

travel
BLEISURE



Southern calling

Thiruvananthapuram is the commercial, educational and cultural hub of Kerala. Take a road trip along the coast from this state capital to the southern tip of India, Kanyakumari, exploring offbeat stopovers at Kovalam and Poovar.

words // Edwina Dsouza



KERALA'S

CAPITAL, THIRUVANANTHAPURAM HAS MANY FACETS – THE COMMERCIAL NERVE CENTRE OF THE STATE, A RESEARCH AND EDUCATIONAL HUB AND A CULTURAL HOTSPOT FROM THE TIMES OF THE TRAVANCORE KINGDOM. EVEN MORE EXCITING IS THE TOWN'S ENVIABLE LOCATION BY THE SEA, WHICH MADE IT A PROMINENT TRADING POST FOR SPICES AND IVORY.

Today, Thiruvanthapuram is an excellent base for a getaway to some of the most vibrant beaches and tranquil backwaters in God's Own Country. Get a taste of Indian tropics on this coastal road trip from Thiruvananthapuram in Kerala to the southern tip of India in Tamil Nadu.

KOVALAM

Once a tiny fishing hamlet, 18 kilometres from the capital, Kovalam has evolved into a truly global beach destination. But it still has a distinct charm of its own. Think clear waters, white sands and a cobbled beach promenade dotted with shops and shacks.

Kovalam's warm waters, low tides and perfect surf-breaks make it an ideal spot for surfing and swimming. For those in the mood to simply unwind, there's always a sun-bed. The red and white Vizhinjam lighthouse, perched on a rock at the edge of the sea, adds a nice touch to the blue of the ocean, giving you postcard like photographs. Make sure to climb the 142 steps to the lighthouse (closed on Mondays) to grab a spectacular view of the beach town. Treat yourself to some roasted mussels and cashew prawns at a seaside café, while downing beers in coffee mugs. Do visit the German Bakery along the promenade not only for its menu, but a brilliant terrace view of the sea. Later, stroll by the many shops along the shore and pick up quirky souvenirs like sea-shell accessories and pen stands



HOW TO GET THERE

Vistara has daily direct flights between Thiruvananthapuram and Delhi.



in the shape of a monkey, handmade from a single coconut shell.

POOVAR

Drive another 16 kilometres further down from Kovalam to Poovar Island for a destination completely off the mainstream tourist radar. Marthanda Varma, a former ruler of Travancore, was so enthralled by this small island in Southern Kerala, that he named the place Poovar – meaning 'a string of flowers'. This tiny fishing village has a very unique setting, sandwiched between the backwaters of Kerala, Neyyar River and the Arabian Sea.

Poovar is a world in itself, away from the hectic city lives. Stay at one of the luxurious properties by the backwaters overlooking the canal, separated from the sea by a thin sandbar. Take a boat-cruise through the canal, spotting exotic birdlife. And pamper yourself with a relaxing Ayurvedic massage after a leisurely stroll on the Poovar beach devoid of people. If that isn't all, take a drop to the mainland by speed boat through the island's backwaters.

KANYAKUMARI

Head back on the road for 70 kilometres, hopping

multiple towns before reaching Kanyakumari, the southernmost tip of India, in Tamil Nadu. Kanyakumari's location is a matter of envy for any Indian town with the confluence of three water bodies – Arabian Sea, Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean at Triveni Sangam.

Begin the day early with a walk to the water's edge at Kanyakumari beach to catch one of the most beautiful sun rises you'll ever see. Take a ferry to the twin structures of the Vivekananda Rock Memorial and Thiruvalluvar Statue, while marveling at the busy coastal town from the other side. It is said that Swami Vivekananda attained enlightenment at the site of the Vivekananda Rock Memorial, before his famed visit to Chicago for the Parliament of the World Religions in 1893. Its neighbour, the 40 metres tall Thiruvalluvar Statue is an icon of Kanyakumari, named after a Tamil poet and philosopher from the 4th century BCE. Drop by at the Gandhi Memorial Mandapam that housed the urn of Mahatma's ashes before immersing them in the Triveni Sangam. At sundown head to the sunset viewpoint for an incredibly beautiful view of the sun setting into the horizon that'll mark the close of day and an end to a spectacular road trip.

EXPLORE THIRUVANANTHAPURAM



VISIT

The iconic Padmanabhaswamy Temple in Thiruvananthapuram is the city's biggest draw and one of the richest religious institutions in South India. The Kuthiramallika Palace Museum of the royal family of Travancore displays rare antiques. Stop by at the adjoining art gallery that displays over 1100 paintings from the Travancore dynasty. The 1855 Napier Museum has a collection of arts and artefacts related to the kings and queens of Travancore as well as some fine Raja Ravi paintings.

EAT

The India Coffee House near the central railway station is one of the oldest coffee houses in Thiruvananthapuram and a landmark in itself for its unique spiral structure. Sip *karikku* (tender coconut) and *sambharam* (spiced buttermilk) from street side vendors to beat the tropical heat of the city. For a royal dining experience, visit Villa Maya – an 18th century Dutch manor now converted into a heritage restaurant. Try fusions like seafood *rasam* and sundried bashed meat in a betel leaf.



SHOP

Thiruvananthapuram is dotted with gold shops aplenty, so a gold souvenir for those who can indulge is a nice memoir. Soak in the pulse of the city at Chalai market – Kerala's busiest street bazaar and find great bargains on fresh fruits, dates, sandalwood, handicrafts, quirky accessories and textile. ✨