

# The Portuguese connection

Once an important port of trade in world history, Kozhikode is where Vasco da Gama first landed in 1498. Today, it is the food capital of Kerala. Here is where the celebrated Malabar cuisine comes from...

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A rather offbeat destination, Kozhikode, with its historic sites, delicious food, boat building yards and uncrowded beaches can be a good starting point for exploring the Malabar Region of Kerala.

From the Calicut Biryani that traces its flavours back to the Arabs who landed here, to the purely local unnakaaya, a deep-fried snack made from sweetened ripe bananas rolled in cashews and raisins; Kozhikode is known for its distinctive food culture. Little surprise then that this historic town is also home to one of the oldest food streets in the country. SM Street (short for Sweet Meat Street) was once the busiest of food streets, where the roads used to be lined with stalls of halwa - sweet meat for the British, who gave this street its name. It still is one of the busiest streets in Kozhikode owing to the plethora of shops selling everything from boho clothes to silver trinkets.

Even minus the sweetmeat stalls today, a stroll down SM Street is



An Uru under construction in Beypore

still a delight. Its most interesting features are the delightful old Parsi temple hidden behind a nondescript gate and unruly foliage and the statue at its entrance. The statue is of SK Pottekkatt, who wrote the award-winning Malayalam book, 'Oru Theruvinte Katha'. This 1960

novel talks of life on the streets and is set in this very SM Street and murals depicting scenes from the story, line the cobbled pathways that lead you into the celebrated SM Street.

With a six-hundred kilometre coastline that stretches along almost the entire length of the State, Kerala is dotted with numerous golden beaches. From famous white sandy beaches to fishing hamlets, from sun-kissed isolated beaches to coconut groves, from historic beaches to boatbuilding yards; every beach is distinctive and singular.

And, with such an array of beaches to choose from here in Kerala, how can one not head to the beach. Especially when in you are in Kozhikode. For it is in Kozhikode's Kappad Beach that the Portuguese explorer, Vasco da Gama first landed over five hundred years ago, successfully concluding his voyage to discover a sea route to India. There still is, albeit an unremarkable memorial here to mark that historic moment which opened the floodgates of global imperialism. There are other beaches too here, besides the



Murals depicting scenes from the book Oru Theruvinte Katha lead the way

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## FACT FILE

Kozhikode (Calicut) being one of the major cities of Kerala, there are direct flights, trains and buses plying regularly from Hyderabad. Beypore Port is 10 kilometres from Kozhikode.

In Kozhikode, one can also witness the fourth-century martial art, Kalaripayattu. Considered to be the forerunner to Kung Fu, Kalaripayattu is probably more akin to ballet, than being just a form of self-defence, what with the performer's graceful movements and intense facial expressions. But this classical Kerala art form is definitely worth a watch even for those not interested in martial arts, for this very reason. There are many Kalaris Sangams in Kozhikode, where one can even train. And, it isn't a bad idea for those wanting to achieve a sound mind in a sound body, because just like Ayurveda, Kalaripayattu too is a quintessential 'Kerala Experience'.

The Parsi Temple in SM Street

main Kozhikode Beach in town, like the Payyoli Beach where Olive Ridley turtles come to nest every year. About 20 minutes from Kozhikode is yet another beach and port, Beypore. Here, at the boat building yard in Beypore Port, one can go inside an Uru, the traditional Arabian trading vessel and see master craftsmen at work. Bringing to life this striking handcrafted teak wood trading vessel that traces its origins back to over fifteen hundred years ago.

## Live like a superhero

Atlantis, The Palm in Dubai has partnered with Warner Bros Pictures for the 'Aqua-