



A CHRONICLE OF
KERALA'S
CULTURAL RICHNESS

THE SANCTUM OF SPECTACULAR ART FORMS



Between the bewitching shores of the Arabian Sea and the tranquil shades of the majestic Western Ghats, there lies a strip of land abundantly blessed. Lush green forests, pristine lagoons, placid beaches, picturesque backwaters, alluring cuisine, rich history – everything about this land seems to be so enigmatic. The God's Own Country as it is rightly called, Kerala is unique for so many reasons.

Visiting a destination is all about experiencing and understanding it profoundly. That is why when you come to know more about Kerala, what would truly amaze you will be the cultural vibrance of the State that has for centuries, enthralled the world. Staying veiled in the soul of the land are innumerable art forms that are splendid expressions of the socio-cultural richness of the State.



THE UNIQUE ART FORMS OF KERALA

Much of Kerala's art forms are so unique to the land's folklores and culture. They are inspired by age-old traditions, customs and even the diverse ways of life of the people. Some of these art forms are associated with religious practices, while many others are performed for various special occasions. Across religious and social sects, many of these art forms have been in existence for centuries now. Dance, drama, poetry, martial arts – many of these genres converge in these art forms, making them visual and experiential spectacles for the audience.

Though these legendary art forms are from different pages of history, they are to this day practised and performed with great passion in the Kerala. That is you just can't afford to miss glimpses of these on your visit to Kerala.

A short list of some of the best recommendations for you is given in the following pages. Enrich yourself with these once-in-a-lifetime experiences. Be blessed abundantly by the God's Own Country.

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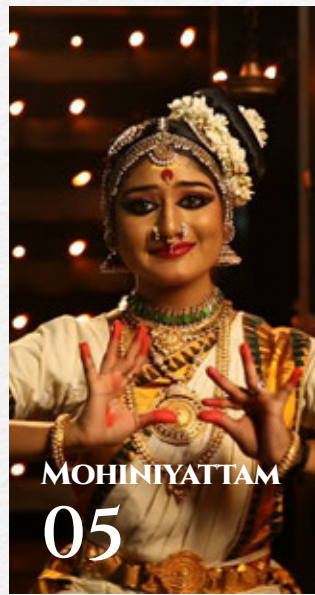
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KATHAKALI



Watch
video

Make-up for Kathakali is elaborate
and takes hours to finish



A splash of colours & a feast for the eyes

A brightly burning traditional Kerala lamp that emanates an enigmatic charm, artists dressed in elaborately colourful costumes and face masks, captivating music and beats that make every listener attentive – Kathakali inspires and entertains the people of Kerala in a big way.

A visual spectacle that never ever ceases to amaze, Kathakali is a classical art form performed all across the state. This story play is believed to have originated in its fully developed style around the 17th century. Kathakali narrates stories from Hindu epics, religious legends and even folk stories. The unit consists of artists who perform and singers handling the playback. A Sanskritised version of Malayalam is used for the vocal. Kathakali is believed to have emerged

from Ramanattam, which is another classical art form.

The characters, dressed in colourful make-up, masks and different costumes, do not speak or sing during the performance.

KATHAKALI IS ONE OF THE MOSTLY ADMIRERD POPULAR ART FORMS BY BOTH LOCALS & TOURISTS ALIKE

The play is presented with the help of songs in the background. Kathakali music includes musical instruments such as Chenda, Maddalam, Chengila and Elathaalam. The artists use various hand gestures, facial expressions and movements to communicate the story.

KOODIYATTAM



Watch
video

Koodiyattam can be performed
only after years of practice



Reflection of Kerala's
inherent cultural richness

A masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity as listed by UNESCO, Koodiyattam is an ancient Sanskrit theatrical art form. Believed to be 2,000 years old, Koodiyattam is more of a temple art form which literally means “combined acting”.

Koodiyattam is performed in a specially prepared venue known as 'Koothambalam'. Koodiyattam is a combination of Sanskrit theatre and Koothu, which is yet another ancient performing art form. A complete Koodiyattam performance typically takes several days to finish. The play consists of three parts – Purappadu, Nirvahanam and finally the Koodiyattam. The performance involved elaborate and lengthy sequences of acting using hand

gestures and other types of acting. The musical instruments used in Koodiyattam are Mizhavu, Kuzhitalam, Edakka, Sankhu and Kurumkuzhal.

KOODIYATTAM ART FORM IS PERFORMED IN A SPECIALLY PREPARED VENUE KNOWN AS 'KOOOTHAMBALAM'

Traditionally the artists involved in Koodiyattam are Chakyars, a Hindu sub-caste in Kerala, and Nangiyarammas who belong to the Ambalavasi Nambiar caste.

Even a single day viewing of Koodiyattam could leave you thrilled and excited. That is why you should make sure that you get a glimpse of this art form on your trip to Kerala.

MOHINIYATTAM



Watch
video

Mohini, as the performer is known, is considered an incarnation of Lord Vishnu



A truly enchanting visual feast

It's all about the charming grace, the gorgeous and slow movements of the artist and a visual impression it creates in the minds of the audience. Mohiniyattam, one of the most popular classical art forms of Kerala, casts a magical spell on the viewers.

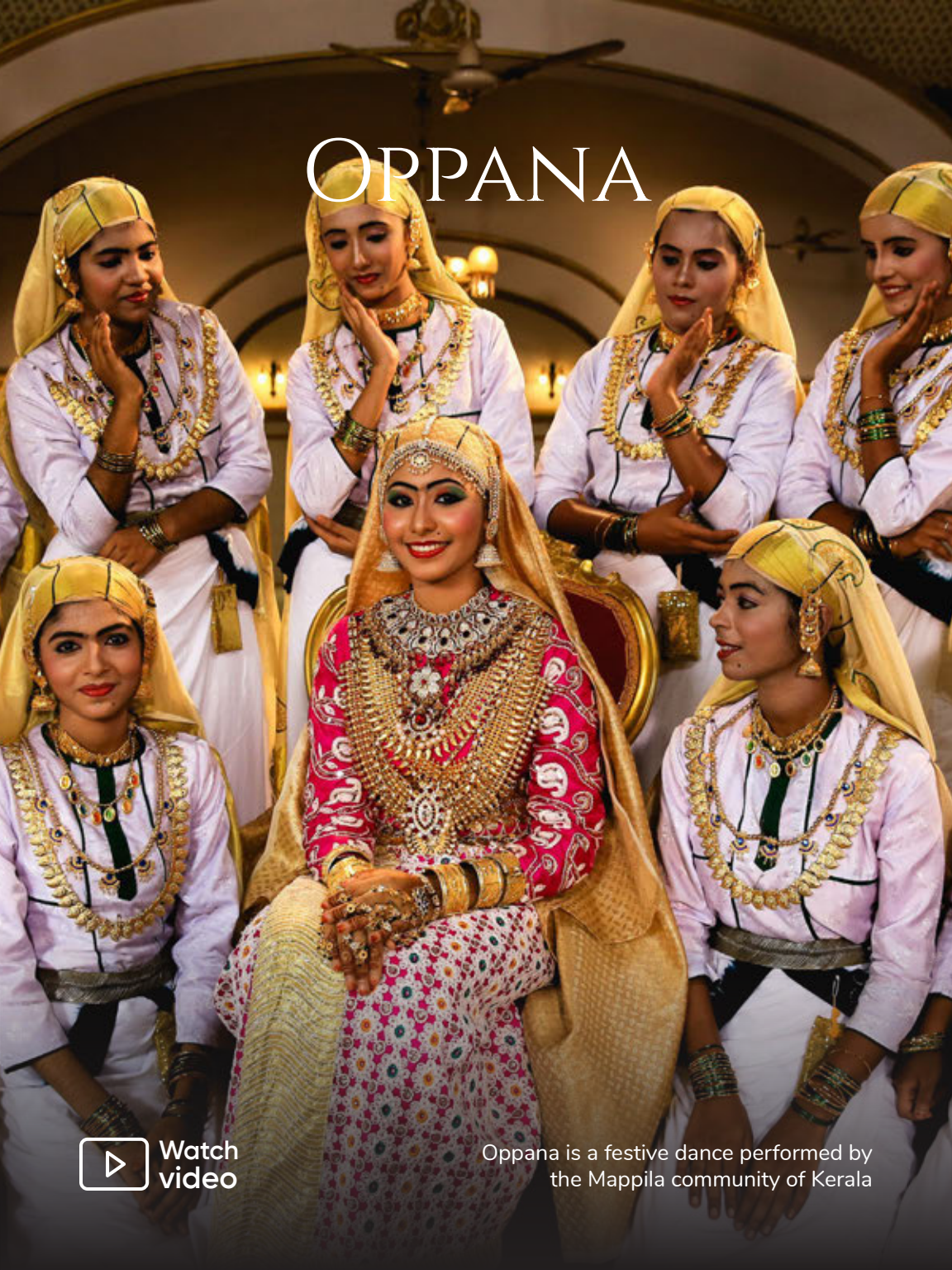
Mohiniyattam leans more towards the Lasya type of performance where the artist showcases slow, graceful and more feminine kind of movements. It is traditionally a solo dance accompanied by the vocal performance of a singer and musical instruments like Kuzhithalam, Veena, Idakka and Mridangam. Mohiniyaattam is visualized to be the dance of Mohini, a female incarnation of Lord Vishnu as an enchantress. Mohini appears in Hindu puranas and is presented as a seductress who cunningly helps the

good Devas get Amrut, the nectar of life from the hands of the demonic Asuras. The character symbolises the triumph of good over evil.

MOHINIYATTAM LEANS MORE TOWARDS THE LASYA TYPE OF PERFORMANCE

The roots of Mohiniyattam are firmly based in Natyashasthra, an ancient Hindu Sanskrit text on performing arts. The dancers wear plain white or off-white sarees embellished with golden laces embroidered on its borders. She adorns herself with jewellery and her feet and fingers are coloured in red with natural dyes. So if you would love to be enchanted by the grace of this classical dance form, Kerala is the place to be in.

OPPANA



Watch
video

Oppana is a festive dance performed by
the Mappila community of Kerala



Rhythms of festivity

A finely dressed bride adorned in gold ornaments sitting on a high seat, women dressed in traditional Kerala Muslim attire forming a circle around her, dances and music running late into the night – this is exactly how a performance of Oppana, a conventional Muslim dance form would look like.

Oppana is an art form that is generally performed during Muslim wedding ceremonies in Kerala. Prevalent mostly among the Mappila community in North Kerala, Oppana resembles certain dance rituals practised in the Arabian countries. Performers circle around the bride who sits on a high seat known as 'peedam'. The artists go round the bride, clapping their hands and singing. Two or three performers usually take the lead and the others

accompany as chorus. The rhythm and movements are simple, yet soothingly attractive and create an aura of celebration.

OPPANA IS GENERALLY PERFORMED DURING MUSLIM WEDDING CEREMONIES IN KERALA

The theme of Oppana performances are fun-based, which is generally to tease the bride on the occasion of her marriage. A combination of Malayalam and Arabic are used. Tabla, Ganjira and Harmonium are some of the musical instruments used in this. So if you would ever get invited to a Mappila wedding in north Kerala, you could be lucky enough to have a glimpse of this spectacular dance.

KALI THEEYATTU



The artist dresses up as Kali,
the fiercest form of Goddess Shakthi



An eerie face of sacred worship

In the backdrop of the night, an uncanny character emerges; two sticks lit up on the ends with fire, performing electrifying moves that would leave you in awe. An elaborate impression of Goddess Kali painted on the floor using coloured powders. It's a feeling like few others.

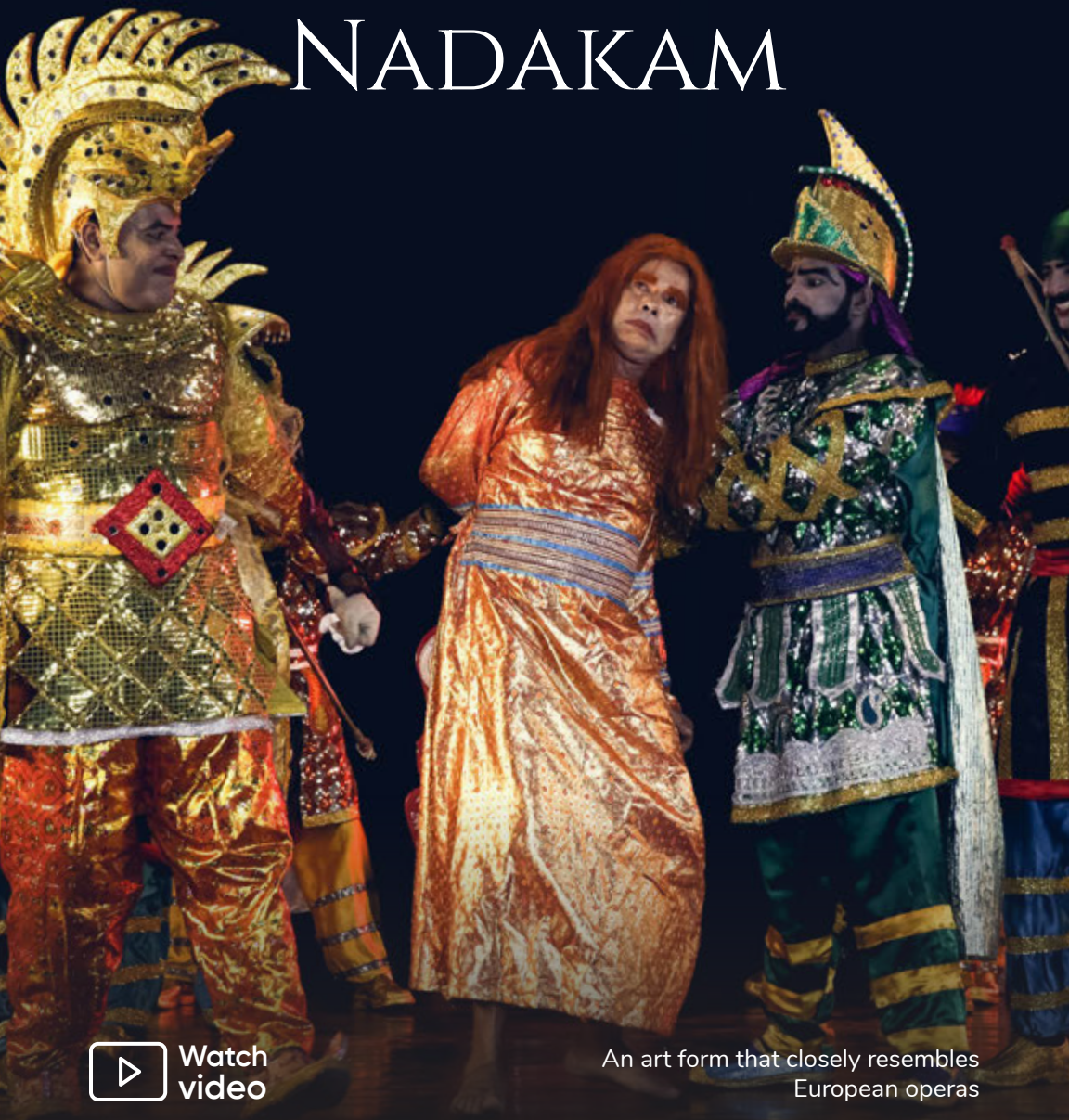
Kali Theeyattu is a Hindu temple art form performed by 'Theeyattunnis' who are a Brahmin community based in Kerala. It's a ritualistic dance held in Bhadrakali temples in the State. Bhadrakali is considered to be the most fierce form of Goddess Shakti as discussed in the sacred book of Hindus – Devi Mahathmyam. The Kali Theeyattu dance tells the tale of a war that was fought between Goddess Kali and Darika, a demon. The Goddess emerges victorious in the battle and

it is this story of her triumph that is enacted in the form of a dance. One of the most interesting features of the performance is 'Kalamezhuthu'. This part is done during the day time.

KALI THEEYATTU TELLS THE TALE OF A WAR FOUGHT BETWEEN GODDESS KALI AND DARIKA, A DEMON

A visually amazing picture of Kali is created using coloured powders on the floor. Once Kalamezhuthu is over, songs praising the Goddess are sung in the venue. Then a male performer who dresses up as Kali arrives and the performance begins. Nothing less than a visual spectacle. Kali Theeyattu is a once-in-a-lifetime experience.

CHAVITTU NADAKAM



Watch
video

An art form that closely resembles
European operas



Rhythmic steps that leave a lasting impression

Glittering medieval European costumes, a musical dance drama that tells heroic tales of valour, wooden planks acting as the stage of enactment – Chavittu Nadakam is unlike any other authentically traditional Kerala art form in every aspect.

A breathtaking performance that captivates the audience, Chavittu Nadakam is a popular art form practised among the Latin Catholic Christian community in Kerala. Believed to have originated in Kochi around the 17th century, it is usually performed on open stages.

Heroic episodes from Bible and that of famed Christian warriors are selected as stories. In many ways, this art form resembles the world-famous European operas.

What makes Chavittu Nadakam so appealing is the unique way in which it is presented on the stage. The performers wear distinctive make-up while dressing up as characters.

THE PERFORMERS WEAR
DISTINCTIVE MAKE-UP
WHILE DRESSING UP
AS CHARACTERS

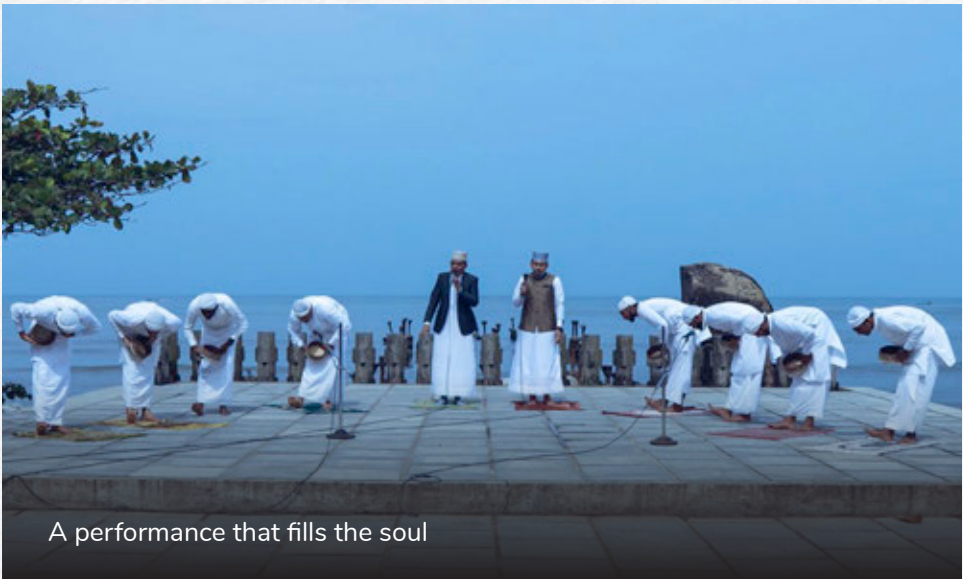
With detailed gestures and amazing body movements, the artists sing and play along with rhythmic playbacks, often stomping on the grounds in sync with the beats. The background score is created using bells and drums. Though exclusive to the Latin community in certain districts, Chavittu Nadakam is one of the shining gems in Kerala's cultural spectrum.

DUFFMUTTU



Watch
video

The verses of Duffmuttu celebrate
the lives of Islamic heroes



A performance that fills the soul

Performers dressed in white with the traditional hats on their heads, captivating beats that captures the attention of any viewer, graceful movements that sets a definite tone to the whole performance – Duffmuttu is one of the most popular Muslim art forms in Kerala.

If there is a universal language, that will be music. Relatable to members of any community from any part of the world, music enthral the minds of people and is one of the most popular entertainments the world over. That is exactly why Duffmuttu can easily be enjoyed by people from all parts of the globe. Mostly prevalent in the Malabar region of Kerala, Duffmuttu derives its name from 'Duff', the percussion instrument using which it is performed. 'Duff' is made from wood and ox skin.

Duffmuttu is often performed as a social entertainment and also during festivals.

DUFFMUTTU CAN EASILY BE ENJOYED BY PEOPLE FROM ALL PARTS OF THE GLOBE

The verses celebrate the lives of Islamic heroes and warriors. The singers play the duff and would sing along its rhythm, swaying their bodies in sync with the tempo of the song. The lead singer in the troupe sings the song and the team members would act as a chorus, adding charm and vigour to the performance. Duffmuttu can be performed any time of the day. So do make it a point to see an awesome Duffmuttu performance during your trip to Kerala.

ARABANA MUTTU



Watch
video

Arabana Muttu is commonly performed by
Muslim communities in North Kerala



Music that melts your heart

It's all about rhythmic beats and graceful movements that create a visual spectacle – the allure of an Arabic percussion instrument at its traditional best. Arabana Muttu or Aravana Muttu is a celebration of local Muslim music that is played to welcome dignitaries.

A handheld and one-sided musical instrument, Arabana is made of wood and animal skin. The art form is mostly practised and performed in the northern districts of Kerala. Arabana Muttu is often mistaken for Duff Muttu, another very similar art form prevalent in the region. However, the Arabana drum itself is smaller and wider than the one used for Duff Muttu. The drum in Arabana Muttu has a wooden frame and is beautifully coloured and strung with knotted ropes.

The group of performers usually sit in semicircles in the traditional way. The leader of the group has the privilege to sing the first song and after that initial one, the rest of the group joins in by playing the Arabana and singing.

ARAVANA MUTTU IS A CELEBRATION OF LOCAL MUSLIM MUSIC PLAYED TO WELCOME DIGNITARIES

Each part of the performance is termed 'Adakan'. The performance begins slowly and then gains momentum, gradually picking up the tempo. Knowing, appreciating and enjoying an art form like Arabana Muttu is pretty easy for anyone. After all, the rhythmic beats of music is universally understood.

GADHIKA



This tribal art form is performed
by the Adiya community of Wayanad



The artistic lushness of incredible art

It's a celebration of tribal culture at its enigmatic best. Seeking new expectations and a promise of prosperity, this tribal art form is performed with a belief that it will ward off the evil. Gadhika reflects the inherent relationship between tribespeople and the land that they live in.

Gadhika is practised by Adiyas – a tribal community living in Wayanad. Nattu Gadhika and Pooja Gadhika are considered to be two variations of this tribal dance form. While Pooja Gadhika is mainly performed for ritualistic purposes, Nattu Gadhika can also be performed in front of the public. Gadhika is more of a dance-drama and is accompanied by drums and wind instruments. The performers move round and round in rhythmic brilliance

and is headed by Moopan who is the head of the tribe. Often, participants of Gadhika receive invitations from homes to visit and perform. It is also believed that if someone falls ill in

GADHIKA IS MAINLY PERFORMED IN THE MALAYALAM MONTH OF MITHUNAM, WHICH FALLS BETWEEN JUNE AND JULY

a household as a result of God's anger, a Gadhika performance will help appease the God and bring in wellness. The participants are men, however they dress up as women. The costumes are simple, yet colourful. 'Thudi' is the percussion instrument used in Gadhika. 'Cheenum', a reed pipe made out of bamboo, is also used.

SARPAM THULLAL



Watch
video

This ritualistic art form is performed
as a part of snake worship



A medley of art and myths

One might assume that it is an uncanny tradition to worship snakes, yet it is so very common in Kerala. Sarpam Thullal is a ritualistic art form that is performed as a part of snake worship with a belief that it would bring about good luck and prosperity.

Sarpam means snake in Malayalam. Many family houses in Kerala have 'Sarppakavus' or shrines for snakes within their estates. Sarppam Thullal is traditionally held in these family home shrines. Members belonging to the Pullavar caste are usually assigned with the task of performing the art form. A Kalam (colourful drawings prepared on the ground using powders) is drawn with an image of Nagayakshi (serpent goddess) on it. Traditionally two girls who have

attained puberty are made to sit inside the Kalam with Pookkulas (areca nut flowers) on their hands.

THE FRENZY, THE STATE
OF TRANCE AND THE
MYSTERIOUS ATMOSPHERE
ARE ALL SIGHTS
WORTH EXPERIENCING

A mystic music begins accompanied by instruments such as pulluvankudam, pulluvanveena and ilathalam. As the music progresses, the girls start to make serpent-like circular motions with their body and would brush the Kalam with their hairs and the Pookkulas. The belief is that snakes would come to life through these girls, a feature that adds a lot of mystery.

MARGAM KALI



Watch
video

The term 'Margam Kali' means
the path to salvation



A delightful choreographed sequence

Women dressed in traditional Kerala Christian attire danced around a Nilavilakku (traditional lamp) placed at the centre with a cross amid a captivating music – Margam Kali is a simple, yet highly entertaining art form unique to Kerala.

A historic dance form performed in the St Thomas Christian community in Kerala, the art is mainly prevalent among a sub-sect known as Knanaya Christians. Margam in Malayalam means Path. In the context of Margam Kali, the word stands for the path to salvation. Centred around the mission of St Thomas, the Apostle in Kerala, the dance form retells the stories of his missionary work, the miracles he performed and more. Though performed by men in the early days, Margam Kali is now mostly performed

by women. Women artists are dressed in their traditional attire which include chatta, mundu, kavini, mekka mothiram and bangles.

MARGAM KALI IS MOSTLY PERFORMED THESE DAYS ON THE OCCASION OF MARRIAGES AND SPECIAL FEASTS AT CHURCHES

Beginning slowly, the tempo rapidly rises as the song goes on. The performance begins with songs and dances that narrate the life of St Thomas and takes a swift turn with a martial art display using artificial shields and swords. No accompaniments are used in the performance apart from palm-sized cymbals that the artists themselves play.

OTTAN THULLAL



Watch
video

Ottan Thullal was introduced by the legendary
Malayalam poet Kunchan Nambiar



An interesting blend of humour, music and dance

A classical art form laced with humour, sarcasm and satire? It might sound rather unbelievable, but here in Kerala it has been in practise since the 1700s. Getting to know more about Ottan Thullal and how it evolved is itself an entertaining piece of information.

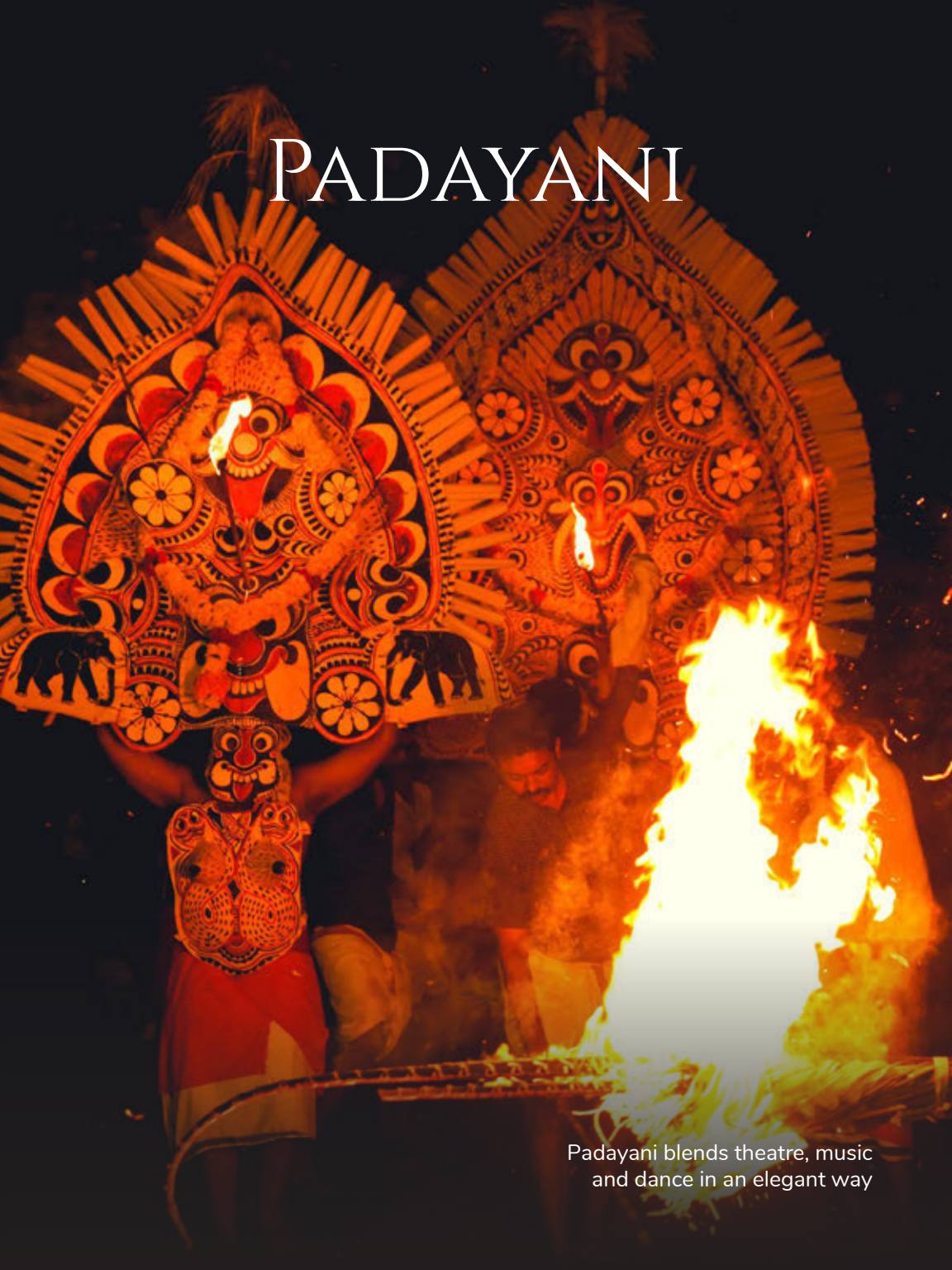
Presented with simplicity, wit and humour, Ottan Thullal adorns a distinct place among the classical art forms of Kerala. Through humour, the art form also carries out the responsibility of social criticism in a nice way. Ottan Thullal is the most popular choice among the three Thullal art forms, the other two being Sheetangan Thullal and Parayan Thullal. Ottan Thullal, like many other classical art forms follows the basic principles of Natya Shashtra. The performer dresses up in colourful

costumes and makeup. He/she will then dance in a particular physical motion and recite the verses of the literature loudly, which will be repeated by another artist in the background.

THROUGH HUMOUR, THE
ART FORM CARRIES OUT THE
RESPONSIBILITY OF SOCIAL
CRITICISM IN A NICE WAY

Ottan Thullal was first introduced by the legendary Malayalam poet Kunchan Nambiar. The witty and sarcastic presentation of Ottan Thullal resonated profoundly with the common people. The energy that the performer brings in to the stage itself is a reason why Ottan Thullal should be in your bucket list.

PADAYANI

The image captures a Padayani performance, a traditional art form from Kerala, India. The central focus is a large, ornate, triangular mask (Kuttiyattam) with multiple faces and a central flame. The mask is held by a person in a red and white costume. To the right, a large fire is visible, adding to the dramatic atmosphere. The background is dark, making the mask and fire stand out.

Padayani blends theatre, music
and dance in an elegant way



A burning passion for perfection

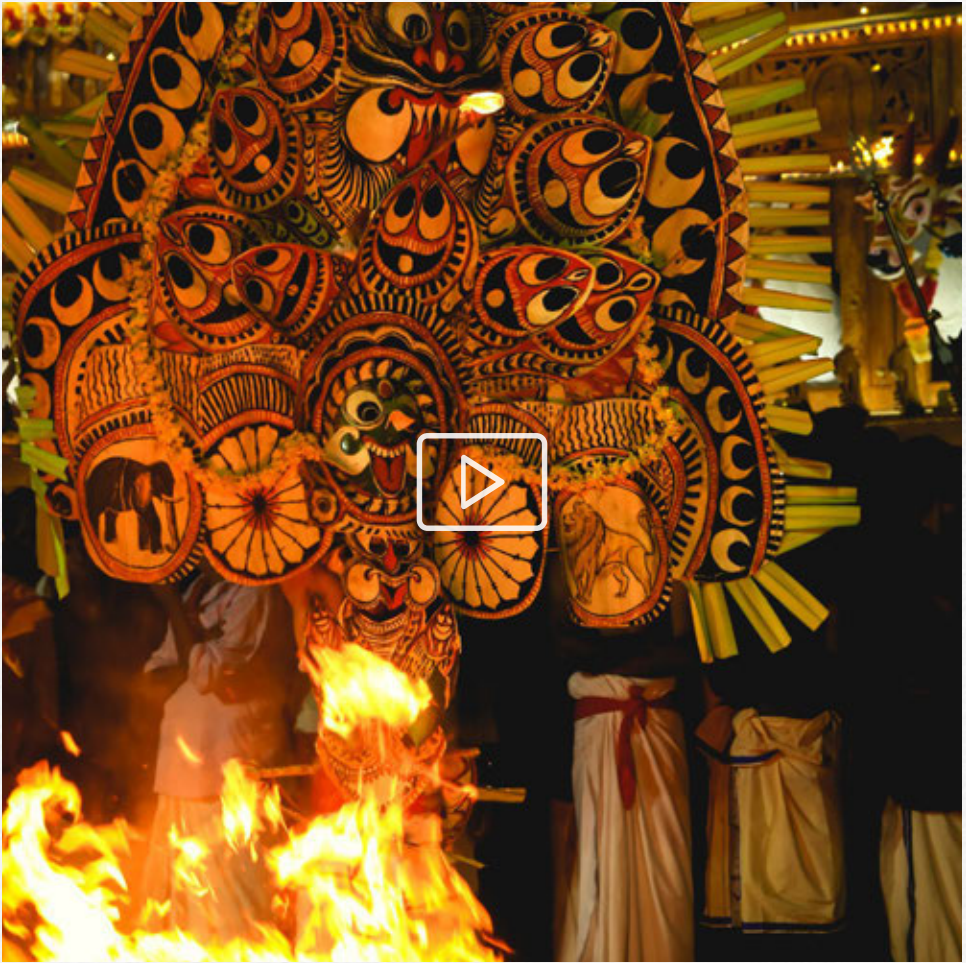
In the backdrop of night, with burning fire and a heart that burns even more with passion, an artist emerges; uniquely dressed, wearing a face mask and an elaborately designed 'kolam', performing with great zest and vigour. Padayani is indeed a one-of-its-kind art form.

Padayani basically means a row of warriors. This ritual theatre form is performed in temples and is associated with Bhadrakali, a manifestation of an angry goddess Kali. The art form blends theatre, music and dance beautifully and is usually performed in temples dedicated to Bhadrakali. Padayani Thappu, Chenda and Para are some of the musical instruments used during Padayani. Unique to the old central Travancore area, Padayani is also observed as a

thanksgiving for a great harvest. The brilliant theatrical virtues of Padayani makes it a performance beyond expectations.

WATCHING PADAYANI IS A CHANCE TO KNOW MORE ABOUT MYTHICAL STORIES AND TRADITIONS OF INDIA

The myth behind Padayani relates to the story of how goddess Bhadrakali defeated and killed the demon Darika. The demon had won a boon from Lord Brahma that only a woman will be able to kill him. Thus Bhadrakali, the fiercest form of Kali emerged and killed Darika. Watching Padayani will for sure be a chance to know more about the great mythical stories and traditions of India.



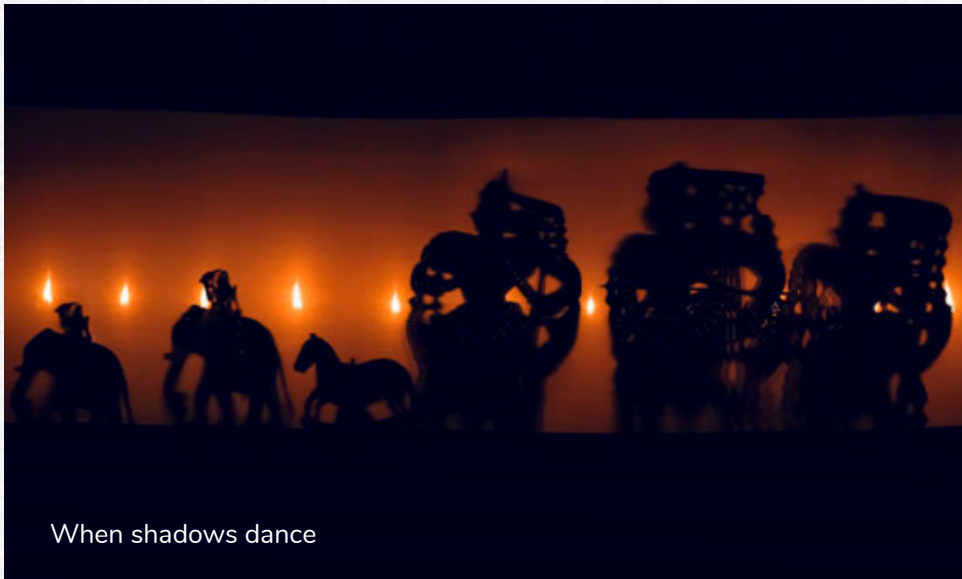
KOTTANGAL PADAYANI

Kottangal Devi Temple in Pathanamthitta district is famous for its annual Padayani festival, popularly known as Kottangal Padayani. The festival is celebrated over the Malayalam months of Dhanu and Makaram (December-January period). The last 8 days are important with the performance of various Kolams and other traditional programmes.

THOLPAVAKOOTHU



Tholpavakoothu is Kerala's unique
form of shadow puppetry



When shadows dance

What a splendid sight it would be to watch shadows come to life and narrate plots from legends that are part of the intrinsic cultural heritage of a region! If you are yet to experience such a spectacle, here is Tholpavakoothu for you, Kerala's very own shadow puppetry.

Popular mostly in the northern districts of Kerala, Tholpavakoothu is a form of ritualistic art that is traditionally performed in temples. Though not much is known about the origins of Tholpavakoothu, it can definitely be considered one of Kerala's ancient art forms. Thol stands for leather, paava means doll and koothu is play. Tholpavakoothu is usually performed at night and is held on a stage called Koothumadam. A curtain is set and illuminated using lamps. The specially

designed puppets that come in various shapes and forms are played behind the curtain. Shadows of these puppets fall on a piece of white cloth, giving the audience a spectacular visual and musical experience.

THOLPAVAKOOTHU IS
UNIQUE IN THAT ARTISTS
MAKE USE OF PUPPETS
IN ENACTING A TALE

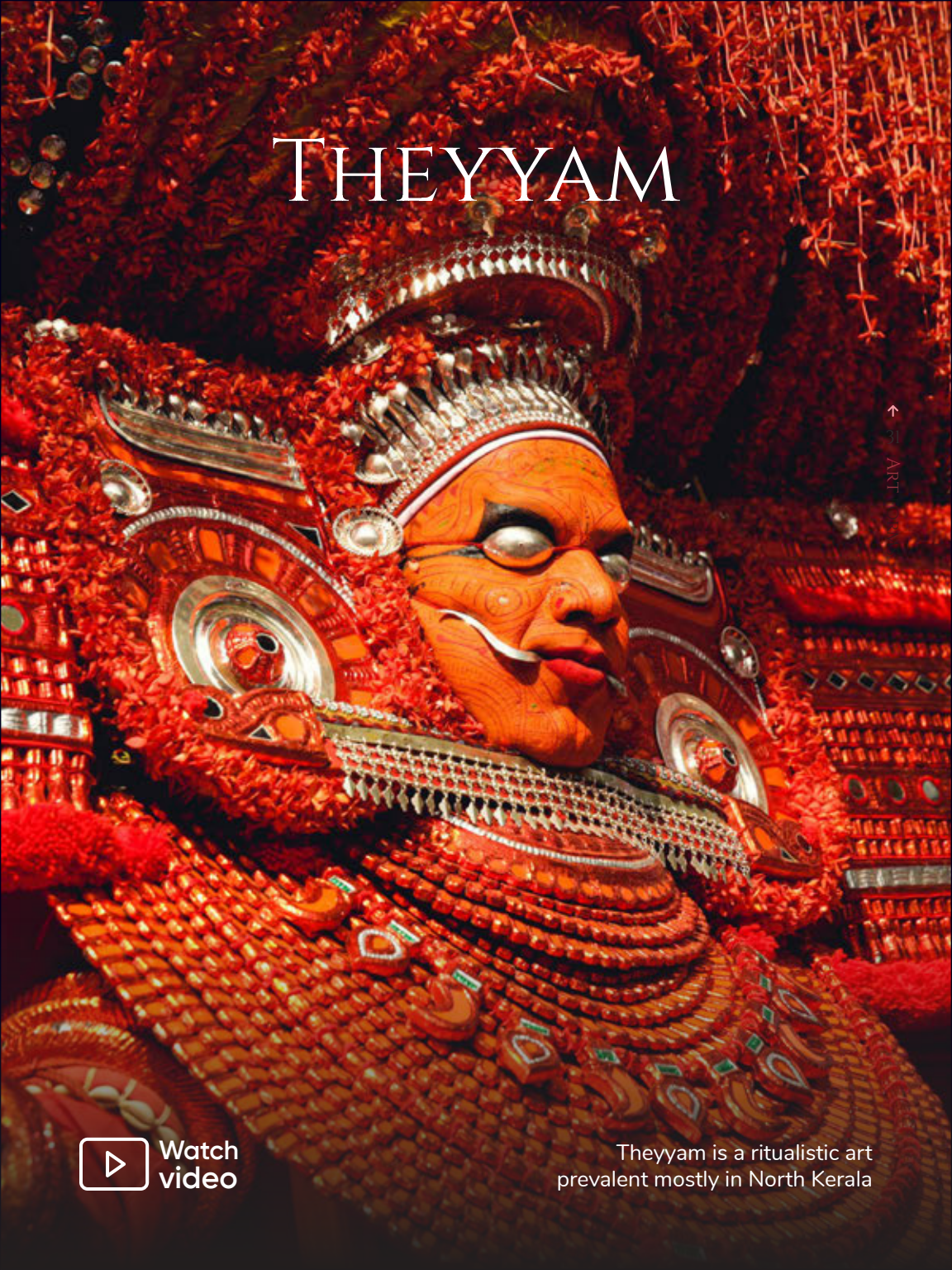
Tholpavakoothu is yet another performance dedicated to goddess Bhadrakali. Legend has it that Bhadrakali could not witness the triumph of lord Rama over Ravana as she was fighting Darika at the time. So Tholpavakoothu was staged at her request, narrating the story of the Rama-Ravana war.



THOLPAVAKOOTHU

Tholpavakoothu or shadow puppetry is a temple art form which is prevalent in the Bhagavathy temples (mother Goddess) in Palakkad district and nearby regions in Kerala. Accompanying instruments include Ezhupara, Chenda and Maddalam. The artists have to undergo several years of rigorous training to master this art form. The puppetry is staged on a special structure in temple premises called Koothumadam.

THEYYAM



→ ART



Watch
video

Theyyam is a ritualistic art
prevalent mostly in North Kerala



An art form, so divine.

In the God's Own Country, often you see men dressed up as deities themselves. Dancing, singing, trying to communicate with that extra-celestial power – all with an intention to seek divine blessings. If you wish to know more about that, you need to understand about Theyyam.

A ritualistic dance worship prevalent in the northern parts of Kerala, Theyyam inherits traditions, rituals and customs from thousands of years back. There are more than 400 varieties of Theyyams and are generally performed by male artists, with Devakotthu Theyyam being the only one presented by women. The artists wear heavy makeup, face paints using natural colours, flamboyant costumes, ornaments and elaborate headgears. Legends, myths and heroic tales are

included as the verses for the music. Musical instruments like chenda, ila thalam, kurumkuzhal and veekuchenda are used to create a mesmerising music.

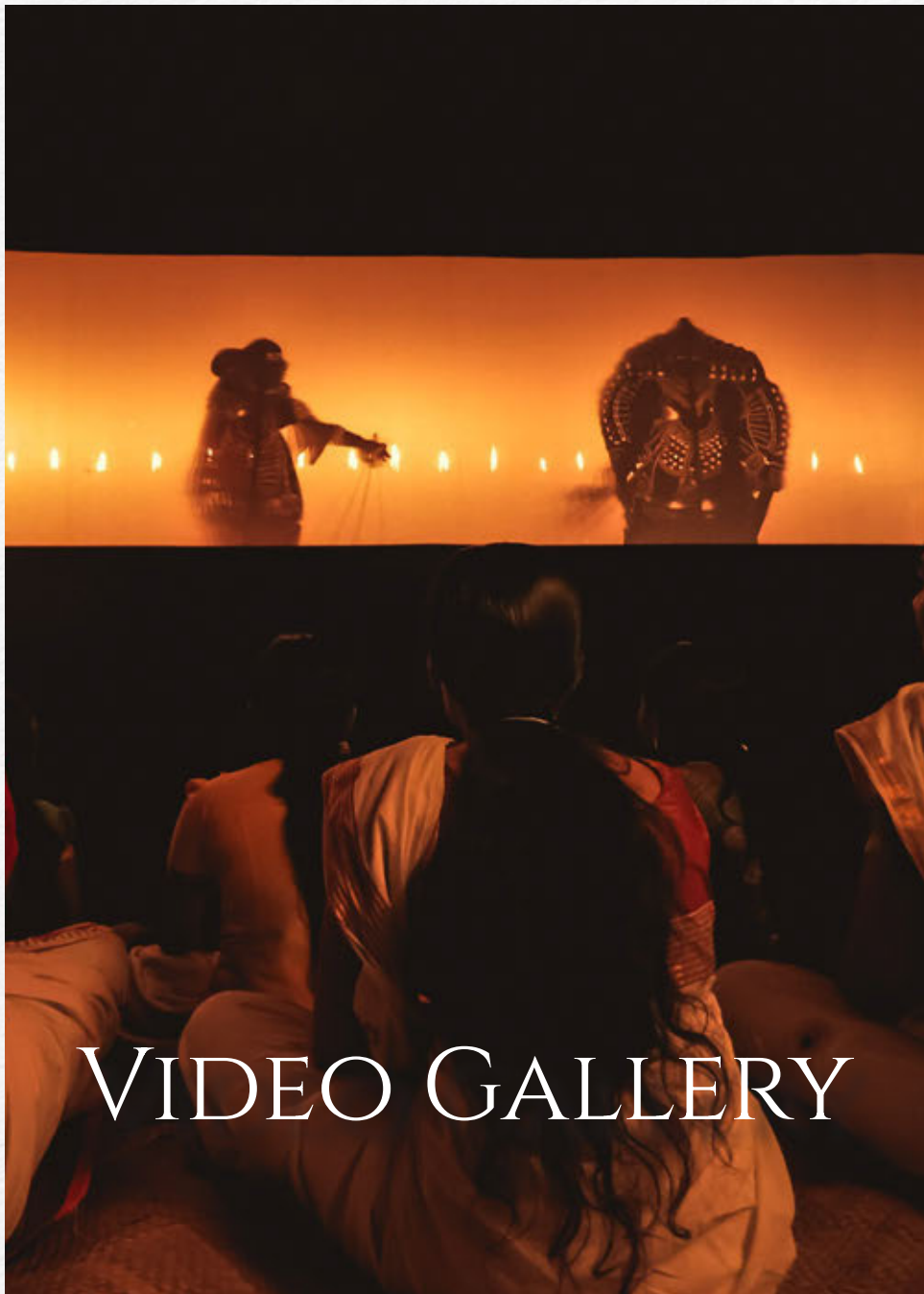
TO CATCH A GLIMPSE OF THEYYAM PERFORMANCES, VISIT THE MALABAR REGION OF KERALA DURING THE DECEMBER-APRIL SEASON

The performances are usually conducted in shrines and sometimes even family homes with detailed rites and rituals to honour ancestors. The performer begins Theyyam in front of the shrine and later would go around it, also running and dancing through the premises and courtyards. The performance is a splendid combination of recitations, music and dance.



MANNANKOOTHU

The ritual art form of Mannankoothu tells the story of Kovilan and Kannagi (central characters from the Tamil epic Silapathikaram) and is performed by Mannan community during the harvest festival of 'Kavaloottu'. Mannans are tribespeople living in the forests of Idukki district in Kerala. Ardent devotees of goddess Madura Meenakshi, the Mannan community of Kerala has a well-established administration when compared to other tribal communities.



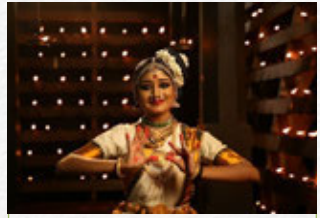
VIDEO GALLERY



Kadhakali



Koodiyattam



Mohiniyattam



Oppana



Bhadrakali Theeyattu



Chavittu Natakam



Duffmuttu



Arabanamuttu



Gadhika



Sarpam Thullal



Margamkali



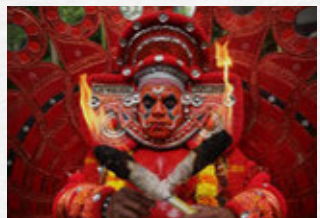
Ottan Thullal



Padayani



Tholpavakothu



Theyyam





PLAN YOUR TRIP

While planning your trip to experience the art forms, you don't have to worry about places to stay. There are a multitude of hotels and homestays which are registered with Kerala Tourism. You can check the Kerala Tourism website to know about them and also the tour operators who will help you to plan the trips.



HOTELS



HOMESTAYS



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PACKAGES

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A Catalogue of Festivities



Thiruvananthapuram, A Tropical Paradise



The Dance of the Divine



Chasing the Flavours of Malabar

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THANK YOU

