



Kerala

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Best Places to Eat

- » Dal Roti (p289)
- » Grand Pavilion (p290)
- » Ayisha Manzi (p304)
- » Pachyderm Palace (p301)
- » Rose Garden (p277)

Best Places to Stay

- » Malabar House (p285)
- » Brunton Boatyard (p285)
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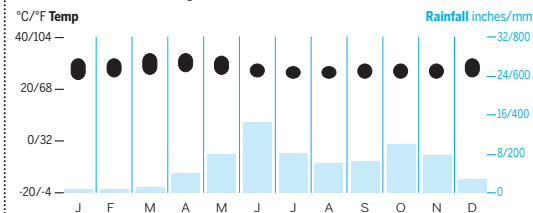
Why Go?

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) 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, p284) Eight days of festivities culminating in a parade of 15 splendidly decorated elephants, music and fireworks.
- » Thirunakkara Utsavam (Mar, Thirunakkara Shiva Temple, Kottayam, p271) 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, p265) A 10-day festival with full-night Kathakali performances and a procession of 40 ornamented elephants.
- » Thrissur Pooram (Apr/May, Vadakkumnathan Kshetram Temple, Thrissur, p295) The elephant procession to end all elephant processions.
- » Nehru Trophy Snake Boat Race (2nd Sat in Aug, Alappuzha, p266) 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.