wooden ceilings and chessboard black-and-white-tiled flooring, with whirring fans. It serves wine and beer, and tasty Keralan dishes, if tweaked for tourist tastes.

Malabar Junction

INTERNATIONAL \$\$\$

(Map p954; ②2216666; Parade Ground Rd; mains ₹380-600) Set in an open-sided pavilion, the restaurant at Malabar House is moviestar cool, with white-tableclothed tables in a courtyard close to the small pool. There's a seafood-based, European-style menu and Grover's Estate wine (quaffable Indian) is served. The signature dish is the impressive seafood platter with grilled vegetables (₹1500). Upstairs, the bar serves upmarket snacks such as tapioca-and-cumin fritters in funkily clashing surroundings.

Old Harbour Hotel

MULTICUISINE \$\$\$

(Map p954; 2218006; www.oldharbourhotel.com; Tower Rd; mains ₹400-500; ⊗10.30am-10pm) Certainly one of Cochin's most enchanting settings for an evening meal, in the poolside candlelit garden of the Old Harbour Hotel, serenaded by traditional musicians. The food is bland but acceptable, but it gets a thumbs up for ambience and you can order wine (from ₹1350 a bottle) and beer (₹175).

(1

RΔR

(Map p954; \odot 10am-10.30pm) This slightly dingy bar-restaurant, with whirring fans and big windows, is a hugely popular place to settle down for a cold Kingfisher, with reasonable prices, palatable snacks and meals such as beef deep fry.

MATTANCHERRY & JEW TOWN

Ramathula Hotel

(Map p956: Kavees Junction, Mattancherry: birvani ₹40-45; ⊗lunch & dinner) This place is legendary among locals for its chicken and mutton biryanis - get here early or you'll miss out. It's better known by the chef's

INDIAN \$

name, Kayikka's.

Caza Maria MULTICUISINE \$\$ (Map p956; Bazaar Rd; mains around ₹120-200) With cooks trained by a travelling Frenchman, this is an enchanting, bright blue, antique-filled space with funky music and a changing daily menu of North Indian, South Indian and French dishes.

Ginger House

INDIAN \$\$\$ (Map p956; Bazaar Rd; meals ₹400-600) Walk through the massive antique-filled godown and you'll find the attached restaurant, with a fantastic setting right on the water-

front, where you can relax on mismatched chairs (straight from the shop) and feast on Indian dishes and snacks.

Shri Krishna

INDIAN \$ (Map p956; thali ₹24, dishes ₹4-23; ⊗7am-9.30pm) A simple, basic, but tasty thali.

Café Jew Town

CAFE \$\$ (Map p956: Bazaar Rd: snacks around ₹100-200) A Swiss-owned cafe, this chi-chi little place running alongside an upmarket antique shop has a few tables and proffers good cakes, snacks and coffee.

ERNAKULAM

TOP Grand Pavilion

INDIAN \$\$ (Map p958; MG Rd; meals ₹90-350; 🕸) This is the restaurant at the Grand Hotel and is as retro-stylish as the hotel itself. It serves a tome of a menu that covers dishes from the West, North India, South India and most of the rest of the Asian continent. The meen pollichathu (fish cooked in banana leaves) gets the thumbs up.

Frys Village Restaurant

KERALAN \$ (Map p958; Veekshanam Rd; dishes ₹50-100; decorated place with an arched ceiling is a great family restaurant with authentic Keralan food, especially seafood like pollichathu or crab roast (₹50-200 depending on size). Fish/veg thalis (and much more) are available for lunch

Subhiksha

(Map p958; Gandhi Sq, D.H. Road; dishes ₹30-100; veg hotel restaurant, this is a smart place to dig into tasty thalis (₹90). It's rammed for breakfast and lunch. The hotel also has a busy, breezy coffee shop serving dosas and the like.

Aruvi Nature Restaurant

KERALAN \$

(Map p958; Chittoor Rd; dishes ₹10-25; @noon-2.30pm & 6-9pm) An interesting twist on the traditional Keralan set meal - the menu is created according to ayurveda principles and contains no dairy, spicy peppers or salt. And with dishes such as pumpkin dosas, it's definitely worth a try!

Andhra Meals

INDIAN \$\$

(Map p958; meals ₹70-125; ⊗11.30am-3.30pm & 7-11.30pm) A dark, buzzing 1st-floor place, serving spicy Andhra cuisine on banana leaves. Try a thali, for all-you-can-eat joy.

South Star

(Map p958; Shanmughan Rd; meals ₹70-140; 🕸) This upmarket version of the Bimbis chain of restaurants is in a moodily lit space that's plushed out in nice chairs and dark-wood tables. The bulky menu has North and South Indian victuals, as well as a massive choice of Chinese dishes.

Spencer's Daily

SUPERMARKET \$

(Map p958; Veekshanam Rd; ⊕7.30am-10.30pm) Well-stocked supermarket.

Indian Coffee House

CAFF

(Map p958; Cannon Shed Rd) Also has branches on Jos Junction and MG Rd near Padma Junction

Coffee Beanz

CAFE

(Map p958; Shanmugham Rd; snacks ₹40-140;

Entertainment

There are several places in Kochi where you can view Kathakali (see p976). The performances are certainly made for tourists, but they're also a good introduction to this intriguing art form. The standard program starts with the intricate make-up application, followed by a demonstration and commentary on the dance and then the performance. The fast-paced traditional martial art of kalarippayat can now be easily seen in Fort Cochin.

See India Foundation **CULTURAL PROGRAM** (Map p958; 2376471; devankathakali@yahoo. com: Kalathiparambil Lane. Ernakulam: admission

₹150; ⊗make-up 6pm, show 6.45-8pm) One of the oldest Kathakali theatres in Kerala, it has small-scale shows with an emphasis on the religious and philosophical roots of Kathakali.

Kerala Kathakali Centre CULTURAL PROGRAM (Map p954; 2217552; www.kathakalicentre.com; KB Jacob Rd, Fort Cochin; admission ₹250; ⊗makeup from 5pm, show 6-7.30pm) In an intimate, wood-lined theatre, this place provides a useful introduction to Kathakali, complete with amazing demonstrations of eye movements, plus handy translations of the night's story. The centre also hosts performances of the martial art of *kalarippayat* at 4 to 5pm daily, traditional music at 8 to 9pm Sunday to Friday and classical dance at 8 to 9pm on Saturday.

Ens Kalari

CULTURAL PROGRAM (2700810; www.enskalari.org.in; Nettoor, Ernakulam) If you want to see real professionals have a go at *kalarippayat*, it's best to travel out to this renowned kalarippayat learning centre, 8km southeast of Ernakulam. There are one-hour demonstrations Monday to Saturday at 5.30pm (one day's notice required, admission by donation).

Sridar Cinema CINEMA

(Map p958; Shanmugham Rd, Ernakulam) Screens films in Malavalam, Hindi, Tamil and English.



Shopping

Broadway in Ernakulam (p958) is good for local shopping, spice shops and clothing, and around Convent and Market Rds is a huddle of tailors. On Jew Town Rd in Mattancherry there's a plethora of Gujarati-run shops selling genuine antiques mingled with knock-offs and copies. A couple of shops close to the synagogue sell exquisite lace work. Most of the shops in Fort Cochin are identikit Kashmiri-run shops selling a mixed bag of north Indian crafts. Many shops around Fort Cochin and Mattancherry operate lucrative commission rackets, with autorickshaw drivers getting huge kickbacks (added to your price) for dropping tourists at their door.

Niraamaya

CLOTHING Fort Cochin (Map p954; 23263465; Quiros St, Fort Cochin: @10am-5.30pm Mon-Sat): Mattancherry (Map p956; VI/217 A.B. Salam Rd, Jew Town) Popular throughout Kerala, Niraamaya sells 'ayurvedic' clothing and fabrics - all made of organic cotton, coloured with natural herb dyes, or infused with ayurvedic oils.

DC Books

BOOKSTORE

(Map p958; **≥**2391295; Banerji Rd, Ernakulam; ⊕9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat) This has a typically great English-language selection of fiction and nonfiction.

Idiom Bookshop

BOOKSTORE

Fort Cochin (Map p954; 2217075; Bastion ⊕10.30am-9pm Mon-Sat); Mattancherry (**2**2225604; opposite boat jetty; ⊗10am-6pm) Huge range of quality new and used books.

Fabindia

CLOTHING, HOMEWARES

(Map p954: 2217077: www.fabindia.com: Napier St, Fort Cochin; 10.30am-8.30pm) Fab Fabindia has heaps of fine Indian textiles, fabrics, clothes and household linen.

Cinnamon

CLOTHING

(Map p954; 2217124; Post Office Rd, Fort Cochin; ⊗10am-7pm Mon-Sat) Cinnamon sells gorgeous Indian-designed clothing, jewellery and homewares in an ultrachic white retail space.

Tribes India

HANDICRAFTS

(Map p954; 2215077; c/o Head Post Office, Fort Cochin:

10am-6.30pm Mon-Sat) Tucked behind the post office, this TRIFED (Ministry of Tribal Affairs) enterprise sells tribal artefacts, paintings, shawls, figurines, etc, at reasonable fixed prices and the profits go towards supporting the artisans.

Information

Internet access

Net Park (Map p958: Convent Rd. Ernakulam: per hr ₹15; @9am-8pm)

Sify iWay (Map p954; per hr ₹40; ⊕9am-10pm) Fast computers in a spacious upstairs cafe setting above the Shop-n-Save.

Medical Services

Lakeshore Hospital (22701032; NH Bypass, Marudu) It's 8km southeast of central

Medical Trust (Map p958; **≥**2358001; www .medicaltrusthospital.com; MG Rd)

Money

UAE Exchange (@9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat) Ernakulam (22383317; Perumpillil Bldg, MG Rd); Ernakulam (23067008; Chettupuzha Towers, PT Usha Rd Junction); Fort Cochin (22216231; Amravathi Rd) Foreign exchange and travellers cheques.

Post

College post office (≥2369302; Convent Rd, Ernakulam; ⊗9am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Ernakulam post office branches (▶2355467; Hospital Rd; ⊗9am-8pm Mon-Sat, 10am-5pm Sun) Also branches on MG Rd and Broadway.

Main post office (Post Office Rd, Fort Cochin; ⊕9am-5pm Mon-Fri, to 3pm Sat)

Tourist information

There's a tourist information counter at the airport. Many places distribute a free brochure that includes a neat map and walking tour entitled *Historical Places in Fort Cochin.*

KTDC Tourist Reception Centre (Map p958; **2**2353234; Shanmugham Rd, Ernakulam; ⊗8am-7pm) Also organises tours.

Tourist Desk Information Counter Ernakulam (Map p958: 2371761; touristdesk@satyam. net.in; ⊗8am-6pm); Fort Cochin (Map p954; 22216129) A private tour agency that's extremely knowledgeable and helpful about Kochi and beyond. Runs several popular and recommended tours, and its Ernakulam office displays a board showing recommended cultural events on in town that day, has a secondhand book exchange, and produces the 'Village Astrologer', a monthly free newsletter about cultural events in Kerala.

Tourist Police Ernakulam (**2**2353234; Shanmugham Rd, Ernakulam; ⊗8am-6pm); Fort Cochin (Map p954; **2**2215055; ⊗24hr)

Getting There & Away

The following airlines have offices in Kochi:

Air India (22351295; MG Rd)

Jet Airways (22358582; MG Rd)

Kingfisher Airlines (21800 2093030; Spencer Travels, 2nd fl, Sreekandath Rd)

Rus

DOMESTIC FLIGHTS FROM ERNAKULAM				
DESTINATION	AIRLINE	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	FREQUENCY
Agatti	IT	₹10,000	1½	5 weekly
Bengaluru	9W	₹2200	11/4	1 daily
	IT	3500	11/4	4 daily
Chennai	IC	2300	1	1 daily
	9W	2900	11/2	3 daily
	IT	2800	11/2	1 daily
Delhi	IC	5900	3	2 daily
	9W	6300	3	3 daily
Goa	IT	6200	5	1 daily
	SG	9350	5	1 daily
Kozhikode	IC	2000	3/4	2 daily
Mumbai	IC	5500	2	1 daily
	9W	5300	2	1 daily
	IT	4700	2	1 daily
	SG	4900	2	2 daily
Trivandrum	IC	2300	3/4	1 daily
	6E	2200	3/4	1 daily

Note: Fares are one way. Airline codes: IC – Air India; 9W – Jet Airways; IT – Kingfisher; 6E – IndiGo; SG – SpiceJet.

MAJOR BUSES FROM ERNAKULAM

The following bus services operate from the KSRTC bus stand (Map p958).

DESTINATION	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	FREQUENCY
Alleppey	34	11/2	every 20min
Bengaluru	302 (AC 576)	14	4 daily
Calicut	120 (AC 190)	5	1-2 hourly
Chennai	465	16	1 daily, 2pm
Coimbatore	130	41/2	9 daily
Kannur	170	8	2 daily
Kanyakumari	170	8	2 daily
Kollam	90	3½	every 20min
Kothamangalam	30	2	every 10min
Kottayam	40	2	every 30min
Kumily (for Periyar)	90	5	8 daily
Madurai	160	9	1 daily, 7.45pm
Munnar	86	4½	every 30min
Mangalore	286	12	1 daily
Thrissur	46	2	every 10min
Trivandrum	140	5	every 30min

Several private bus companies have superdeluxe, AC, video buses to Bengaluru, Chennai, Mangalore and Coimbatore; prices are around 75% higher than government buses. There are stands selling tickets all over Ernakulam. Kaloor bus stand is the main private bus station; it's 1km north of the city.

Train

Ernakulam has two train stations, Ernakulam Town and Ernakulam Junction. Reservations for both are made at the Ernakulam Junction reservations office (≥132; ⊗8am-8pm Mon-Sat, 8am-2pm Sun).

There are trains to Trivandrum (2nd class/AC chair ₹70/255, 4½ hours), via either Alleppev (₹39/165, 1½ hours) and Kollam (₹60/210, 3½ hours), or via Kottayam (₹40/165, 1½ hours). Trains also run to Thrissur (₹43/165, 1½ hours). Calicut (₹67/237, 4½ hours) and Kannur (₹85/300, 6½ hours). For long-distance trains, see p966.

Getting Around

To/From the Airport

Kochi International Airport (610125; http:// cochinairport.com) is at Nedumbassery. 30km northeast of Ernakulam. Taxis to/from Ernakulam cost around ₹500, and to/from Fort Cochin around ₹650; a bumpy rickshaw dash from Ernakulam would cost ₹350. Ernakulam's mad traffic means that the trip can take over 11/2

hours in the daytime, though usually less than one hour at night.

Boat

Ferries are the fastest form of transport between Fort Cochin and the mainland. The jetty on the eastern side of Willingdon Island is called **Embarkation** (Map p953); the west one, opposite Mattancherry, is Terminus (Map p953); and the main stop at Fort Cochin is **Customs**, with another stop at the Mattancherry Jetty near the synagogue (Map p956). One-way fares are ₹2.50 (₹3.50 between Ernakulam and Mattancherry).

ERNAKULAM There are services to both Fort Cochin jetties (Customs and Mattancherry) every 25 to 50 minutes (5.55am to 9.30pm) from Ernakulam's main jetty (Map p958).

Ferries also run every 20 minutes or so to Willingdon and Vypeen Islands (6am to 10pm). FORT COCHIN Ferries run from Customs Jetty to Ernakulam between 6.20am and 9.50pm. Ferries also hop between Customs Jetty and Willingdon Island 18 times a day from 6.40am to 9.30pm (Monday to Saturday).

Car and passenger ferries cross to Vypeen Island from Fort Cochin virtually nonstop from 6am until 10pm.

Local Transport

There are no real bus services between Fort Cochin and Mattancherry Palace, but it's an

MAJOR TRAINS FROM ERNAKULAM

The following are major long-distance trains departing from Ernakulam Town.

DESTINATION	TRAIN NO & NAME*	FARE (₹)	DURATION (HR)	DEPARTURES (DAILY)
Bengaluru	6525 Bangalore Express	264/688/949	13	5.55pm
Chennai	2624 Chennai Mail	289/758/1028	12	10.52
Delhi	2625 Kerala Express**	579/1572/2159	46	3.45pm
Goa	6312 Bikaner Express	305/827/1137	15	8.00pm (Sat only)
Kanyakumari	6526 Kanyakumari Express	155/404/551	8	10.10am
Mangalore	6347 Malabar Express	187/496/679	10½	1.30am
Mumbai	6382 Mumbai Express	465/1277/1762	40	1.20pm

^{*}Sleeper/3AC/2AC

enjoyable 30-minute walk through the busy warehouse area along Bazaar Rd. Autorickshaws should cost around ₹20-30. Most autorickshaw trips around Ernakulam shouldn't cost more than ₹25.

To get to Fort Cochin after ferries stop running, catch a bus in Ernakulam on MG Rd (₹8, 45 minutes), south of Durbar Hall Rd. From Fort Cochin, buses head out to Ernakulam from opposite the Vypen Island ferry jetty. Taxis charge round-trip fares between the islands, even if you only go one way – Ernakulam Town train station to Fort Cochin should cost around ₹200.

Scooters/Enfields can be hired for ₹250/350-600 per day from **Vasco Tourist Information Centre** (Map p954; **2**216267; vascoinformat ions@yahoo.co.uk; Bastion St, Fort Cochin).

Around Kochi

TRIPUNITHURA

Hill Palace Museum (☑0484-2781113; admission ₹20; ⊚10am-12.30pm & 2-4.30pm Tue-Sun) At Tripunithura, 16km southeast of Ernakulam en route to Kottayam, this museum was formerly the residence of the Kochi royal family and is an impressive 49-building palace complex. It now houses the collections of the royal families, as well as 19th-century oil paintings, old coins, sculptures and paintings, and temple models. From Ernakulam catch the bus to Tripunithura from MG Rd or Shanmugham Rd, behind the Tourist Reception Centre (₹5 to ₹10, 45 minutes); an autorickshaw should cost around ₹300 return with one-hour waiting time.

CHERAI BEACH

On Vypeen Island, 25km from Fort Cochin, Cherai Beach might just be Kochi's best-kept secret. It's a lovely stretch of as-yet undeveloped white sand, with miles of lazy backwaters just a few hundred metres from the seafront. Best of all, it's close enough to visit on a day trip from Kochi.

If you plan to stay for more than a day, there are a few low-key resorts here.

Brighton Beach House (№9946565555; www.brightonbeachhouse.org; r ₹1500, with AC ₹2000) has a few basic rooms in a small building right near the shore. The beach is rocky here, but the place is wonderfully secluded, filled with hammocks to loll in, and has a neat, elevated stilt-restaurant that serves perfect sunset views with dinner.

An excellent collection of distinctive cottages lying around a meandering lagoon, Cherai Beach Resort (≥0484-2416949; www. cheraibeachresorts.com; Vypeen Island; r from ₹2500; (※) has the beach on one side and backwaters on the other. Bungalows are individually designed using natural materials, with curving walls, or split-levels, or lookouts onto the backwaters. There's even a tree growing inside one room. Check out a few to find one to your liking.

To get here from Fort Cochin, catch a carferry to Vypeen Island (per person ₹2) and either hire an autorickshaw from the jetty (around ₹300) or catch one of the frequent buses (₹14, one hour).

^{**}Departs from Ernakulam Junction

MUSEUM

PARUR & CHENNAMANGALAM

Nowhere is the tightly woven religious cloth that is India more apparent than in **Parur**. 35km north of Kochi. Here, one of the oldest synagogues (admission ₹5; ⊗9am-5pm Tue-Sun) in Kerala, at **Chennamangalam**, 8km from Parur, has been fastidiously renovated. Inside you can see door and ceiling wood reliefs in dazzling colours, while just outside lies one of the oldest tombstones in India - inscribed with the Hebrew date corresponding to 1269. The Jesuits first arrived in Chennamangalam in 1577 and there's a **Jesuit church** and the ruins of a Jesuit college nearby. Nearby are a Hindu temple on a hill overlooking the Perivar River, a 16th-century **mosque**, and Muslim and Jewish burial grounds.

In Parur town, you'll find the agraharam (place of Brahmins) - a small street of closely packed and brightly coloured houses originally settled by Tamil Brahmins.

Parur is compact, but Chennamangalam is best visited with a guide. **Indoworld** (Map p954; **2**9447037527; www.indoworldtours.com; Princess St) can organise tours; a day trip is around ₹2200 including guide and car.

Buses for Parur leave from the KSRTC bus stand in Kochi (₹16, one hour, every 10 minutes). From Parur catch a bus (₹3) or autorickshaw (₹60) to Chennamangalam.

Thrissur (Trichur)

20487 / POP 330,100

While the rest of Kerala has its fair share of celebrations, untouristy, bustling Thrissur is the cultural cherry on the festival cake. With a list of energetic festivals as long as a templeelephant's trunk, the region supports several institutions that nurse the dying classical Keralan performing arts back to health. This busy, bustling place is home to a Nestorian Christian community whose denomination dates to the 3rd century AD. The popular performing-arts school Kerala Kalamandalam (p969) and Shri Krishna Temple (p969) are nearby. Plan to arrive during the rambunctious festival season (November to mid-May).

Sights & Activities

Thrissur is famed for its central temple, as well as for its numerous impressive churches.

Vadakkunathan Kshetram Temple TEMPLE One of the oldest in the state, Vadakkunathan Kshetram Temple crowns the hill at the epicentre of Thrissur. Finished in classic Keralan architecture, only Hindus are al-

lowed inside, though the mound surrounding the temple has sweeping metropolis views and is a popular spot to linger.

Archaeology Museum

(admission ₹6; ⊗9am-1pm & 2pm-4.30pm Tue-Sun) The Archaeology Museum is housed in the wonderful 200-year-old Sakthan Thampuran Palace. Its mix of artefacts include fragile palm-leaf manuscripts, 12th-century Keralan bronze sculptures, earthenware pots big enough to cook children in, and an extraordinary 1500kg wooden treasury box covered in locks and iron spikes.

Our Lady of Lourdes Cathedral CHURCH This massive cathedral has an underground shrine.

Puttanpalli (New) Church CHURCH Recognisable from its towering, pure-white

Chaldean (Nestorian) Church CHURCH This church is unique in its complete lack of pictorial representations of Jesus.

* Festivals & Events

In a state where festivals are a way of life, Thrissur still manages to stand out for temple revelry. Highlights include **Thrissur Pooram** (April/May) - the most colourful and biggest of Kerala's temple festivals with wonderful processions of elephants; Uthralikavu Pooram (March/April), whose climactic day sees 20 elephants circling the shrine; and **Thypooya Maholsavam** (January/February), with a kavadiyattam (a form of ritualistic dance) procession in which dancers carry tall, ornate structures called kavadis.

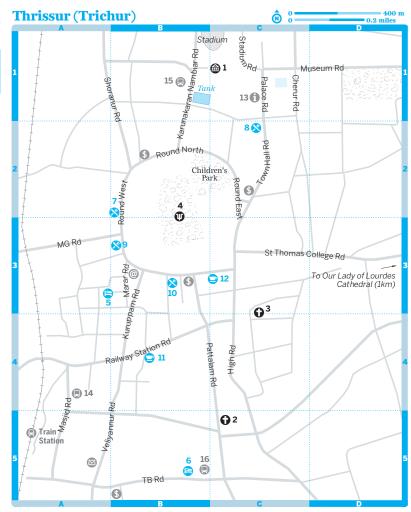
Sleeping

Hotel Luciya Palace

feels like a fun-park ride.

HOTEL \$\$ (22424731; www.hotelluciyapalace.com; s/d with AC ₹1250/1400; **③**) In a cream, colonialthemed building, this is one of the few places in town that has some character. Sitting in a quiet cul-de-sac, this grandiose-looking hotel has comfortable and spacious rooms.

Jovs Palace HOTEL \$\$ (22429999; www.joyshotels.com; TB Rd; s/d from ₹2400/2900; ***@**) This ornate 10-storey meringue caters to Thrissur's jet set. Thankfully, the rooms are not too over the top, are quite comfy and have big windows to enjoy the upper floor's sweeping views. There's a 2nd-floor **restaurant** with an outdoor balcony, and a cool glass-fronted elevator that



Pathans Hotel

(1)2425620; www.pathansresidentialhotel.com; Round South; s/d from ₹400/539, with AC ₹700/1000; ♠) With no-frills rooms at no-frills prices, this is probably the best budget value in town. The basic and clean rooms are on the 5th and 6th floors and have TV and occasional hot water.

X

Eating & Drinking

India Gate

(Town Hall Rd; dishes ₹30-60) In the same building as the HDFC Bank, this is a bright, pureveg place, with a vintage feel, serving an

unbeatable range of dosas, including jam, cheese and cashew versions, and *uttapams* (thick savoury rice pancakes – a Tamil Nadu version of a pizza).

Navaratna Restaurant
(Round West; dishes ₹57-96; ⊗lunch & dinner) Cool dark and intimate, this is the classiest dining joint in town, with seating on raised platforms and piped music. Expect lots of veg and nonveg dishes from North India, plus a few Keralan specialities, served in AC surrounds.

Pathans Hotel INDIAN \$ (1st fl, Round South; dishes ₹30-40; 7am-9.30pm) A little cafeteria-like, this atmospheric

Thrissur (Trichur) 9 Navaratna RestaurantB3 Sights 1 Archaeology Museum......C1 10 Pathans Hotel.....B3 Drinking 4 Vadakkunathan Kshetram 11 Indian Coffee House.....B4 Temple..... B2 Information Sleeping 5 Hotel Luciva Palace......A3 6 Joys Palace B5 Pathans Hotel(see 10) **Transport** Eating 15 Privadarshini (North) Bus 7 Ambady Restaurant......B2 Stand......B1 16 Sakthan Thampuran Bus StandB5

place is popular with families for lunch (thali ₹40) and has a sweets counter downstairs.

Ambady Restaurant

INDIAN \$

(Round West; dishes ₹30-40) A little way off the street, this dark-brown place is a huge hit with families tucking into several different varieties of set meals.

Indian Coffee House

CAFE Has branches at Round South and Railway Station Rd.

Information

There are several ATMs around town.

DTPC office (District Tourism Promotion Council; 2320800; Palace Rd; ⊕10am-5pm Mon-Sat)

Lava Rock Internet Cafe (Kuruppam Rd; per hr ₹30: ⊗8.30am-9pm)

UAE Money Exchange (22445668; TB Rd;



KSRTC buses leave around every 30 minutes from the KSRTC bus stand bound for Trivandrum (₹193, 7½ hours), Ernakulam (Kochi, ₹51, two hours), Calicut (₹80, 3½ hours), Palakkad (₹43, 1½ hours) and Kottayam (₹83, four hours). Hourly buses go to Coimbatore (₹77, three hours). From here there are buses to Ponnani (₹35, 1½ hours, four daily) and Prumpavoor (₹37, two hours), where you can connect with buses bound for Munnar.

Regular services also chug along to Guruvayur (₹22, one hour), Irinjalakuda (₹13, one hour) and Cheruthuruthy (₹20, 1½ hours). Two private bus stands (Sakthan Thampuran and

Priyadarshini) have more frequent buses to these destinations, though the chaos involved in navigating each station hardly makes using them worthwhile.

Train

Services run regularly to Ernakulam (2nd class/AC chair ₹43/165, 1½ hours) and Calicut (₹53/180, three hours). There are also regular trains running to Palakkad (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹120/265/306, 1½ hours) via Shoranur.

Around Thrissur

The Hindu-only Shri Krishna Temple at Guruvavur, 33km northwest of Thrissur, is the most famous in Kerala, Said to have been created by Guru, preceptor of the gods, and Vayu, god of wind, the temple is believed to date from the 16th century and is renowned for its healing powers. An annual and spectacular **Elephant Race** is held here in February or March.

Kerala Kalamandalam (204884-262305; info@kalamandalam.org; @ June-Mar), 32km northeast of Thrissur at Cheruthuruthy, is a champion of Kerala's traditional-art renaissance. Using an ancient Gurukula system of learning, students undergo intensive study in Kathakali, mohiniyattam (dance of the enchantress), Kootiattam, percussion, voice and violin. Structured visits (per person ₹1000; ⊗9.30am-12.30pm) are available, including a tour around the theatre and classes. Individually tailored introductory courses (per month around ₹2500) are offered one subject at a time and last from six to 12 months. The school can help you find local homestay accommodation. For visits, email to book in advance.

Natana Kairali Research & Performing Centre for Traditional Arts (☑0480-2825559; natanakairali@gmail.com), 20km south of Thrissur near Irinjalakuda, offers training in traditional arts, including rare forms of puppetry and dance. Short appreciation courses (per class about ₹400) lasting up to a month are sometimes available to keen foreigners. In December each year, the centre holds five days of mohiniyattam performances, a form of classical Keralan women's dance.

River Retreat (②04884-262244; www.river retreat.in; Palace Rd; Cheruthuruthy; d₹2520-4725) is only 1km from Kerala Kalamandalam. It's a hotel in the former summer palace of the Maharajas of Cochin. The more expensive rooms in the main building have river views. They're much nicer and discounts may be available, so ask.

Regular bus services connect each of these destinations with Thrissur (p969).

NORTHERN KERALA

Kozhikode (Calicut)

20495 / POP 880,168

Always a prosperous trading town, Calicut was once the capital of the formidable Zamorin dynasty. Vasco da Gama first landed near here in 1498, on his way to snatch a share of the subcontinent for king and country (Portugal that is). These days, trade depends mostly on exporting Indian labour to the Middle East. There's not a lot for tourists to see, though it's a nice break in the journey and the jumping-off point for Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary.

Sights

Mananchira Square was the former courtyard of the Zamorins and preserves the original spring-fed tank. The 650-year-old Kuttichira Mosque is in an attractive wooden four-storey building that is supported by impressive wooden pillars and painted brilliant aqua, blue and white. Burnt down by the Portuguese in 1510, it was protected then rebuilt to tell the tale. The central Church of South India was established by Swiss missionaries in 1842 and has unique Euro-Keralan architecture. At Beypore, 10km south, it's possible to see the traditional craft of dhow (boat) building.

Sleeping

TOP Harivihar

HOMESTAY \$\$\$

(☑2765865; www.harivihar.com; Bilathikulam; s/d from ₹4800/6600) In northern Calicut, the ancestral home of the Kadathanadu royal family is as serene as it gets, a traditional Keralan family compound with pristine lawns. Rooms are large and furnished with darkwood antiques. There's an ayurvedic centre, with packages available. The food is delicious.

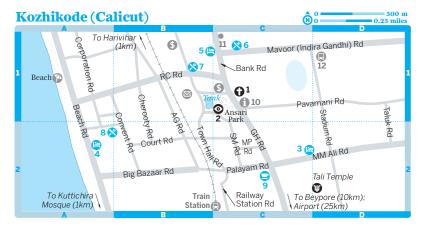
Beach Hotel HOTE

(2762055; www.beachheritage.com; Beach Rd; r₹2500; ② Built in 1890 to house the Malabar British Club, this place is now a delightful 10-room hotel. Some rooms have bathtubs and secluded verandas; others have original polished wooden floors and private balconies. All are tastefully furnished and drip with character. Dinner is often served in the little garden.

Hyson Heritage

HOTEL \$\$

(24081000; www.hysonheritage.com; Bank Rd; s/d from ₹1800/2300; 🕸 🕏 At this business-



focused, friendly place you get a fair bit of swank for your rupee. All rooms are spic and span, large, comfortable and with inoffensive decor, while the massive deluxe rooms have views over town too

Alakapuri

HOTEL \$

(22723451; www.alakapurihotels.com; MM Ali Rd; s/d from ₹250/700, with AC ₹625/800; 🕸) Built motel-style around a green lawn (complete with fountain!) this place is off the road and quieter than most. Rooms come in different sizes and prices and, while a little scuffed, are tidy and reasonable value.

Eating & Drinking

Paragon Restaurant

INDIAN \$\$ (Kannur Rd; dishes ₹50-220) This always packed restaurant was founded in 1939. The menu is embarrassingly vast, and it's famous for fish dishes such as fish in tamarind sauce. and its legendary chicken biryani.

INDIAN \$

(Convent Cross Rd; dishes ₹60-100; ⊕noon-11pm) This historic, authentic Mappila restaurant cooks up delicious authentic dishes such as deep fried beef pathiri (pastry) and unnakaya (plantain snack).

Hotel Sagar

INDIAN \$

(Mavoor Rd; dishes ₹20-80) With a dark wood interior and latticework on the front, this eatery is a tad more stylish than the competition. Veg and nonveg thali meals are

Kozhikodo (Calicut)

Mozimkouc (Cancut)
Sights 1 Church of South India
Sleeping 3 Alakapuri C2 4 Beach Hotel A2 5 Hyson Heritage B3
Seating 6 Hotel Sagar CI 7 Paragon Restaurant BI 8 Zains AZ
DrinkingIndian Coffee House
Information 10 KTDC Tourist Information
Transport

11 Air India

served, with yummy biryanis (including fish) and other dishes offered at lunchtime.

Indian Coffee House

(GH Rd) For tasty snacks and great coffee.

Information

There are HDFC and State Bank of India ATMs in town, and several internet cafes.

KTDC Tourist Information (▶2373862: GH Rd; ⊕10.15am-5.15pm Mon-Sat) Cursory tourist information.

UAE Exchange (2762772: Bank Rd: 9.30am-6pm Mon-Fri, to 4pm Sat, to 1pm Sun) Close to the Hyson Heritage Hotel.

Thomas Cook (2762681; Bank Rd; 9.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat)

Getting There & Away

Air India (2771974; Eroth Centre, Bank Rd) flies daily to Mumbai (from ₹4700), Chennai (₹5600) and Kochin (₹6000). **Jet Airways** (22740518; 29 Mavoor Rd) has one daily flight to Mumbai (₹2300), while **Kingfisher** (🗐 1800 2093030) flies to Chennai (₹5700), Mangalore (₹6300) and Kochi (from ₹6200).

The **bus stand** (Mayoor Rd) has government buses to Bengaluru (Bangalore: via Mysore. ₹226. AC ₹391. eight hours, 10 daily), Mangalore (₹260, seven hours, three daily) and to Ooty (₹100, 5½ hours, four daily). There are frequent buses to Thrissur (₹81, 3½ hours), Trivandrum (via Alleppey and Ernakulam; ordinary/Express/ deluxe ₹260/300/335, 10 hours, eight daily) and Kottayam (₹160, seven hours, 13 daily). For Wayanad district, buses leave every 15 minutes heading to Sultanbatheri (₹63, three hours) via Kalpetta (₹51, two hours). Private buses for various long-distance locations also use this stand.

Train

The train station is 1km south of Mananchira Sq. There are trains to Mangalore (sleeper/3AC/2AC) ₹130/330/448, five hours), Kannur (2nd class/3AC/2AC ₹46/210/279, two hours). Ernakulam (2nd class/AC chair ₹67/237, 4½ hours) via Thrissur (₹67/237, three hours), and all the way to Trivandrum (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹181/500/680. 11 hours).

Heading southeast, trains go to Coimbatore (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹120/292/394, 4½ hours), via Palakkad (₹120/243/356, 3½ hours). These trains then head north to the centres of Bengaluru. Chennai and Delhi.

Getting Around

Calicut has a glut of autorickshaws and most are happy to use the meter. It's about ₹20 from the station to the KSRTC bus stand or most hotels.

AYURVEDA

With its roots in Sanskrit, the word avurveda is from avu (life) and veda (knowledge); it is the knowledge or science of life. Principles of ayurvedic medicine were first documented in the Vedas some 2000 years ago, but may have been practised centuries earlier.

Ayurveda sees the world as having an intrinsic order and balance. It argues that we possess three doshas (humours); vata (wind or air); pitta (fire); and kapha (water/earth). known together as the tridoshas. Deficiency or excess in any of them can result in disease: an excess of vata may result in dizziness and debility; an increase in pitta may lead to fever, inflammation and infection. Kapha is essential for hydration.

Ayurvedic treatment aims to restore the balance, and hence good health, principally through two methods: panchakarma (internal purification), and herbal massage. Panchakarma is used to treat serious ailments, and is an intense detox regime, a combination of five types of different therapies (panchakarma means 'five actions') to rid the body of built-up endotoxins. These include: vaman - therapeutic vomiting; virechan purgation; vasti - enemas; nasya - elimination of toxins through the nose; and raktamoksha – detoxification of the blood. Before panchakarma begins, the body is first prepared over several days with a special diet, oil massages (snehana) and herbal steambaths (swedana). Although it may sound pretty grim, panchakarma purification might only use a few of these treatments at a time, with therapies like bloodletting and leeches only used in rare cases. Still, this is no spa holiday. The herbs used in ayurveda grow in abundance in Kerala's humid climate - the monsoon is thought to be the best time of year for treatment, when there is less dust in the air and the pores are open and the body is most receptive to treatment - and every village has its own ayurvedic pharmacy.

Wavanad Wildlife Sanctuary

204936 / POP 780,200

Ask any Keralan what the prettiest part of their state is and most will whisper: Wayanad. Encompassing part of a remote forest reserve that spills into Tamil Nadu, Wayanad's landscape is combines rice paddies of ludicrous green, skinny betel nut trees, bamboo, red earth, spiky ginger fields, and rubber, cardamom and coffee plantations. Tourist infrastructure is beginning, though it's still fantastically unspoilt, with epic views. Surprisingly few tourists make it here. a shame since it's one of the few places you're almost guaranteed to spot wild elephants.

The 345 sq km sanctuary has two separate pockets - Muthanga in the east bordering Tamil Nadu, and Tholpetty in the north bordering Karnataka. Three major towns in Wayanad district make good bases for exploring the sanctuary - Kalpetta in the south, Sultanbatheri (Sultan Battery) in the east and Mananthayadi in the northwest.

Sights & Activities

Visiting the Sanctuary NATURE RESERVE Entry to both parts of the sanctuary (admission to each part ₹110, camera/video ₹25/150;

as part of a guided trek or jeep safari, both of which can be arranged at the sanctuary entrances. Tholpetty closes during the monsoon period, while Muthanga remains open.

At **Tholpetty** (204935-250853; jeep ₹300, guide ₹200; Sept-Mar), the 1½-hour **jeep** tours (7am to 9am and 3pm to 5pm) are a great way to spot wildlife. Rangers organise guided treks (up to 5 people ₹1500, extra people ₹400) from here.

At Muthanga (2271010; jeep ₹300 guide ₹100), two-hour **jeep tours** are available in the mornings and afternoons. During the monsoon period, with a minimum of four people, rafting trips (2½hr trip ₹800-900) may also be arranged.

The DTPC, as well as most hotels, arrange guided jeep tours (up to 5 people with/without guide ₹2200/1700) of the Muthanga sanctuary and surrounding Wayanad sights.

Kannur Ayurvedic Centre

AYURVEDA (0436-203001: www.ayurvedawayanad.com; Kalpetta; massage from ₹500) For avurvedic treatments, visit this excellent small, government-certified and family-run clinic, tucked away in the leafy backstreets of Kalpetta, Avurvedic massage starts at ₹500, longer treatments like full 21-day panchakarma cleansing costs around ₹20,000, including food.

There are nice rooms (r ₹500) - some with balconies and views. There are also daily yoga classes (per week ₹400; ⊗6-7am).

Trekking & Rafting OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES There are some top opportunities for independent trekking around the district, including a climb to the top of Chembra Peak, at 2100m the area's tallest summit; Vellarimala, with great views and lots of wildlifespotting opportunities; and Pakshipathalam, a formation of large boulders deep in the forest. Permits are necessary and can be arranged at forest offices in South or North Wayanad. The DTPC office in Kalpetta organises trekking guides (₹600 per day), camping equipment (around ₹250 per person) and transport - pretty much anything you might need to get you hiking. It also runs four-hour bamboo rafting trips

Thirunelly Temple

(₹1000) from June to September.

TEMPLE (@dawn-dusk) Thought to be one of the oldest on the subcontinent, Thirunelly Temple is 10km from Tholpetty. Non-Hindus cannot enter, but it's worth visiting to experience the otherworldly cocktail of ancient and intricate pillars and stone carvings, set against a backdrop of mist-covered peaks.

Jain temple

TEMPLE (⊗8am-noon & 2-6pm) The 13th-century Jain temple near Sultanbatheri, has splendid stone carvings and is an important monument to the region's strong historical Jain presence.

Edakal Caves

(admission ₹10; ⊗9am-5pm) Close to the Jain temple, near Ambalavayal, these caves have petroglyphs thought to date back over 3000 years and jaw-dropping views of Wayanad district.

Wayanad Heritage Museum

MUSEUM (Ambalavayal; admission ₹10; ⊕9am-5pm) In the same area as the caves, this museum exhibits headgear, weapons, pottery, carved stone and other artefacts dating back to the 15th century that shed light on Wayanad's significant Adivasi population.

Uravu

HANDICRAFTS (204936-231400/275 443; Thrikkaippetta; www. uravu.net; ⊕8.30am-5pm Mon-Sat) Around 6km southeast of Kalpetta is where a collective of bamboo workers create all sorts of artefacts from bamboo. You can visit the artists' workshops, where they work on looms, painting and carving, and support their work by buying vases, lampshades, bangles, baskets, and much more at bargain prices from the small fixed-price shop. A return jeep from Kalpetta will cost around ₹250.

Pookot Lake PARK, BOATING (admission ₹10; ⊗9am-6pm) is 3km before Vythiri, a beautiful mirror framed by forest. Geared up for visitors, it has wellmaintained gardens, a cafeteria, playground and **boats** (paddle/row boats per 20min ₹30/50) for hire. It gets packed on the weekends, though feels quite peaceful during the week.

Sleeping & Eating

TOP Tranquil HOMESTAY \$\$\$ (204936-220244; www.tranguilresort.com; Kuppamudi Estate, Kolagapara: full board & tax s/d from ₹10.101/13.750, tree villa ₹14.850/19.500. tree house ₹13,000/17,900; ≥ This wonderful homestay is in the middle of an incredible lush 160 hectares of pepper, coffee, vanilla and cardamom plantations. The elegant house has sweeping verandas filled with plants and handsome furniture, and there are two treehouses that have to be the finest in the state - most romantic is the tree house, which is at a dizzying height and has a branch growing through the bathroom. Victor, the plantation owner, will welcome you in like an old friend of the family. There are 12 walks marked around the plantation.

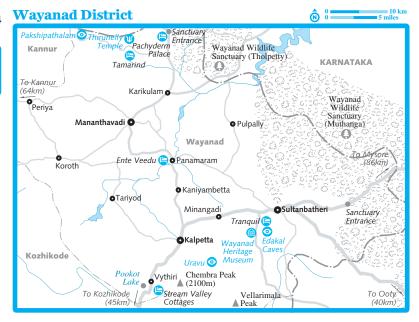
CAVES

Pachyderm Palace GUESTHOUSE \$\$ (2 reservations 0484-2371761; touristdesk@satyam. net.in; Tholpetty; r per person incl meals ₹1250-1500) This fine old Keralan house lies just outside the gate of Tholpetty Wildlife Sanctuary – handy for early-morning treks, tours and wildlife viewing. The varied rooms are simple and tidy, with polished wood ceilings, tiled floors and mosquito nets. There's one stilt-bungalow surrounded by forest. Venu is a stupendous cook, and his son Dilip is a great guide to the surrounds. Besides trekking, they can arrange night animalspotting safaris (30-60min ₹200) - not inside the park - where your chances of spotting wild elephants are pretty phenomenal.

Ente Veedu

HOMESTAY \$\$

(20435-220008; www.ente veedu.co.in; Panamaram; r incl breakfast ₹2500-3000; @) It's isolated



and set in a stunning location overlooking sprawling banana plantations and rice paddies, so this homestay halfway between Kalpetta and Manthavady is definitely worth seeking out. Surrounded by bucolic villages, it has several large rooms that come thoughtfully and colourfully furnished. Two rooms are bamboo-lined and offer private balconies. There are hammocks and wicker lounges here to enjoy the sensational views. Call to arrange a pick-up.

Stream Valley Cottages RESORT \$\$ (204936-255860; www.streamvalleycottages.com; Vythiri; d ₹2500-3000, cottages sleeping 8 ₹6000) These plain modern cottages lie on the banks of a small stream, several hundred metres off the main road (2.5km before Vythiri). Each cottage has a separate sitting area, private veranda, dark-wood interior and comes with a hushed soundtrack of singing birds and bubbling brooks. Traditional Keralan meals (₹390) are available.

Tamarind

HOTEL \$\$ (20493-5210475: info@tamarindthirunellv.com: Thirunelly; d with AC ₹1400) With a fantastic setting 750m from the Thirunelly Temple, this remote-feeling KTDC property is set on its own in the countryside, has large rooms with verdant views, and is a good deal. There's a restaurant.

Haritagiri

HOTEL \$\$ (04936-203145: www.hotelharitagiri.com: Kalpetta: s/d ₹900/1200, executive ₹1200/1600; 🕸) Somewhat set away from Kalpetta's busy main streets, this is a reasonable, comfortable hotel, and some of the rooms, with lively orange, green and blue colour schemes, have good views across the town's greenery from their balconies.

PPS Tourist Home

HOTEL \$ (≥ 04936-203431: Kalpetta: s/d ₹440/550. deluxe d ₹670; 🕸) This agreeable and friendly place in the middle of Kalpetta has budget rooms in a motel-like compound that are fairly clean and comfy. The helpful management can arrange trips around Wayanad (₹2000 per carload) and hikes up Chembra Peak (₹1000 plus permit fees, six hours).

Hotel Regency

HOTEL \$\$ (204936-220512; www.issacsregency.com; Sultanbatheri; s/d/tr from ₹800/1200/1400, with AC from ₹1200/1600/1800; ♣) The pick of Sultanbatheri's bunch of hotels, this quiet and no-nonsense place has routine, large and relatively tidy rooms in a U-shaped building.

The deluxe rooms differ from the standard ones in price only.



Information

The somewhat disorganised DTPC office (204936-202134; www.dtpcwayanad.com; Kalpetta; ⊗10am-5pm Mon-Sat) at Kalpetta can help organise tours, permits and trekking. There are UAE Exchange offices in Kalpetta and Sultanbatheri, and Federal Bank and Canara Bank ATMs can be found in each of the three main towns, as can a smattering of internet cafes.

Getting There & Around

Autorickshaw & Jeep

There are plenty of autorickshaws and jeeps for short trips within the towns.

Bus

Buses brave the winding roads between Calicut and Sultanbatheri (₹62/70 ordinary/Express, three hours), via Kalpetta (₹51), every 15 minutes. Private buses also run between Kannur and Mananthavadi every 45 minutes (₹62, 2½ hours). From Sultanbatheri, an 8am bus heads out for Ooty (₹56, four hours), with a second one passing through town at around 1pm. Buses for Mysore (₹78, three hours) leave every 30 minutes or so.

Plenty of private buses connect Mananthavadi, Kalpetta and Sultanbatheri every 10 to 20 minutes during daylight hours (₹14 to ₹22, 45 minutes to one hour). From Mananthavadi, regular buses also head to Tholpetty (₹14, one hour), Mysore (₹70, three hours, five buses) and Ooty (₹82, 5 to 6 hours, two daily). You can hire jeeps to get from one town to the next for around ₹400 to ₹600 each way.

Car hire

DTPC can help arrange car hire (from around ₹1700 per day).

Kannur (Cannanore)

20497 / POP 498.200

Under the Kolathiri rajas, Kannur was a major port bristling with international trade explorer Marco Polo christened it a 'great emporium of spice trade'. Since then, the usual colonial suspects, including the Portuguese, Dutch and British, have had a go at exerting their influence on the region. Today it is an unexciting, though agreeable, town known mostly for its weaving industry and cashew trade, with some stunning, off-thebeaten track beaches nearby; bear in mind you can't swim during the monsoon season because of rough seas. This is a dominantly Muslim area, so local sensibilities should be kept in mind: wear a sarong over your bikini on the beach. It's also a great base for seeing incredible theyyam possession performances.

Sights & Activities

Theyyam Rituals

CULTURAL PROGRAM

Kannur is the best place to see the spiritpossession ritual called theyyam (p976); on most nights of the year there should be a theyyam ritual on somewhere in the vicinity. The easiest way to find out is to contact Kurien at Costa Malabari guesthouse. Alternatively, you can visit the Kerala Folklore Academy (2778090), near Chirakkal Pond, Valapattanam, 20km north of Kannur, where you can see vibrantly coloured costumes up close and sometimes catch a performance.

FREE St Angelo Fort

FORT

(⊕9am-6pm) The Portuguese built the St Angelo Fort in 1505 from brilliantly red laterite stone on a promontory a few kilometres south of town. It has a serene garden and excellent views of nearby palm-fringed beaches.

Loknath Weavers' Co-operative

HANDICRAFTS

(22726330; ⊗8.30am-5.30pm Mon-Sat) Established in 1955, this is one of the oldest cooperatives in Kannur and occupies a large building busily clicking with the sound of looms. You can stop by for a quick tour and visit the small shop here that displays the fruits of their labours. It's 4km south of Kannur.

Kerala Dinesh Beedi Co-Operative

HANDICRAFTS

(≥ 2835280; ⊗8am-5pm Tue-Sat) This region is also known for the manufacture of beedis, those tiny Indian cigarettes deftly rolled inside green leaves. This is one of the largest and purportedly best manufacturers, with a factory at Thottada, 7km south of Kannur. Either of these cooperatives is a ₹80 to ₹100 (return) autorickshaw ride from Kannur town.

Kairail ROATING

(≥0460-2243460; barge hire per hr ₹1600) Kairail, 20km north of Kannur, offers rice-barge trips on the unspoilt northern Kerala backwaters; you can rent a barge by the hour but it's worth enquiring about day trips.

Sleeping & Eating

Ezhara Beach House

(②0497-2835022; www.ezharabeachhouse.com;
7/347 Ezhara Kadappuram; r per person incl meals
₹1500; ⑤) Beside the unspoilt Kizhunna
Ezhara beach, midway between Kannur
and Telicherry railway stations (11km from
each), hidden amongst palms alongside similar traditional Keralan houses, is the blue
Ezhara Beach House, run by the magnificent, straight-talking Hyancinth. Rooms are
simple and small, but the house has character and there's a brilliant terrace where you

can sit and gaze out to sea through swaying palms and spot sea eagles swooping, plus wi-fi if you should want to keep in touch with the world.

Ayisha Manzil

HOMESTAY \$\$

(②0490-2341590; Court Rd, Tellicherry; d incl meals & tax ₹9750) Around 25km south of Kannur is Ayisha Manzil, a lovely 1862 colonial-era building perched on a cliff top, with stunning sea views and faded, antiquedecorated rooms, run by the perfect hosts, CP Moosa and his wife Faiza Moosa, who is a renowned cook and cookery teacher, spe-

TRADITIONAL KERALAN ARTS

Kathakali

The art form of Kathakali crystallised at around the same time as Shakespeare was scribbling his plays. The Kathakali performance is the dramatised presentation of a play, usually based on the Hindu epics the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the Puranas. All the great themes are covered – righteousness and evil, frailty and courage, poverty and prosperity, war and peace.

Drummers and singers accompany the actors, who tell the story through their precise movements, particularly mudras (hand gestures) and facial expressions.

Preparation for the performance is lengthy and disciplined. Paint, fantastic costumes, ornamental headpieces and meditation transform the actors both physically and mentally into the gods, heroes and demons they are about to play.

You can see cut-down performances in tourist hot spots all over the state, and there are Kathakali schools in Trivandrum and near Thrissur that encourage visitors.

Kalarippayat

Kalarippayat is an ancient tradition of martial training and discipline, still taught throughout Kerala. Some believe it is the forerunner of all martial arts, with roots tracing back to the 12th-century skirmishes among Kerala's feudal principalities.

Masters of *kalarippayat*, called Gurukkal, teach their craft inside a special arena called a *kalari*.

Kalarippayat movements can be traced in Kerala's performing arts, such as Kathakali and *kootiattam*, and in ritual arts such as *theyyam*.

Theyyam

Kerala's most popular ritualistic art form, *theyyam*, is believed to pre-date Hinduism, originating from folk dances performed during harvest celebrations. An intensely local ritual, it's often performed in *kavus* (sacred groves) throughout northern Kerala.

Theyyam refers both to the shape of the deity/hero portrayed, and to the actual ritual. There are around 450 different theyyams, each with a distinct costume; face paint, bracelets, breastplates, skirts, garlands and especially headdresses are exuberant, intricately crafted and sometimes huge (up to 6m or 7m tall).

During performances, each protagonist loses his physical identity and speaks, moves and blesses the devotees as if he were that deity. Frenzied dancing and wild drumming create an atmosphere in which a deity indeed might, if it so desired, manifest itself in human form.

During October to May there are an annual rituals at each of the hundreds of *kavus*. *Theyyams* are often held to bring good fortune to important events such as marriages and housewarmings. See p975 for details on how to find one.

HOTEL \$\$

cialising in Mopla cuisine (Keralan Islamic cooking). Pick up may be arranged.

Costa Malabari

GUESTHOUSE \$\$ (reservations 0484-2371761; touristdesk@saty am.net.in; Thottada Beach; r per person incl meals from ₹1250) In a small village and five minutes' walk from an idyllic beach, Costa Malabari pioneered tourism in this area with its spacious rooms in an old hand-loom factory, surrounded by lush greenery. There's a huge communal space and comfy lounging areas outside. Extra rooms are offered in two other buildings, the pick of which is perched dramatically just above the beach, where you fall asleep to the crashing of waves, and there are steps directly down to the beach. The home-cooked Keralan food is plentiful, varied, and delicious. Kurien, your gracious host, is an expert on the astonishing theyyam ritual and can help arrange a visit. It's 8km from Kannur town; a rickshaw/taxi from the train station is around ₹120/200.

Kannur Beach House

HOMESTAY \$\$ (20497-2708360, 9847184535; www.kannurbeach house.com: Thottada Beach: r ₹2200-2500) Near Costa Malabari and in an idvllic spot right behind the beach, the rooms in this traditional Keralan building are presentably furnished and boast handsome wooden shutters. Four rooms overlook the sea, with either a balcony or porch to enjoy the sensational ocean sunset views through swaying palms, and you can spot cuckoos and bramini kites in the nearby mangroves. It's 8km from Kannur.

Government Guest House

GUESTHOUSE \$ (22706426; d ₹440; 🕸) This place has the air of torpor that is the speciality of government-run hotels, but rooms in the 'new block' are enormous, simply furnished and sport balconies that look right onto the sea they're phenomenal value.

Hotel Meridian Palace

HOTEL \$ (22761676; www.hotelmeridianpalace.com; Bellard Rd; s from ₹200/250, d with AC ₹600-900) In the market area opposite the main train station, this is not quite a palace, but is friendly enough and offers a cornucopia of budget rooms. If you manage to decide on one, chances are it will be fairly clean, basic and convenient for an early train departure.

Mascot Beach Resort

(22708445; www.mascotresort.com; d with AC from ₹2200; 🕸 🛎) A few hundred metres south of the Government Guest House, this place is a small, reasonable hotel and also has grand views of the ocean from its 30 neat and comfy AC rooms. It's worth angling for a discount

1 Information

The **DTPC Office** (**27**06336; ⊗10am-5pm Mon-Sat), opposite the KSRTC bus stand, supplies basic maps of Kannur, There are Federal Bank and State Bank of India ATMs adjacent to the bus stand. A UAE Exchange (2709022: City Centre. Fort Rd: ⊕9.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 11am-1pm Sun) office changes travellers cheques and cash; it's located in City Centre mall, five minutes from the train station.

⋒ Getting There & Away

There are daily buses to Mysore (₹164/188 ordinary/deluxe, eight hours, five daily), Mangalore (₹109, four hours, two daily), Ernakulam (₹187, eight hours, four daily), and Kalpetta (₹70. four hours, two daily) for Wayanad, There's one daily bus to Ooty (via Wayanad, ₹135, nine hours) at 10pm.

There are several daily trains to Mangalore (sleeper/3AC/2AC ₹100/218/301, three hours), Calicut (2nd class/AC chair ₹31/140, two hours) and Ernakulam (₹69/272, 6½ hours).

Bekal & Around

20467

Bekal and nearby Palakunnu and Udma, in Kerala's far north, have some long whitesand beaches begging for DIY exploration. The area is beginning to be colonised by glitzy, unreal five-star resorts catering to fresh-from-the-Gulf millionaires, but it's still worth the trip for off-the-beaten-track adventurers intent on discovering the beaches before they get swallowed up by developers with dollar-signs in their eyes. Because it's a predominantly Muslim area, it's important to keep local sensibilities in mind, especially at the beach.

The laterite-brick **Bekal Fort** (Indian/ foreigner ₹5/100; ⊗8am-5pm), built between 1645 and 1660, sits on Bekal's rocky headland and houses a small Hindu temple and plenty of goats. Next door, Bekal Beach (admission ₹5) encompasses a grassy park and a long, beautiful stretch of sand that

VALIYAPARAMBA BACKWATERS

For those seeking to escape the burgeoning commercialism around Alleppey, what are often referred to as the northern backwaters offer an intriguing alternative. This large body of water is fed by five rivers and fringed by ludicrously green lands punctuated by rows of nodding palms. One of the nearest towns is **Payyanur**, 50km north of Kannur. It's possible to catch the ferry from Kotti, from where KSWTD operates local ferries to the surrounding islands. It's five minutes' walk from Payyanur railway station. The 2½-hour trip (₹9) from Kotti takes you to the **Ayitti Jetty** (▶0467-2213577), 8km from Payyanur; then catch the return ferry.

You can stay at the tiny Valiyaparamba Retreat (②2371761; touristdesk@satyam.net. in; d full board ₹3000), a secluded place 15km north of Payyanur and 3km from Ayitti Jetty. It has two simple rooms and two stilted bungalows, fronted by an empty golden-sand beach and backed by backwaters. Kochi's Tourist Desk (contactable via the Retreat, or in Kochi, p964) also runs day trips (per person incl lunch ₹600) for groups of four to 15 people, on a traditional houseboat around the Valiyaparamba Backwaters.

Otherwise, 22km south of Bekal, **Bekal Boat Stay** (▶0467-2282633; www.bekal boatstay.com; Kottappuram, Nileshwar) is one of the few enterprises in the region to offer overnight **houseboat trips** (2-4 people per 24hr ₹7000-9500) around the Valiyaparamba backwaters. Cheaper sunset or day cruises are also available. You can also try Kairail (p975) near Kannur.

turns into a circus on weekends and holidays when local families descend here for rambunctious leisure time. Isolated **Kappil Beach**, 6km north of Bekal, is a beautiful, lonely stretch of fine sand and calm water, but beware of shifting sandbars.

There are lots of cheap, poor quality hotels scattered between Kanhangad (12km south) and Kasaragod (10km north), with a few notable exceptions that could work well as Bekal bases.

TOP COOKE Neeleshwar Hermitage (☑0467-2288876; www.neeleshwarhermitage.com; Neeleshwar; r from ₹8000) consists of 16 fishermen's cottages that have been converted into a stand-out eco resort. Built according to the principles of Kerala Vastu, it has an infinity pool that gazes out to sea, nearly 5 hectares of lush gardens fragrant with frangipani, smashing organic food and little comforts like iPod docks.

Gitanjali Heritage (☑0467-2234159; www. gitanjaliheritage.com; s/d full-board ₹2500/3500) This lovely place lies surrounded by rice paddies, deep among Kasaragod's inland villages. It is just 5km from Bekal and is an intimate heritage home with comfortable, higgledy-piggledy rooms filled with ancestral furniture and polished wood. Call ahead for pick-ups.



A couple of local trains stop at Fort Bekal station, right on Bekal beach. Kanhangad, 12km south, is a major train stop, while Kasaragod, 10km to the north, is the largest town in the area. Both Kanhangad and Kasaragod have frequent buses running to and from Bekal (around ₹10, 20 minutes). An autorickshaw from Bekal Junction to Kappil beach is around ₹40.

LAKSHADWEEP

POP 60.700

Comprising a string of 36 palm-covered, white sand-skirted coral islands 300km off the coast of Kerala, Lakshadweep is as stunning as it is isolated. Only 10 of these islands are inhabited, mostly with Sunni Muslim fishermen, and foreigners are only allowed to stay on a few of these. With fishing and coir production the main sources of income, local life on the islands remains highly traditional, and a caste system divides the islanders between Koya (land owners), Malmi (sailors) and Melachery (farmers).

The real attraction of the islands lies under the water: the 4200 sq km of pristine archipelago lagoons, unspoiled coral reefs and warm waters are a magnet for flipper-toting travellers and divers alike. Diving, snorkelling, kayaking, boat trips, sailing and jaunts

to nearby islands can be arranged by most resorts. At the time of research, the resort on the 20-hectare, white-sand-fringed Bangaram island was closed – enquire locally to find out if it's reopened.

Lakshadweep can only be visited on a prearranged package trip – all listed accommodation prices are for the peak October to May season and include permits and meals.

1 Information

SPORTS (Society for the Promotion of Recreational Tourism & Sports; ≥0484-2668387; www.lakshadweeptourism.com; IG Rd, Willingdon Island; ≥10am-5pm Mon-Sat) is the main organisation for tourist information.

PERMITS Foreigners are limited to staying in the resorts, none of which are budget places; a special permit (one month's notice) is required and organised by tour operators, hotels or SPORTS in Kochi. Most of the islands have only recently been opened up to foreigners, who are now allowed to stay on Bangaram, Agatti, Kadmat, Minicoy and Kavaratti Islands.

1 Getting There & Away

Kingfisher Airlines (www.flykingfisher.com) flies regularly between Kochi and Agatti Island (₹9700 return). At the time of research, there were no ferry services between Agatti and Ban-

garam. Boat transport between Agatti and Kadmat is included in the package tours available, and the same goes for transport from Kochi to Kadmat and the Mincoy Islands. See the package section of www.lakshwdeeptourism.com for more details.

Agatti Island

The village located on this 2.7-sq-km island has several **mosques**, which you can visit if dressed modestly. There's no alcohol on the island.

Agatti Island Beach Resort (⊉0484-2362232; www.agattiislandresorts.com; d full board €155, with AC €210; ⊛) sits on two beaches at the southern tip of the island and offers a range of packages. The resort has simple, low-rise beach cottages, designed to be comfortably cool without AC, and a restaurant for 20 people.

Kadmat Island

Kadmat Beach Resort (②0484-4011134; www.kadmat.com; d from €185 per person; 逶) has 28 modern cottages, administered by Mint Valley (www.mintvalley.com) and can be reached by overnight boat from Kochi (p952).



DIVING

Lakshadweep is a diver's dream, with excellent visibility and an embarrassment of marine life living on undisturbed coral reefs. The best time to dive is between mid-October and mid-May when the seas are calm and visibility is 20m to 40m.

Lacadives (≥022-66627381; www.lacadives.com) runs dive centres on Bangaram and Kadmat Islands. Costs can vary: a four-day PADI open-water course costs ₹28,000, while experienced divers pay ₹3000 per dive (including equipment hire), with discounts available for multiple dives. Information is available through the hotels or directly through Lacadives at 14C Bungalow, Boran Rd, Opposite Elco Market, Off Hill Rd, Bandra (W), Mumbai.

From Kadmat Island, dives range from 9m to 40m in depth. Some of the better sites include North Cave, the Wall, Jack Point, Shark Alley, the Potato Patch, Cross Currents and Sting Ray City. Around Bangaram good spots include the 32m-deep wreck of the *Princess Royale*, Manta Point, Life, Grand Canyon and the impressive sunken reef at Perumal Par.

Minicoy Island

You can stay on the remote island of Minicoy, the second largest island and the closest to the Maldives, in modern cottages or a 20room guesthouse at Minicoy Island Resort (≥0484-2668387; www.lakshadweeptourism.com; s/d ₹3000/4000, with AC ₹5000/6000; ®) via SPORTS Swaying Palms and Coral Reef Packages.

© Lonely Planet Publications Pty Ltd. To make it easier for you to use, access to this chapter is not digitally restricted. In return, we think it's fair to ask you to use it for personal, non-commercial purposes only. In other words, please don't upload this chapter to a peer-to-peer site, mass email it to everyone you know, or resell it. See the terms and conditions on our site for a longer way of saying the above - 'Do the right thing with our content.'