



Thiruvananthapuram

Perched on the edge of the Arabian Sea near India's southernmost tip, Kerala's capital is a city of myriad charms

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Thiruvananthapuram, also known as Trivandrum, often gets overlooked by travellers eager to explore Kerala's famous backwaters and beachside resorts. But the laid-back city rewards those who take the time to explore it. Built on seven hills, it was once a trading post for sandalwood, spices and ivory. Today, it's a growing science and technology hub; yet, the legacy of the former ruling royal family of Travancore and their love for the arts remains very much a part of the city's social fabric.



KING'S ABODE

Visit Puthen Malika Palace, one of the city's cultural landmarks, and see paintings, sculptures and musical instruments once belonging to Swathi Thirunal, a former Maharaja and celebrated poet, composer and musician. Made entirely of teak and rosewood and built in 1844 in traditional Keralan style, the palace boasts intricate carvings of 122 horses on the wooden brackets supporting its roof.

BEACH RETREAT

The small beach town of Varkala, 50km up the coast, is dominated by spectacular red laterite cliffs overlooking the beach. It's also known for its ancient Vishnu Temple and natural spring, which is believed to have curative properties.

LOCAL FLAVOURS

Keralan cuisine is prepared with generous doses of coconut in all forms. Fish is also a staple. At the 24-hour **The Fifth Element** at Vivanta by Taj – Trivandrum hotel, try local specialities like the Alleppey prawn curry cooked with raw mangoes in a spicy coconut gravy or *karimeen pollichathu* (deep-fried pearl spot wrapped in a banana leaf).

COTTON WEAVES

Traditional wear in Kerala is elegantly understated. Think crisp white saris decorated with delicate hems in gold or solid colours. **Karalkada** boutique carries a superb collection of these garments made of high-quality handwoven cottons with hems spun from real gold thread.

 SilkAir flies four times weekly between Singapore and Thiruvananthapuram

GETTY IMAGES; TAJ HOTELS, KERALA TOURISM, KARALKADA



DANCE UNDER THE STARS

Held annually from 20-26 January, the prestigious **Nishagandhi Festival**, besides being free to all, is the perfect opportunity to catch some of India's renowned classical dancers and musicians from across the country, as well as Kerala's own performing arts, like the feminine classical dance *Mohiniattam* and the stylised dance-drama form of *Kathakali*. Adding to the cultural vibe is the venue: the open-air theatre in the grounds of the majestic Kanakakunnu Palace.