

**TELEGRAPH**  
**A GREEN HAVEN**

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**WAYFARER ▶**

Nothing rejuvenates the city-jarred soul than sailing through Kerala's backwaters, says **Lubna Salim**

# A green haven

It's a picturesque city that's the perfect destination after the hustle and bustle of Calcutta. Alleppey — also known as Alappuzha — is a combination of breathtaking backwaters, beaches and canals and it's a great place to relax and rejuvenate. Add to that great food and fabulous resorts and you have nothing short of an amazing experience.

My rendezvous with Kerala began with a long flight that took me all the way from Calcutta to Kochi with a halt in Bangalore. But even from the plane you can spot the difference the minute you cross into Kerala and see a serene sea of green below. From Kochi, it's a two-and-a-half-hour drive to Alleppey with a brief halt for a quick sip of refreshingly sweet coconut water — this is Kerala after all.

**A three-minute serpentine drive, 4km** from Alleppey town, leads to the Punnamada Resort that overlooks the beautiful Vembanad Lake. It looks like something from a picture book with wooden villas and cottages, some overlooking the lake. There is, of course, plenty of green all around and houseboats anchored nearby on the lake. I had a quiet dinner at the hotel's multi-cuisine restaurant — a colonial style structure — which included some tropical fruit salad, blueberry cheese-



(Left) Alleppey hosted Coir Kerala 2012, the second international coir trade fair in February; Houseboats are a signature feature of the backwaters; (inset) The Panoramic Sea Resort near Alappuzha Beach is a lush getaway



Courtesy: Punnamada Resort

**Ready reckoner**

Map not to scale

**Getting there:** Fly to Kochi and then take a car to Alleppey.

**Staying there:** Go for one of the Ayurvedic resorts. A houseboat stay in Punnamada Resort [(0477) 2233691/ 69] makes for a great backwater experience. Beach lovers can check in at the Panoramic Sea Resort [(0477) 2251071].

cake and butterscotch ice-cream that were beckoning me from the dessert section.

But the best was yet to come. A few quick steps from the hotel's reception and I caught a glimpse of a houseboat anchored near the hotel's back lawn. This was to be my home for the night and I stepped into the lap of luxury. The houseboat had a deck-cum-dining area, two bedrooms and even a private kitchen. My room was cosy with ambient lighting and a comfy four-poster bed. Waking up to the sounds of birds was a rare treat, and I left the houseboat reluctantly the next morning.

**Since I was on holiday, I** figured it was time to taste the local specialities. At breakfast, I went for an exotic combination of *puttu* (steamed savoury cakes made with ground rice) served with *kadala* (black gram) curry and hot *idlis* and *vadas* with *sambar* and chutney.

A cottage at the Panoramic Sea Resort was to be my home for the next three days. There were more swaying palm trees and quaint cottages here and also the sound of waves and golden sands right across the road.

Alleppey is a chilled out city but the markets here shut by 7.30 in the evening. I was told to visit the EMS Stadium for Coir Kerala 2012 — the second edition of the Kerala's international coir trade fair that was in full swing. I ended up buying some really chic coir mats, rugs and jewellery to take back home as souvenirs.

By the time my first round of retail therapy was over, it was noon and I decided on a light lunch before hitting the beach in the

without a tour of the local market. So, the following day I set out to explore the *bazaar*. From spices to utensils, clothes, rows and rows of jewellery shops and small confectionery shops that sell everything from popular banana chips to short cakes and biscuits, it was an interesting window shopping experience.

**The high point of the next day was a** traditional five-course Kerala meal at the Hotel Arcadia. Here, the delicacies on the table included *neymeen porichathu* (fried seer fish), *meen curry* (Kerala-style fish curry), *avial*, *puttisseri* (gravy made with curd and vegetables), stew (vegetables stewed in coconut milk), *payasam* (dessert made of *chana dal* cooked with jaggery and coconut milk).

I reserved the following day for quiet contemplation and lazing around at the resort, while the evening spelt a special sunset by the sea.

My last day was made special with a three-hour houseboat tour of the stunning backwaters with a scrumptious breakfast cooked and served on cruise. We were a group of six on-board *Spice Ginger*, operated by Spice Routes.

As we relaxed on the deck and tried our hand at steering the boat, the aromas of *puttu* with *kadala* and duck egg curry filled the dining area. While munching on all this, we sailed past boats, ferries and fishermen and also picturesque churches, homes and resorts.

We rounded off the day with an Italian meal at an eatery called Dreamers Café, a stone's throw from the resort. This single-storey restaurant had an easy air, ideal for long meals.

The next morning, I started for Kochi airport. On my way back home, I was a new, rejuvenated person.

Photographs by author



There's nothing like sailing through God's Own Country

evening. So, after an authentic Kerala meal of coconut rice and *avial* (vegetables cooked with curd, coconut and curry leaves) and a siesta at the hotel, it was beach time. The soft sand, warm water and setting sun marked the perfect end to my first day in Alleppey.

Most hotels here are located on the outskirts and Alleppey is known for its backwater retreats but a visit to any city is incomplete