



KERALA

Kerala, one of the smallest States in the Republic of India, was formed in 1956. It has an area of 15,005 sq. miles. [38,863 sq. km.] about one percent of the total land area of India. The State stretches for about 360 miles along the Malabar coast on the south-western side of the Indian peninsula; its width varies from 20 to 75 miles.

It is bordered by the states of Karnataka on the north, Tamil Nadu to the east and the Arabian sea to the west. The state has 14 districts and the capital is in Trivandrum [now Thiruvananthapuram]. Cochin [now Kochi] is the largest city. Both of these cities has an international airport close by.

GENERAL INFORMATION

- Kerala is one of the most densely populated, culturally mixed and politically unusual states in the world.
- The population is 29million and there are 819 people/sq km.
- Long before Vasco Da Gama 'discovered' India when he landed on the coast of Kerala, the Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs, and the Chinese had long since been sailing to Kerala in search of spices, sandalwood and ivory.
- In 1957 Kerala was the first state in the world to bring to power a communist government via democratic elections. Whilst the Communist Party is no



THE ELLISON ROBERTS FACT FILE - KERALA, SOUTH INDIA

longer in control the State has had a succession of left leaning administrations.

- Over 90% of people in Kerala own the land on which their home stands.
- 30% of state spending is on education and Kerala boasts 100% literacy, by far the highest in India. 99% of primary age boys and 94% of primary age girls are in school.
- Life expectancy in Kerala is the highest in India and infant mortality the lowest.

- Kathakali is a dance recital enacting mythological themes. It presents epic cycles from the Vedas through elaborate make-up, music and mannerisms.
- Agriculture contributes most to the state's income in the primary sector. Kerala's major sources of exports are agro-based and traditional like coir and cashew as well as marine products and manpower. In spices, pepper is the single most important product, with Kerala being the largest producer and exporter of black pepper. Cardamom and ginger are also exported.



- Smoking in public places is banned and can attract a fine of 500Rp [about £6], however, this is not thought to be applied to tourists.
- Onam is the major festival of Kerala. It is celebrated in Chingom [August/September], welcoming the legendary King Mahabali. The snake-boat races are a part of this festival.

- Ayurveda means knowledge of life and is a 5000 year old medical/healing system. Ayurveda maintains that any disease occurs due to imbalance of the 'tridoshas' and the various treatments including herbal massages are designed to restore such balance.



- **Dry days!!** The 1st of each month is a 'dry day' and no alcohol can be purchased. Be prepared – stock up the day before.



THE ELLISON ROBERTS FACT FILE - KERALA, SOUTH INDIA

THE WEATHER

- There is little seasonal variation in temperature but there are distinct wet and dry seasons. Kerala is the first state in India to receive the SW monsoon, and the date of the onset of monsoon is eagerly awaited by the rest of India sweltering under the heat of summer. This generally occurs around the end of May, with June and July being the wettest months.
- The driest months are December, January, February and March.
- The warmest months are April and May with average daily high temperatures at the coast between 30C and 34C. The temperate Western Ghats are much cooler than the coast and in the winter months, at the highest levels i.e. 6,000ft, night time temperatures can be as low as 2C.

CLOTHING

- In the Tropics loose cotton cannot be bettered. If your trip involves a visit to the higher reaches of the Ghats, which rise to over 6,000ft, it can be cool in the evenings and in the early mornings and a lightweight fleece will be appreciated. There is the chance of a heavy downpour for much of the year and a lightweight waterproof will come in handy. Regardless of elevation local rules of modesty must be observed especially around temples and other religious sites. For women the shoulders, and legs above the knee are always covered. Of course this does not apply on beaches or around the pool. Sandals are a must, but if you intend to do any walking in the rainforest or the Ghats, lightweight walking boots are essential. Above all travel light as cheap and efficient laundry services are available at most hotels/homestays and suitable clothing is both cheap and fun to buy. For example a pair of men's lightweight cotton trousers, with pockets, belt loops and a zip, can be run up in a matter of hours and delivered to your hotel, at a cost of £6. For ladies, a shalwar chamise (loose top and trousers), in an infinite variety of colours and patterns will cost around £4. Ask at hotel reception for a reputable tailor. Slip on shoes are very handy as you are often expected to remove your shoes before entering houses. A good umbrella can be bought for under £2 in Cochin.



THE ELLISON ROBERTS FACT FILE - KERALA, SOUTH INDIA

MONEY

- The Indian unit of currency is the Rupee. This is divided into 100 paisa. Strictly speaking the currency should not be imported or exported and therefore you will not be able to obtain Rupees outside of India however, there are foreign exchange facilities at all the airports and these usually offer favourable rates of exchange. Both £s and US\$ in cash or in the form of traveller's cheques can also be converted at the larger hotels.
- Credit cards can be used to obtain cash from the larger hotels. There are ATMs in Cochin, Alleppey, Kumily [Periyar] and Kottayam but few elsewhere.

RELIGION

- Broadly, Hindu 60%, Christian 20% and Muslim 20% with a very small number of Jains and other religious groups.
- Hinduism, the world's oldest religion dates back to about 5000 BC. The sacred texts include the Vedas, Epics and Puranas, apart from other philosophical treatises. Hinduism is a way of life and is based on the principle of Sanathana Dharma.

Earlier inhabitants (Dravidians) of Kerala followed primitive animism and spirit worship to propitiate the Gods. With the arrival of Aryans settlers from the north India, the human forms of worship and caste division were evolved.

- Islam is believed entered into India through Kerala. There are historical records of commercial trading between Kerala and Middle East during 7th Century AD. The Jews and Arabs of the Pre-Islamic period were among the pioneers of spice trade with Kerala. The religion of Islam was also by these traders from Middle East, who later settled in Coastal belt of Kerala.
- The Syrian Christians of Kerala believe that St. Thomas, one of the direct disciples of Christ landed near Muziris in 52 AD and established 7 churches, of which 4 exist even today.

There is recorded evidence of a theologian from Alexandria coming to Kerala to preach the gospel in 180 AD and the migration of about 400 people from the Middle East in the 4th century and yet another exodus at the beginning of the 9th century.

The Portuguese who arrived in 1498 AD introduced Latin rites. Later, during the British rule, the Church Mission Society of London began its work in the country. Today, there are five distinct branches of Christianity in Kerala, the Roman



THE ELLISON ROBERTS FACT FILE - KERALA, SOUTH INDIA

Catholic Church following either Syrian, Latin or Malayalam liturgies, the Orthodox Syrian Church, the Mar Thomas Syrian Church, the Church Of South India and the Nestorian Church.

- Jainism
Though there is evidence of practice of Jainism in Kerala before the arrival of Aryans. History is silent about it. The Famous Jainmedu temple in Palakkad is the manifestation of Jainism in Kerala. Today few families of Jain community are found around Palakkad in Kerala.

TIPPING AND BEGGING

- Your driver – as a rule of thumb the Rupee equivalent of £1 a day, per person, will be a suitable tip. On a longer trip, say 10 days with the same driver, Rp 500 per person would be appropriate. This equates to a substantial portion of their monthly salary, which seem to be kept low by the transport companies, who expect the drivers to be recompensed in this way.
- For other services such as portering it is handy to have a supply of 5Rp and 10Rp notes. In the bigger hotels a tip for this is not expected, however at railway stations, airports etc. you may find that your offer of 10 Rupees is treated with a sneer of disbelief. Some porters in these locations have become rapacious and spoilt by the misguided over tipping from western visitors who will hand over a week's wages for a minimal service. At the larger hotels and resorts it is customary to leave a tip of Rps 100 per person, which will be distributed amongst all the staff.
- Street begging – you will see evidence of staggering poverty and only the hardest of hearts can inure itself totally. You are strongly advised not to respond, as this will inevitably bring hordes towards you. On occasion the persistent can be persuaded to seek another victim with the offer of a Rp1 coin. A supply of these will prove very useful, particularly around major tourist sites e.g. temples.
- Younger children will frequently ask for pens and whilst this seems a laudable request that it would be churlish to refuse it is not uncommon for the same pen to quickly appear on a market stall minutes later and some children are finding this trade more attractive than going to school.



THE ELLISON ROBERTS FACT FILE - KERALA, SOUTH INDIA

PHOTOGRAPHY

- Should you still be using it, 35mm film is widely available but street vendors might well have out-dated stock on offer.
- If you wish to photograph people it is polite to request permission first. Keralan men seem inordinately keen to be photographed and will often request this of you. Women are usually more reticent.



COMMUNICATION

- Mobile telephones generally work well in Kerala and there are a number of Indian service providers. Rates can be expensive however, up to £1/minute – beware! If you are planning a long stay and intend to make many calls from a mobile it is worth buying a SIM card there.
- Landlines are widely available.
- Internet connections are available in all large hotels and at many internet cafes. Connection speeds are generally slow.
- Wi-fi connections can now be found in some hotels e.g. Brunton Boatyard and Taj Malabar in Cochin

LANGUAGE

- Malayalam (/malayALam/) is the principal language of Kerala and also of the Lakshadweep Islands (Laccadives). Malayalis (speakers of Malayalam) constitute 4 percent of the population of India and 96 percent of the population of Kerala. In terms of the number of speakers, Malayalam ranks eighth among the fifteen major languages of India. The word Malayalam originally meant mountainous country) (/mala/- mountain + /aLam/-place).
- English is widely spoken

VISAS

- Visas are required by EC citizens wishing to visit India as tourists or on business. The visa application forms can be downloaded from the link below.
<http://www.hcilondon.net/services/visa-download.html>
Visas can be obtained in person by visiting the Indian High Commission



THE ELLISON ROBERTS FACT FILE - KERALA, SOUTH INDIA

offices in London and Birmingham. You can also use a specialist visa agent.
We are recommending <http://www.indiavisa.co.uk/>

MAP



THE ELLISON ROBERTS FACT FILE - KERALA, SOUTH INDIA

ACCOMMODATION

- **Homestays, plantation houses and residencies.**
Kerala has a marvellous stock of heritage houses and family run small hotels.



- **International class hotels**
If you want 5* accommodation and beyond it is available in Kerala



You can find lots of information on the best accommodation in Kerala if you visit www.ellisonroberts.co.uk



THE ELLISON ROBERTS FACT FILE - KERALA, SOUTH INDIA

FOOD

- Vegetarian cuisine is the norm. However, plenty of restaurants present themselves as being VEG and NON VEG
- Almost every dish prepared in Kerala has coconut and spices added to it – spices such as cinnamon, cardamom, ginger, cloves, garlic, cumin, coriander, turmeric etc. Spices are used in Kerala to tone up the system the way wines aid the digestion of western cuisine. The juice of coconut – ‘world’s safest natural soft drink’ – is a refreshing nutritious thirst quencher. Kerala cuisine also has a medley of pickles and chutneys. And the crunchy *papadams*, banana chips and jack chips can give french fries a run for their money any day.
- The culinary efforts of the different communities of Kerala produce distinctly different dishes of great variety. While Hindus specialise in delicious vegetarian food such as *sambar*, *rasam*, *olan*, *kaalan*, *pachadi*, *kichadi*, *aviyal*, *thoran* and so on, the Muslims and Christians excel in non vegetarian cuisine. The *pathiri*, a sort of pancake made of rice flour, and *biryani* which is a mouthwatering dish of rice cooked with meat, onions, chillies and other spices are Muslim culinary delights. Christians have interesting recipes to make an array of fish dishes such as *meen pollichathu*, *fish molee* and so on. Christian cookery specially caters to people with a sweet tooth – crunchy *kozhappam*, *achappam*, *cheeda*, *churuttu* etc.
- Whilst Kerala cuisine uses a wide variety of spices it is not as fiery as the north Indian cuisine or that of the ‘Indian’ restaurants of Britain where Pakistani and Bangladeshi cooking predominates.



JOURNEYS BY CAR AND RAIL

- Use 25km/hour to calculate journey times by car.
- The roads are awful but the accredited drivers are pretty good. It’s a bit scary at first and it seems as if there is a game of chicken being played continually...but we haven’t lost a customer yet.
- The mountain roads e.g. up around Munnar can get washed away in the summer monsoon and roadworks are a constant problem in August and September.
- There are frequent driver’s strikes and this may mean that you can’t travel on a strike day until the agreed time, usually 4pm.
- Long train journeys in India, other than the marvellous Palace on Wheels and one or two other luxury operations, are not such good fun and overnight journeys can be an endurance test.



THE ELLISON ROBERTS FACT FILE - KERALA, SOUTH INDIA

- The station porters – with their red shirts and headbands – can be aggressive.
- It is generally best to let your guide/driver deal with the porters and see you safely right into your seat.

HELPFUL HINTS FOR TRAVELLERS TO KERALA

- Kerala is considered by most authorities to be a low malaria risk area. However, we advise you to visit <http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Policyandguidance/Healthadvicefortravellers/index.htm> to get the latest updates on health issues for travellers.
- There are natural substances that repel mosquitoes effectively. Pure lemon-grass oil extract is available in India. Simply mix a few drops with a gentle oil like coconut or your body cream, and rub on your skin.
- A torch is useful as short power-cuts are a regular occurrence.

FINALLY

- Indian beaurocracy can be most frustrating [as those who have queued for visas will testify] but as they say in Kerala ‘if you can’t learn patience, you will lose it’.



AND

- If you would like to offset the carbon dioxide emission from your flight, you can pay for trees to be planted to reduce carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. There are community-based projects for this in Chinnar and Chimmony Wildlife Sanctuaries. Please ask us for details.

FOR MORE KERALA INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT US

info@ellisonroberts.com



ELLISON ROBERTS TOURS
info@ellisonroberts.co.uk
01924 374293

THE ELLISON ROBERTS FACT FILE - KERALA, SOUTH INDIA

01924 374293



ELLISON ROBERTS TOURS
info@ellisonroberts.co.uk
01924 374293