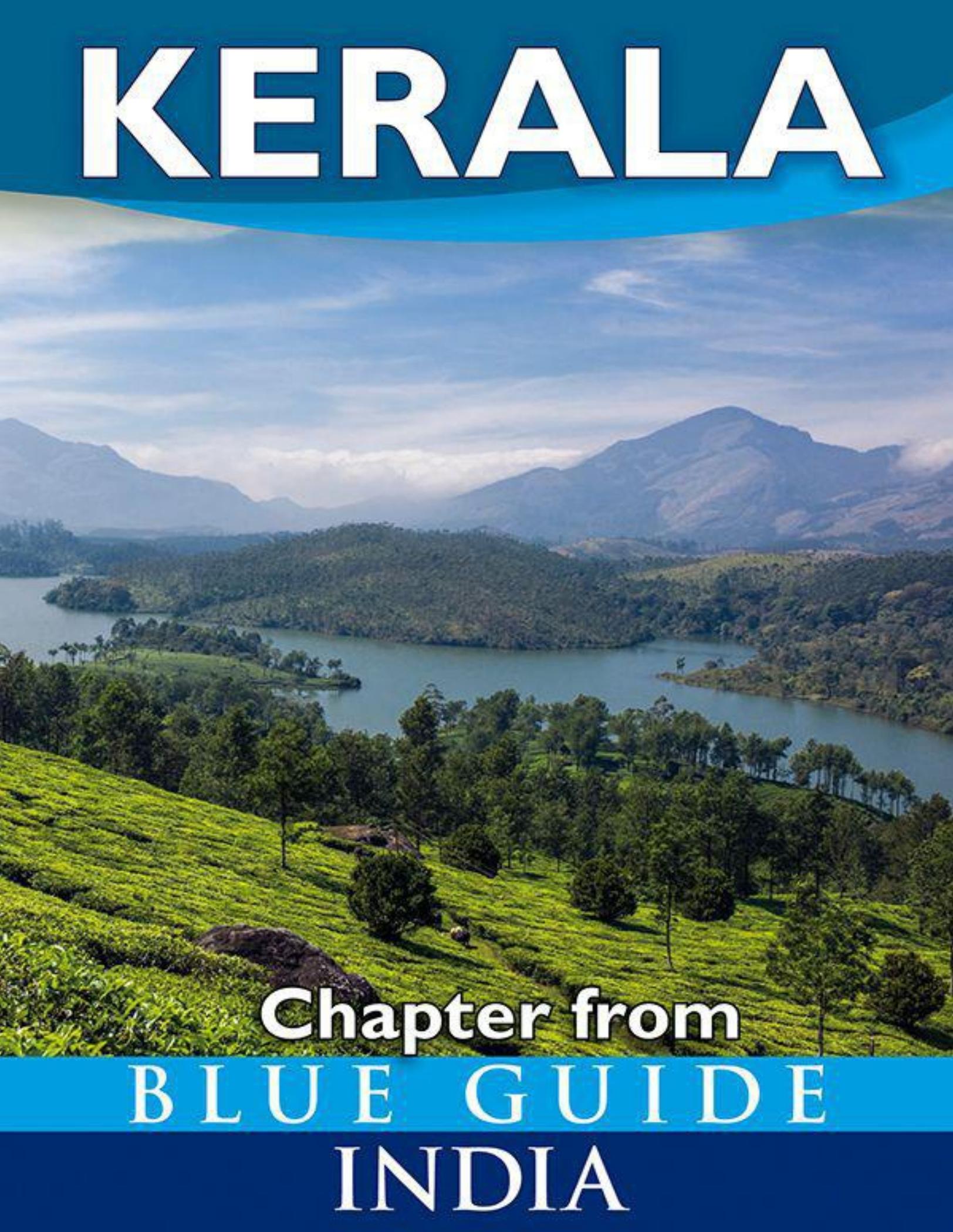


KERALA

A scenic landscape of Kerala, India, featuring a large lake surrounded by lush green hills and mountains under a blue sky with light clouds.

Chapter from

**BLUE GUIDE
INDIA**

KERALA



This ebook comprises the chapter that makes up the Kerala section of *Blue Guide India* (First edition 2012). The maps, drawings and diagrams from the print edition are included. For copyright reasons, the photographs are not.

Published by Blue Guides Limited, a Somerset Books Company
Winchester House, Deane Gate Avenue, Taunton, Somerset TA1 2UH
www.blueguides.com

‘Blue Guide’ is a registered trademark.

Text © Sam Miller 2012

The rights of Sam Miller to be identified as author of this work have been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright Designs and Patents Act, 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—photographic, electronic or mechanical—without permission of the publisher.

ISBN (print edition) 978-1-905131-53-2

ISBN (ebook) 978-1-909177-60-4

The author and publisher have made reasonable efforts to ensure the accuracy of all the information in this ebook; however, they can accept no responsibility for any loss, injury or inconvenience sustained by any traveller as a result of information or advice contained in the guide.

Statement of editorial independence: Blue Guides, their authors and editors, are prohibited from accepting payment from any restaurant, hotel, gallery or other establishment for its inclusion in this guide or on www.blueguides.com, or for a more favourable mention than would otherwise have been made.

Series editor Annabel Barber

Print edition produced for Blue Guides by Thameside Media.

Layout and design by Anikó Kuzmich.

Maps and plans © Blue Guides 2012.

Cover photo: Tea plantations at Munnar. ©istockphoto.com/Daniel Bhim-Rao

Author’s acknowledgements:

Thank you to all those who helped me in a variety of ways during the writing of this book.

In particular: Lucy Peck, John Keay, Francis Wacziarg, Aman Nath, Priya Paul, Varsha Hoon, Penny Richards, Shantum Seth, Natalia Leigh, William Crawley, Tom Crawley, William and Olivia Dalrymple, Eleni Philon, Paul Stafford, Benedict Leigh, Gautham Subramaniam, Abhishek Madhukar, Andrew Whitehead, William and Anjali Bissell, Ferzina Banaji, Anuradha Goyal, Harpreet Kaur, Sachin Mulji, Richard Holkar, Toby Sinclair, Jonty Rajagopalan, the late Tony Mango, Veeresh

Malik, Neeta Das, Rajiv Saurastri, Surinder and Umi Dewan, Jivi Sethi, Shireen Vakil Miller, Zubin Miller, Roxana Miller, Naoshirvan Vakil, Ferida and Noni Chopra, Naval Chopra, Saira Menezes, Annie Dare, Altaf Hussain, Sidharth Bhatia, Valeria Corvo, Karuna Nundy, Nadir Bilimoria, Pheroza and Vijay Singh, Pia Chugani, Raj Kumar Sharma, Pan Singh Bisht, Clementina Lakra, Dipika and Gautam Mehra, Sameera and Syed Zaidi, Christine and Aman Rai, Viva Kermani, Jeroo Mango, Jane and Karl Miller, Subir Bhaumik, Gopal Gandhi, Indivar Mukhopadhyay, Madhup Mohta, Binoo Joshi, Naresh Fernandes, Ran Chakrabarti.

www.blueguides.com

‘Blue Guide’ is a registered trademark.

We welcome reader comments, questions and feedback:

editorial@blueguides.com

SAM MILLER is the Country Director, India, for the BBC World Service Trust, the international NGO arm of the BBC. He has lived and worked in India for much of the last two decades and is a former BBC Delhi correspondent. His first book, *Delhi: Adventures in a Megacity*, was published in 2009.

WILLIAM DALRYMPLE is the author of a number of books, including *The Last Mughal: the Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857* and *Nine Lives* (Bloomsbury). www.williamdalrymple.com.

CONTENTS

[FOREWORD](#)

[INTRODUCTION](#)

[KERALA:](#)

[HISTORY OF KERALA](#)

[TRIVANDRUM:](#)

[ROYAL QUARTER](#)

[NORTH OF TRIVANDRUM](#)

[SOUTH OF TRIVANDRUM](#)

[COCHIN:](#)

[FORT COCHIN](#)

[MATTANCHERRY](#)

[THE REST OF COCHIN](#)

[SOUTH OF COCHIN:](#)

[TRIPUNITHIRA](#)

[VAIKOM & KADUTHURUTHI](#)

[PALAI](#)

[KOTTAYAM](#)

[ALLEPPEY, THIRUVALLA & KAVIYUR](#)

[KRISHNAPURAM PALACE](#)

[NORTH OF COCHIN:](#)

[CRANGANORE](#)

[PALLIPURAM](#)

[TRICHUR](#)

[EAST OF COCHIN](#)

[NORTHERN KERALA:](#)

[CALICUT](#)

[KAPPAD](#)

[MAHÉ & THALASSERY](#)

[KANNUR](#)

[TALIPARAMBA](#)

[BEKAL FORT](#)

[WAYANAD](#)

[PRACTICAL INFORMATION:](#)

[GETTING THERE & GETTING AROUND](#)

[ACCOMMODATION](#)

[FOOD](#)

[FURTHER READING & VIEWING](#)

[MAPS](#)

[GEOGRAPHY OF INDIA](#)

[HISTORY](#)

[ARCHITECTURE & THE ARTS](#)

RELIGION:

HINDUISM

BUDDHISM

JAINISM

SIKHISM

ISLAM

CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

JUDAISM IN INDIA

ZOROASTRIANISM IN INDIA

BAHA'IS IN INDIA

GENERAL PRACTICAL TIPS:

PLANNING YOUR TRIP

TRAVELLING TO INDIA

CLIMATE

WHAT TO TAKE

ARRIVING IN INDIA

TRAVELLING IN INDIA

ACCOMMODATION

EATING & DRINKING

HEALTH

RESPONSIBLE TOURISM

MONEY

COMMUNICATIONS

SOCIAL ETIQUETTE & VISITING PLACES

PUBLIC HOLIDAYS & FESTIVALS

OTHER INFORMATION

GLOSSARY

FOREWORD TO THE PRINT EDITION

by William Dalrymple

In his book *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama writes of his conviction that history not only shapes but becomes embedded in a landscape—in the land and the rocks and the water. For millennia, armies have been crashing through the Himalayan passes to attempt the conquest of India; and for as long as history records, India has been the scene of their clashes. Aryans, Persians, Scythians, Kushans, Huns, Turks and Mughals have all debouched through here, most of them sooner or later coming to grief in a similar manner to the last of the foreign invaders, the British. All over India lie the monuments left by the subcontinent's palimpsest of dynasties. Each in turn has raised its palaces and its great citadels; each in turn has seen its fortunes ebb and its monuments crumble. The British painted and celebrated the ruins of the Delhi sultans and the Mughals in their letters and travelogues, while never seeming to realise that they themselves were subject to the same inexorable historical laws which levelled the domes and vaults of the dynasties that predated them. Perhaps inevitably, it took a Frenchman to see the hubris of the British: when Clemenceau saw the dome of Lutyens's Viceregal Palace in Delhi rising above the crumbling vestiges of the Mughals he gasped and said: 'Ah! This will make the most magnificent ruin of them all.' He had a point: only 17 years after it was opened, the British left India for ever.

Yet alongside all these monuments to secular ambition and power, there has always been in India a parallel monumental landscape of the sacred and the holy. As the great Sanskritist, Diana Eck, puts it: 'Considering its long history, India has had but a few hours of political and administrative unity. Its unity as a nation, however, has been firmly constituted by the sacred geography it has held in common and revered: its mountains, forests, rivers, hilltop shrines.' For Hindus, as for many Indian Buddhists, Muslims, Christians and Sikhs, India is a Holy Land. The actual soil of India is thought by many rural Hindus to be the residence of the divinity and, in villages across India, it is worshipped and understood literally to be the body of the Goddess, while the features of the Indian landscape—the mountains and forests, the caves and outcrops of rock, the mighty rivers—are all understood to be her physical features. She is *Bharat Mata*, Mother India, and in her temple in Benares (Varanasi) she is worshipped not in the form of an idol but manifested in a brightly-coloured map of India. Her landscape is not dead but alive, dense with sacred significance.

This idea of India as a sacred landscape predates classical Hinduism, and, most importantly, is an idea which in turn was passed on to most of the other religions that came to flourish in the Indian soil. Just as the sacredness of the landscape percolated from pre-Vedic and tribal folk cults into classical 'Great Tradition' Hinduism, so in the course of time the idea slowly trickled from Hinduism into Buddhism, Sikhism, Indian Islam and even Indian Christianity. As a result, for example, nowhere else in Islam are there so many Sufi shrines where individual pilgrims can come and directly gain access to the divine through the intercession of the saint of a particular village or *mohalla*. Mosques are everywhere in Islam, but Sufi shrines are, in a very specific way—and very like Hindu *tirthas*—fords linking one world with the next. They are places where, thanks to the intervention of a great saint, you can cross over from the realm of the human to the realm of the divine, a place where prayers are somehow simply more likely to be answered. The Indian Sufi tradition, and the distance it has at times travelled from the strictures of pure koranic orthodoxy, is typical of the diversity of

views and faiths and competing ideas that have always coexisted: 'In India,' writes the Nobel Prize-winner Amartya Sen, heterodoxy 'has always been the natural state of affairs.' Indeed India's genius, argues Sen, derives from this diversity, and from the way that its different orthodoxies have always been challenged by each other.

As a microcosm of modern India, Delhi is paramount. Of the great cities of the world, only Rome and Cairo can even begin to rival it for the sheer volume and density of its historic remains; yet in Delhi, as elsewhere in South Asia, familiarity has bred not pride but contempt. Every year, a few more ruins disappear. According to historian Pavan Verma, the majority of the buildings he recorded in *Mansions at Dusk* only six years ago no longer exist. On every side, rings of new suburbs are springing up, full of call centres, software companies and apartment blocks, all rapidly rising on land that only two years ago was billowing winter wheat. Shah Jahan's great Shalimar Garden, where Aurangzeb was crowned, now has a municipal housing colony on its land. The changes in Delhi reflects the growth of the Indian economy in general: measured by purchasing power parity, India is already on the verge of overtaking Japan to become the third largest economy in the world. This fast-emerging middle-class India has its eyes firmly fixed on the coming century. Everywhere there is a profound hope that the country's rapidly rising international status will somehow compensate for a past often perceived as one long succession of invasions and defeats at the hands of foreign powers. The result is a tragic neglect of its magnificent heritage. There is little effective legislation protecting ancient monuments, no system whatsoever of architectural listing, and the rich array of domestic and colonial architecture is entirely unprotected by law. In the competition between development and heritage, it is the latter that gives way. All of this makes Sam Miller's remarkable guide all the more valuable; and for his masterful work of celebrating and recording and directing us to the best of India's monuments, we owe him a huge debt. India still receives a fraction of the world's travellers: only five million visited in 2010, compared to the eleven million who visited tiny, monument-less Singapore, or the 77 million who visited France. Mass tourism, a threat in many countries, remains only a dream in India, and as a result travellers can play a positive role, highlighting the value—economic and otherwise—of the country's magnificent heritage. I road-tested this guide pre-publication on a trip around the little-visited state of Madhya Pradesh and can vouch for its accuracy, wit, discrimination and remarkable comprehensiveness. Other guide books may give fuller advice on the night club scene of Goa or the pubs of Bangalore; but there exists in print no better one-volume guide to India's architectural legacy, and how to get to see it. I have been waiting many years for a guide like this, and look forward to packing it in my rucksack for many trips to come.

New Delhi 1st July 2011.

INTRODUCTION TO THE PRINT EDITION

India's size, its billion-plus population, its long, complex history and its huge variety of cultural, religious and ethnic traditions make it feel more like a continent than a country. It is impossible to 'know' India in much the same way that it is impossible to 'know' Europe. Many visitors will fall in love with a particular area of India, to which they will return repeatedly, or find a specific architectural or artistic tradition that captivates them. Others will come back to India to explore, gradually, the whole enormous country, learning that wherever they go, there is still more to visit, if only they could tarry a little longer.

Foreign visitors have been touring India for more than 2,000 years, and many first-timers return dazzled and awestruck, and sometimes a little confused. The earliest foreign visitor to describe India was Megasthenes, a diplomat of Greek origin, who gave a vivid and mainly trustworthy account of life in north India in the 3rd century BC. He described the caste system and the geography of India with great accuracy. But, like so many others after him, he also repeats fantastic tales: he speaks of gold-digging ants, of humans with eight-toed feet that point backwards, and tribes of people whose ears are large and long enough to wrap around themselves to sleep in. None of this was true, of course, but for centuries India has been a land of hyperbole—the mysterious, mystic East where all is possible. And it is not always easy to reconcile different versions of the truth. Today, guides at major tourist attractions will spin stories because that's what they think tourists want to hear, or because they're repeating tales from their local oral tradition. If one were to believe every guide (and quite a few guidebooks), one would think that every fort had a secret tunnel to a far-off city, that every piece of inlaid mirror-work was a secret signalling device or every ruler cut off the arms of (or blinded or executed) the builders of a beautiful monument. In fact, the truth is often more interesting.

It is the aim of this book to be a reliable guide to the great monuments and artworks of India by putting them in their historical and cultural context—the first full *Blue Guide to India*, and the first modern attempt to compile an all-India guidebook that specialises in Indian history and culture. This book also aims to encourage visitors to look at the familiar and the famous in new ways, and to explore some magnificent but less well-known monuments before they get swamped by mass tourism.

Sam Miller

KERALA

Over the last two decades, the state of Kerala ([map 14](#)) has emerged as an important international tourist destination. Although the sandy beaches and backwaters of southern Kerala remain the major attractions for visitors, the city of Cochin is one of India's most interesting historic urban centres, with an old European quarter, a fine palace and a synagogue. The north of the state attracts fewer visitors, but has a rapidly developing tourist infrastructure, some glorious beaches and a number of important buildings from the early European period, while inland are some of India's most spectacular landscapes. Kerala is educationally India's most advanced state, with very high rates of literacy, a mixed Hindu-Christian-Muslim population and a powerful Communist tradition dating back to the 1930s. The main language of the state is Malayalam, and the capital is Trivandrum.

HISTORY OF KERALA

The state's early history is dominated by the Chera Dynasty, which is thought to have ruled most parts of modern Kerala for more than 1,000 years, until the early 12th century, when they were defeated by Chola forces from what is now Tamil Nadu. Unlike that of other early southern dynasties, almost nothing has survived of Chera art and architecture, probably because wood, rather than stone, was the main construction material. Kerala's early history was also marked by its importance as a centre for international trade, particularly in pepper and other spices which grow locally. The large port of Muziris, north of Cochin, which flourished 2,000 years ago and traded with the Roman Empire and others parts of the world, has been the subject of recent archaeological excavations.

Foreign religions come to India: According to tradition, the Kerala coast is where three of India's imported faiths first arrived in the country. St Thomas the Apostle is said to have arrived in Kerala in AD 52, and converted many local people to Christianity. Many of the modern-day 'Thomas Christians', belonging to at least seven small Christian sects with strong local roots, claim to be descendants of those early converts. India's earliest Jews are thought to have come to the country at about the same time (though some accounts place their arrival much earlier), and set up important communities, now almost vanished, in central Kerala. The first Muslims are thought to have come to central and northern Kerala as preachers and traders in the 8th century—in areas that still have a large Muslim population.

European trade and rule: The Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama arrived at Kappad, just north of Calicut in 1498, the year from which the European involvement in India is usually dated. Vasco da Gama was able to extract trading concessions from the ruler of Calicut, known as the Zamorin, and later from the rulers of Cochin, where he died in 1524. The Portuguese were soon followed by the Dutch, who were based in Cochin—though they were defeated by the forces of Travancore in 1741 at the Battle of Kolachel. By this time the British were playing a larger role on the Malabar coast, and by the end of the 18th century were the dominant force in Kerala—though the princely states of Cochin and Travancore remained nominally independent during the British period, and the French retained the tiny enclave of Mahé, which is now ruled from Pondicherry.

Independent India: At Independence, Cochin and Travancore were united as one state, and then merged with the more northerly Calicut and Kasargod areas into the state of Kerala in 1956. The following year in Kerala, one of the world's first democratically-elected Communist governments was voted to power. The Communists and Congress have remained rivals for power in Kerala ever since.

TRIVANDRUM

Trivandrum ([map 14 B3](#)), officially called Thiruvananthapuram, is the capital of Kerala and its largest city. Its proximity to the beaches of Kovalam and Varkala means that most visitors only use the city for transit, but Trivandrum was once the capital of the princely state of Travancore, and has several interesting buildings from that period. The capital was moved from Padmanabhapuram (now in Tamil Nadu) by Martanda Varma, possibly the greatest of the Travancore rulers.

Orientation: Trivandrum is set slightly inland from the coast, with the city's airport hugging the seashore. The old Royal Quarter is in the south of the city, beyond the railway station and close to the Padmanabhaswami Temple. The main civic buildings and hotels are in the north of the city.

TRIVANDRUM



Kanakakunnu Palace

Napier Museum

Chitra Art Gallery

Christ Church

Victoria Public Library

St Joseph's Cathedral

Victoria Jubilee Town Hall

Connemara Market

© BLUE GUIDES

Secretariat Building

47

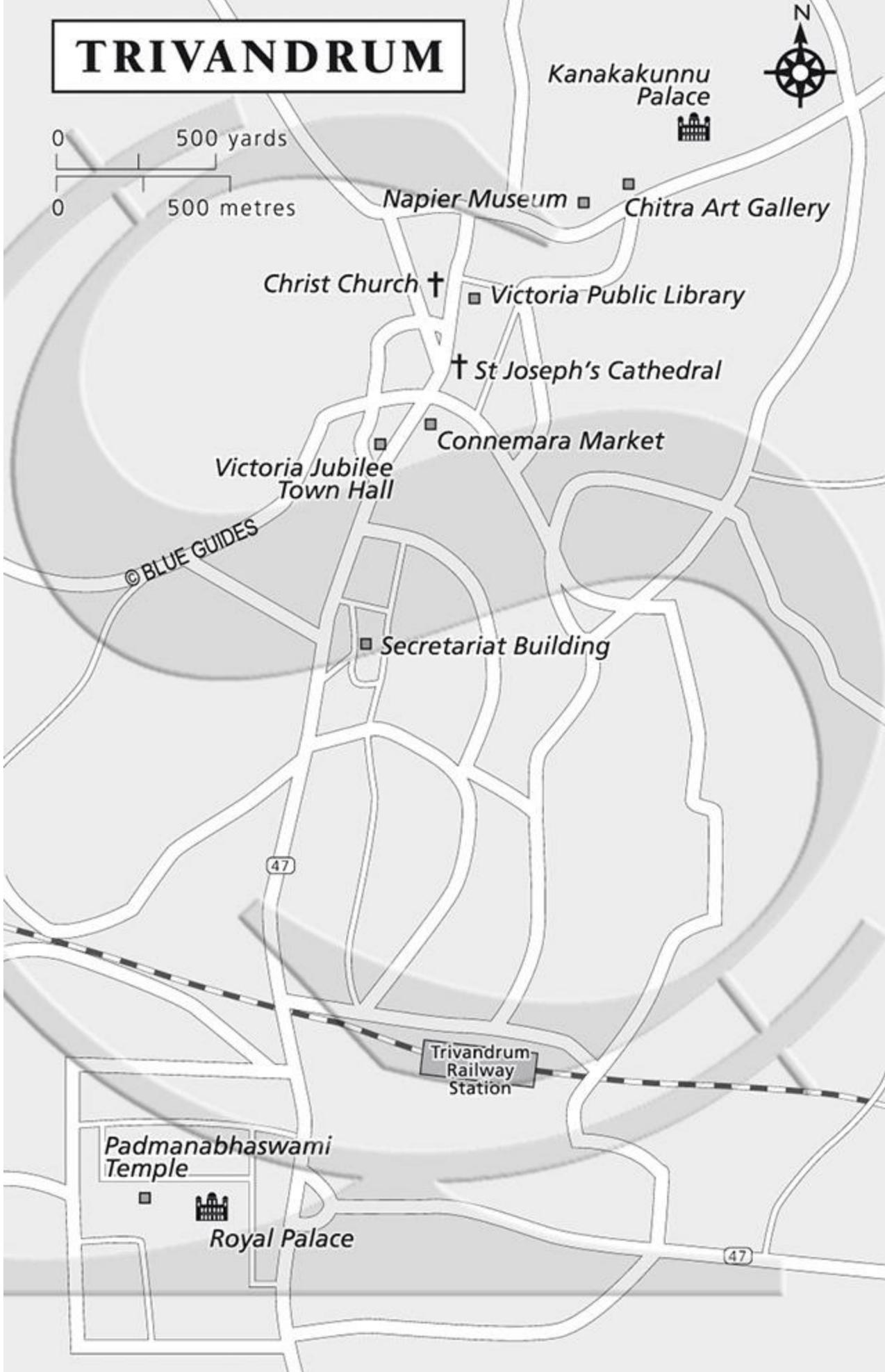
Trivandrum Railway Station

Padmanabhaswami Temple



Royal Palace

47



ROYAL QUARTER

The old Royal Quarter of Trivandrum consists of the large Padmanabhaswami Temple, a pretty man-made rectangular pond, the palace compound (part of which is now a museum) and some portions of the old fort walls.

Royal Palace

The entrance to the Royal Palace (*open Tues–Sun 8.30–1 & 3–5; [map TRIVANDRUM](#)*) is down a passageway that passes through the two-storey building with a clock tower that overlooks the pond, just before the temple. Visitors are allowed into one of the 18th-century palaces, but several others remain empty. Note the superb woodwork, particularly on the ceilings of the palace. An interesting collection of palanquins and howdahs (for riding elephants) are on display, as well as thrones made of crystal and of ivory. Upstairs is a pretty octagonal room with a painted ceiling, and another partially open area, jutting out of the main building, which was used as a music room. Entry is restricted to the Padmanabhaswami Temple, dedicated to Vishnu, which dates back to the 10th century, but which was rebuilt by Maharaja Martanda Varma in the 18th century. Note the Tamil-style *gopura*, as well as the fine stone-carved animals on the entrance pillars.

City centre

Trivandrum's main north–south thoroughfare, MG Road, has several interesting buildings including, from the south ([map TRIVANDRUM](#)): the Neoclassical **Secretariat Building** (1939) with a double pediment and a clock tower, the **Victoria Jubilee Town Hall** (1898), in a hybrid European and Kerala style, which was used for while as the state assembly, and the arched gateway of the **Connemara Market**, named after a former British governor of Madras Presidency.

Heading further north are two neo-Gothic churches ([map TRIVANDRUM](#)): the Roman Catholic **St Joseph's Cathedral** (1873, bell tower added 1927) on the east (left); and the Anglican **Christ Church** (1859) on the west. The latter has some fine stained glass commemorating the life of a former British Resident of Travancore. Note also the 19th-century tombs in the cemetery, and, most unusually, a horse-drawn hearse kept behind glass in a display room in the church grounds. On the other side of the road from Christ Church is the twin-gabled red-brick **Victoria Public Library** (1900), which also carries the date '1000 ME', where 'ME' stands for the local Malayalam Era calendar. The initials 'VI' stand for 'Victoria Imperatrix' (Empress Victoria).

Napier Museum

Trivandrum's most important building from the British period, the Napier Museum (1872; [map TRIVANDRUM](#))—named after Lord Napier, a former British governor of Madras and acting viceroy—is in a large park, close to the zoo. It is an unusual fusion of Keralite and neo-Gothic architectural styles, and was designed by the British architect R.F. Chisholm, who was responsible for many late 19th-century buildings in Chennai. Note the multi-coloured brickwork, and the narrow cusp-arched windows beneath a traditional Kerala tiled roof, with some fine carved woodwork. The building is now officially the **Art Museum** (*open Tues–Sun 10–4.45*), with rare Chera-period bronzes from the 9th century; there are plans, however, to move its collection to another location in Trivandrum.

Chitra Art Gallery

Also in the same park as the museum, close to the entrance to Trivandrum Zoo, is the Chitra Art Gallery ([map TRIVANDRUM](#)), which has a large collection of paintings by Raja Ravi Varma (1848–

1906), India's best-known 19th-century artist, who was born in Kilimanoor, to the north of Trivandrum. There is an annexe to the gallery, closer to the eastern entrance to the park, which has mementos of the Travancore royal family and an extravagant royal golden carriage decorated with lion motifs and cherubs carrying doves.

Just to the east of the Napier Museum is the handsome **Kanakakunnu Palace** (early 20th century), which is widely used for cultural performances.

NORTH OF TRIVANDRUM

Anjengo Fort and Janardhana Temple

The old British **Anjengo Fort** ([map 14 B3](#), also known as Anjuthenga) is 26km northwest of Trivandrum, overlooking the seashore. Anjengo was an important British settlement in the late 17th century, but later fell into decline. The **Janardhana Temple**, close to the popular Varkala Beach, 36km north of Trivandrum, dates back to at least the 13th century, and is dedicated to Vishnu.

Kollam and Thangasseri

The commercial city of **Kollam** ([map 14 B3](#)), formerly known as Quilon, is 60km north of Trivandrum and has been identified, inconclusively, with the seaport of Nelcynda which is described in ancient Roman texts. The city has no major attractions. However, the ruins of the old Portuguese fort at **Thangasseri** ([map 14 B3](#)) can be visited: they are on a promontory close to the lighthouse, just 2km to the northwest of Kollam. Thangasseri was later occupied by the Dutch and the British. Dozens of 18th- and 19th-century British gravestones can be found in the rear gardens of houses on either side of the short road that crosses the promontory.

SOUTH OF TRIVANDRUM

South of the Kerala capital is the popular Kovalam Beach, but the nearest important historical sites, the palace of Padmanabhapuram and the temples at Suchindram, are over the state border in Tamil Nadu (*a separate Blue Guides chapter*).

COCHIN

Cochin, officially known as Kochi ([map 14 B2](#)), is one of India's most interesting cities. It is in a spectacular location on an estuary, with several islands, and its fine historical buildings have transformed Kerala's second-largest city into a major tourist attraction over the last two decades. The main focus is Fort Cochin, on the southern side of the city, which has many interesting buildings from the European colonial period, a fine palace and India's best-known synagogue.

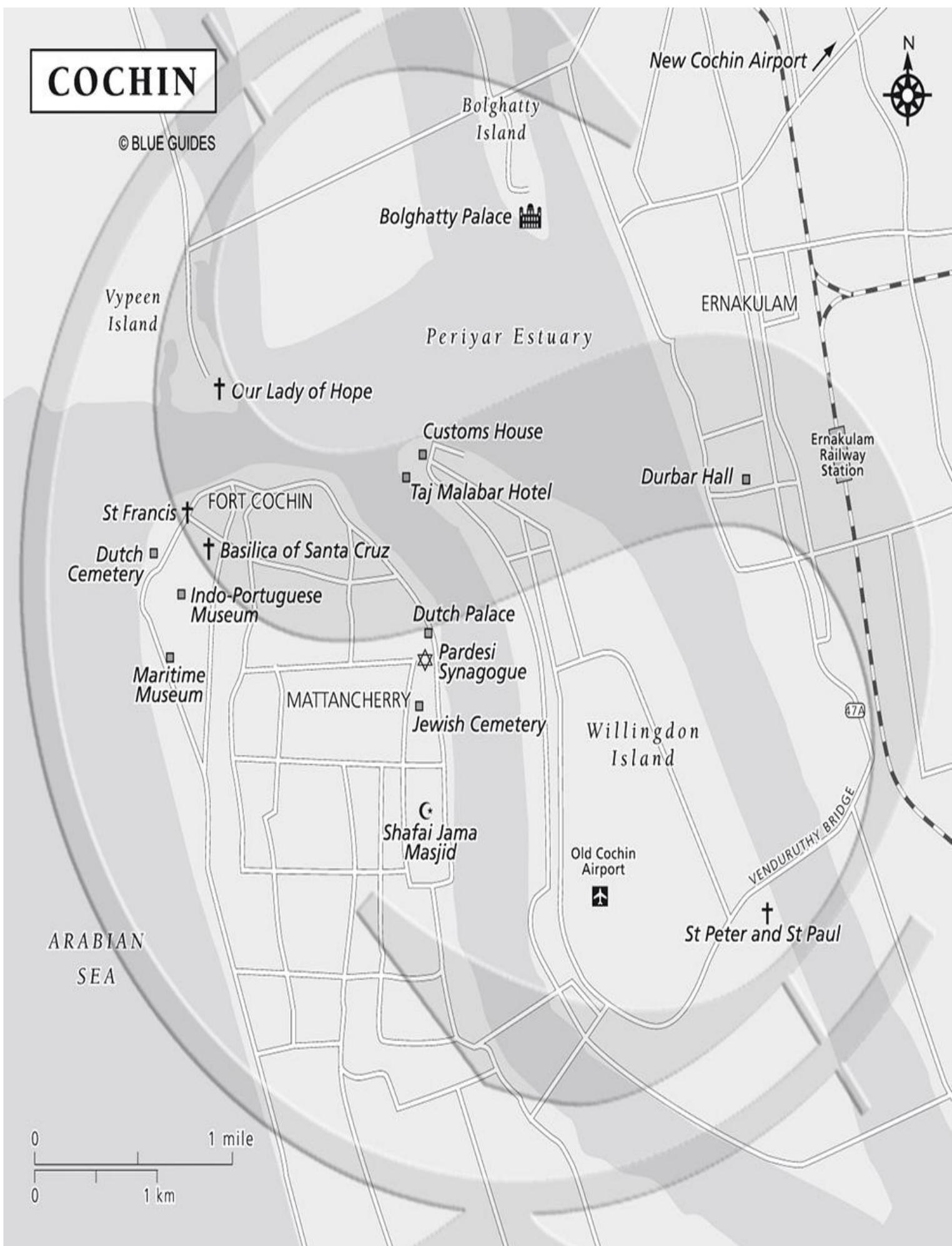
History: Cochin seems to have emerged as a major seaport in the 14th century, when the Periyar Tiver changed course, creating a natural harbour—and Cranganore, to the north, lost its importance. The Portuguese landed here in 1500, and Cochin became the first capital of Portugal's Indian Empire. Vasco da Gama died in Cochin in 1524, and soon after the Portuguese moved their capital to Goa, but retained a base in Cochin.

The Portuguese were ousted from Cochin in the 17th century by the Dutch, who built what is still known as the Dutch Palace for the maharaja of Cochin. The city was captured by the forces of Mysore in the 18th century, and ruled by Hyder Ali and then Tipu Sultan. The British then took direct control

of the fort area of Cochin, along with all other Dutch territories. However, much of the area now occupied by the city, including Ernakulam, remained formally part of the princely state of Cochin, which accepted British suzerainty. Ernakulam was the official capital, while the maharaja's main residence was in Tripunithira, 8km southeast of the city. At Independence, Cochin was united with Travancore, to the south, to form a single state, which was then integrated into Kerala in the 1950s.

COCHIN

© BLUE GUIDES



Orientation: The landscape of Cochin is dominated by water. The city consists of a series of islands,

promontories and peninsulas—many of them now connected by bridges. The oldest part of the city is Fort Cochin, on the southern bank of the estuary of the Periyar River, next to the ocean. Slightly further inland, on the same peninsula, is Mattancherry, with the palace and synagogue still very close to the water. Just opposite Mattancherry is Willingdon Island, connected here by ferry, or by road further inland. It has the Taj Malabar Hotel and the old Cochin Airport. On the other side of Wellington Island is the mainland part of the city known as Ernakulam, with the main railway station. On the northern banks of the Periyar, recently connected by bridge to Ernakulam, are Bolghatty Island, with the Bolghatty Palace Hotel. Beyond that, next to the ocean and just opposite Fort Cochin, is Vypeen Island.

FORT COCHIN

Fort Cochin ([map COCHIN](#)) was the old European part of the city, overlooking the southern side of Periyar River as it enters the sea. Little is left of the actual fort, but many old European houses survive—some of which are now hotels—close to the seafront, which has a long strand for pedestrians. The main features of the waterfront are the Chinese fishing nets—huge wooden contraptions which are dipped into the water to catch fish; they can be seen throughout this part of Kerala. There are also small parts of the old seafront fortifications, with cannon still pointing out to sea.

Church of St Francis, Santa Cruz and the Dutch Cemetery

Originally dedicated to St Anthony, the **Church of St Francis** (1506; [map COCHIN](#)) is one of India's oldest European buildings, and stands slightly inland on Church Street. It was successively a Catholic church under the Portuguese, a Protestant church under the Dutch (who sent the Catholics to nearby Vypeen Island), an Anglican church during the British period and is now part of the Protestant Church of South India. The austere façade of the church, with its small Latin inscription saying that it was renovated in 1779, is from the Dutch period. In the lobby there are a large number of gravestones—many of them removed from the nave of the church—which have been mounted on the side walls. Some have fine carved images on them and date to the 16th-century Portuguese period. There are more wall-mounted Portuguese and Dutch gravestones inside the church, as well as marble and brass memorials from the British era. The **grave of Vasco da Gama** is on the floor on the right, protected by a low railing, the writing on the stone no longer legible. His actual body was disinterred in the 17th century and sent to Portugal. Note the large old-fashioned rope-pulled fans hanging from the ceiling of the church.

The **Basilica of Santa Cruz** (1902–05; [map COCHIN](#)), further inland, is Cochin's main Catholic church, and was built on the site of a much older Portuguese church that was demolished in the British period. It has a fine Neoclassical façade, with twin pyramidal towers. Inside are murals by the Italian priest Antonio Moscheni, who was also responsible for the paintings inside St Aloysius Chapel in Mangalore, Karnataka (*a separate Blue Guides chapter*).

The **Dutch Cemetery** (1724) is next to the beach, 300m southeast of the Church of St Francis, and is often closed. Ask in the church if it can be opened. There are some fine examples of Dutch funerary architecture from the 18th century, and some pretty stone-carved gravestones.

Fort Cochin's museums

The **Indo-Portuguese Museum** (*open Tues–Sun 9–1 & 2–6; no cameras; [map COCHIN](#)*) is in a modern building in the grounds of the old Bishop's House, 400m south of the Church of St Francis.

There are old church vestments, silverware and some fine wood-carved icons collected from Catholic churches in Cochin. Note the unusual 19th-century image of a dead, prostrate Jesus smeared with blood, as well as the painted wooden sculpture of St Michael slaying a black demon. There is also a 19th-century teak wall-pulpit with a canopy showing the dove that represents the Holy Spirit surrounded by ten angels. In the basement of the museum are parts of the excavated walls of Fort Cochin.

Slightly to the south is the small **Maritime Museum** (*open Tues–Sun 9.30–12.30 & 2.30–5.30; [map COCHIN](#)*), which is run by the Indian navy; it has a heavy emphasis on modern military history.

MATTANCHERRY

The area of Mattancherry (officially Mattancheri), 2km southeast of Fort Cochin ([map COCHIN](#)), on the same peninsula, has two of Kerala's most popular visitor attractions: the Dutch Palace and the Cochin Synagogue.

Orientation: The sights are easiest to reach from other parts of Cochin and Ernakulam by ferry to the Mattancherry jetty, though it is a pleasant walk or short drive from Fort Cochin. The Dutch Palace is accessed from the main road, close to the jetty. The synagogue adjoins the palace compound, but can only be accessed by taking the road through a very touristy shopping street for 400m. There is also a short-cut for pedestrians through a shopping arcade sign-posted 'Ethnic Passage'.

The Dutch Palace

The palace (*open daily 8–5; no cameras inside the palace; [map COCHIN](#)*) was originally built by the Portuguese in 1557 for the ruler of Cochin, in exchange for trading rights. It was then rebuilt in 1663 by the Dutch for a later Cochin ruler. It was constructed to a hybrid design, combining a European-style sloping stone wall, and round-arched doors and windows with a traditional Kerala roof and inner courtyard.

The palace compound is entered through a small archway with a pediment. To the left is a small low Mahavishnu temple, closed to non-Hindus, though the conical tiled roof of its sanctuary can be seen from the compound. Beyond the temple is the clock tower of the synagogue (*see below*), with three different sets of numerals—the local Malayalam and the Hebrew systems of numbering can be seen on the far side.

By Indian standards, the main palace is a modest building, of which only part is currently open to the public. The tour of the building begins on the upper floor, with a long entrance hallway which leads on the left to the royal bedchamber—and some superb, richly-coloured murals that recount the story of the *Ramayana*, and date from the 17th to 19th centuries. At the other end of the entrance hallway is another room full of fine murals—including, on the inside wall, a superb image of Vishnu resting on Shesha the snake, with Vishnu's ten avatars springing out of lotus buds. Note how the tenth avatar, Kalki, is depicted as a horse rather than the more common image of a human figure riding a horse. On the other inside wall are Shiva and Parvati, their children Ganesha riding a mouse and Murugan (also known as Kartikeya) on a peacock. Other rooms have more murals, palanquins, arms, royal portraits and an interesting photo exhibition about the history of how the royal family dressed.

Pardesi Synagogue

The synagogue (*open Sun–Thur 10–12 & 3–5; no cameras, but they can be left outside*) is at the end of Synagogue Lane in Mattancherry ([map COCHIN](#)). It is entered through a gate on the left at the end of Synagogue Lane, close to the clock tower.

The main Jewish settlement in Kerala used to be further north in Cranganore, but in the mid-16th century many Jews moved to Cochin because of persecution by the Portuguese, and sought the protection of the Raja of Cochin. The first synagogue on this site, said to date from 1588, was destroyed by the Portuguese, but the community seems to have flourished under the Dutch. The current synagogue is largely the result of a rebuilding that took place in 1762. The clock tower dates from the same period. There are six surviving synagogue buildings in and around Cochin, but this is the only one that is still used for prayer and is open to the public. Most Cochin Jews have emigrated, mainly to Israel.

The gatehouse has a small exhibition of pictures showing scenes of Jewish life in Cochin. There are gravestones on either side of the narrow courtyard that surrounds the building. Note the Hebrew plaque taken from an older synagogue at Kochangadi, which dates to 1344. The simple, airy interior of the synagogue has some fine Chinese blue-and-white floor tiling and several glass chandeliers. The structure in the centre of the synagogue with brass balustrades is the prayer stand, and the scrolls of the Torah are kept in the golden cylinders at the rear. The Jewish Cemetery is 300m southeast of the synagogue, with several dozen tombs.

Muslim Quarter

The old Muslim quarter is just south of Mattancherry, and the oldest of the mosques, the **Shafai Jama Masjid** ([map COCHIN](#)), also known as the Chembattapalli, dates to 1420—although it has been much altered since then.

THE REST OF COCHIN

Willingdon Island ([map COCHIN](#)): This island, to the east of Mattancherry, is largely man-made, and named after Lord Willingdon, a 20th-century British governor of Madras and later viceroy. It is linked by bridges to the rest of Cochin. The Customs House (20th century), close to the Taj Malabar Hotel, is on the northern tip of the island, while the Church of St Peter and St Paul, with a Baroque façade, is in Venduruthy, which was once a separate island.

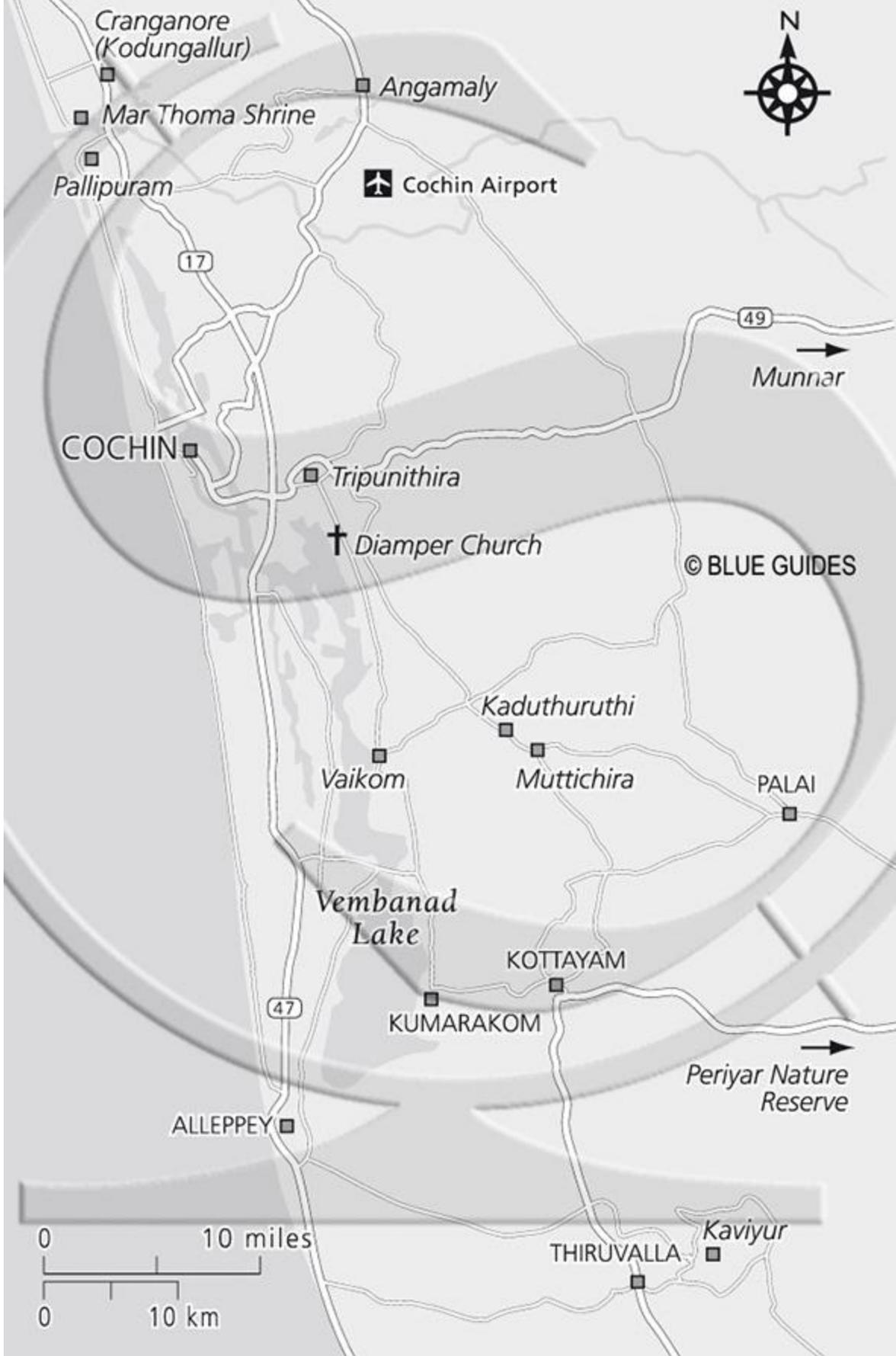
Ernakulam ([map COCHIN](#)): There are few buildings of historical importance in Ernakulam, the mainland part of Cochin. The most interesting is a small 19th-century palace known as the Durbar Hall, which is now an art gallery. Now connected to Ernakulam by a bridge, **Bolghatty Island** has the Bolghatty Palace (1744), which has been much expanded and is now a hotel.

Vypeen Island ([map COCHIN](#)): Another bridge leads to Vypeen Island (just opposite Fort Cochin and more easily reached from there by ferry), home to the Church of Our Lady of Hope (1605), built on the site of an older church. This was Cochin's main Catholic church in the Dutch period. Its Baroque façade is visible from Fort Cochin.

SOUTH OF COCHIN

The area south of Cochin is dominated by the huge Vembanad Lake which stretches to Alleppey, more than 50km away. The inland road has several interesting historical sites, and access to the lakeside resort town of Kumarakom, overlooking the backwaters. The coastal road provides access to beaches—and the quickest route to the town of Alleppey.

COCHIN ENVIRONS



TRIPUNITHIRA

In the 19th century, the town of Tripunithira ([map COCHIN ENVIRONS](#)), 13km east of Fort Cochin, on the inland road, became the main residence of the Cochin royal family.

Hill Palace

This palace (*open Tues–Sun 9–12.30 & 2–4.30; no cameras or phones in the main building*) is now a museum situated in pretty gardens. The car park and the ticket office are at the bottom of the hill, and it is a short walk up to the entrance. The palace consists of several low buildings, mainly constructed in the traditional Kerala style with sloping tiled roofs.

Main rooms: The main palace building has a Neoclassical façade, and the entrance leads into a hall with a pretty wooden staircase, carved with the Cochin crest. At the top of the stairs is a broad verandah. Visitors are then directed to the left, across a bridge to another building and down to a room with an interesting collection of wood carvings that date back to the 14th century. Note, in particular, the unusual wooden image of Shiva, as Nataraja, the Lord of the Dance, and some very fine panels, including familiar images of Krishna as a child sucking his toe and Krishna as a young adult lifting the Govardhan mountain. There is also a small wooden temple pavilion carved with tales from the *Ramayana*, as well some fine 19th-century ivories.

Palace Museum: The museum has an impressive jewellery collection, the centre-piece of which is a golden crown, studded with diamonds, emeralds and rubies, which was sent with Vasco da Gama in 1502 as a gift to the Raja of Cochin from King Manuel of Portugal. Another palace building on the right (south) has collections of carriages and palanquins—and a gallery with prehistoric burial urns from northern Kerala and a number of Neolithic tools.

Diamper Church

The old Diamper Church (1510) in the village of Udayamperur, 6km south of Tripunithira, was the site of the Synod of Diamper (a mispronunciation of the name of the village), at which the Portuguese attempted, partially successfully, to force the local Thomas Christians to accept the leadership of the Roman Catholic Church. The old church, which faces the opposite direction to the adjacent new one, has been disfigured by modern extensions, and it is necessary to go to the back of the site to see the original façade. There is a small museum inside the church. The carved stone cross in front of the modern church is thought to predate the European period.

VAIKOM & KADUTHURUTHI

The town of **Vaikom** ([map COCHIN ENVIRONS](#)), 16km south of Udayamperur and 34km from Cochin, is famous for its Vaikkathapan Temple, dedicated to Shiva. It was in Vaikom in 1925 that Mahatma Gandhi led a peaceful and mainly successful agitation against the temple for preventing the lower castes from using the road close to the shrine. The inner sanctuary is closed to non-Hindus, but the pretty inner courtyard is open to all. Note the carved figures of devotees on the paving stones near the sanctuary entrance, and some fine carvings on the pillars of the entrance pavilion.

The village of **Kaduthuruthi**, 10km east of Vaikom, is an important Christian centre, with, confusingly, three churches dedicated to St Mary. One of these—the oldest—has an extraordinary decorated façade. Drive past the first two churches and take the first right to find it.

Old St Mary's Church

This church (also known as the *thazhathu* or 'lower' church) was built in 1599 on the site of an even older Christian place of worship.

The church has a three-storey Baroque façade, with a profusion of unusual stucco reliefs, now brightly painted. There are elephant-headed fish over the central doorway, human-headed fish with boats on their heads and numerous other images that are not usually found on a church exterior. The side of the church is more austere, but note the stone-carved cross with an inscription embedded in the wall, which is thought to have been taken from an older church. The rear of the church has a hunting scene—a man with a dog shooting a stag.

Inside the church is a restored granite font, probably from the pre-European period. The gilded wooden altar, one of India's finest, is thought to date from the 18th century, while the murals on the barrel-vaulted ceiling and wall are more recent. The large stone cross at the rear of the building is from the 16th century, or possibly earlier. Note the elephants and peacock motifs, richly carved but worn, on the plinth of the cross.

End of this sample Kindle book.

Enjoyed the sample?

[Buy Now](#)

or

[See details for this book in the Kindle Store](#)
