



# Kerala

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## Best Places to Eat

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## Best Places to Stay

- » Malabar House (p957)
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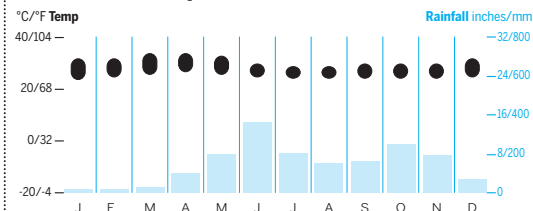
## Why Go?

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-bud-tlingling 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; *kalaripayat* – 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

Thiruvananthapuram (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](http://www.keralatourism.org)) Kerala Tourist Board site.
- » Manorama Online ([www.manoramaonline.com](http://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.