



★ QUESTS

Dares for the brave and the curious. The map marks each with a star; tick them off as you go.

★ 19

Watch a Chinese net go down and come up.

One person walks the beam, the net dips; minutes later it rises with the catch. Ask before you step onto the platform.

★ 3

Buy a fish at the nets and have it fried.

Pick it from the fishmonger, agree the weight, carry it to a stall behind. Eat at sunset.

★ 14

Find where Vasco da Gama was first buried.

Inside St Francis Church, a marked spot on the floor.

★ 41

Look down at the synagogue's Chinese floor tiles.

Hand-painted, under Belgian glass lamps. No photographs inside: remember them instead.

★ 39

Follow the Ramayana round the palace walls.

The murals run from Dasharatha's sacrifice to Sita's return from Lanka. Closed Fridays.

★ 22

Watch the pigeons fed at the Jain temple.

Around midday they gather over the courtyard and visitors feed them grain. Shoes and leather off.

16 104 graves, and none of them is new

Dutch Cemetery. Consecrated in 1724 and called India's oldest European cemetery: 104 tombs of Dutch governors, officials and families, epitaphs in old Dutch. The gate is usually locked: look through, or ask at St Francis Church.

19 A man walks the beam, the net dips

Chinese fishing nets (cheena vala). Shore-operated lift nets, 10 m high: a teak beam, a net 20 m across, stones on ropes as counterweights. Up to six people work each one; a walk along the beam lowers it. How they reached Kochi is told several ways.

22 Pigeons come to lunch at midday

Dharmamath Jain temple. The temple of Mattancherry's Gujarati Jain traders, from 1904 in most accounts. Around midday the pigeons gather and are fed grain. Short visiting hours; leather and shoes off, shoulders and knees covered.

25 The Konkani temple with the giant bell

Cochin Thirumala Devaswam temple. The temple of the Konkani-speaking Gowda Saraswat Brahmins, who came from Goa in the 1500s with their idol of Venkateswara. Its bronze bell is six feet tall. Dress modestly; ask at the gate where to go.

41 Hand-painted tiles, glass lamps, a clock tower

Paradesi Synagogue. Built in 1568 beside the Raja's palace, the oldest active synagogue in the Commonwealth: hand-painted Chinese floor tiles, Belgian glass lamps, a clock tower. Covered shoulders, shoes off, no photographs. Closed Fridays, Saturdays, Jewish holidays.

42 Antiques in front, spice godowns behind

Jew Town and Synagogue Lane. The old Jewish quarter's lanes: antique and craft shops, galleries and cafes by the synagogue, then spice godowns smelling of pepper and ginger. Bargain, beware 'antiques' made last year, ignore toots.

45 Named for its roof of copper

Chemblita Palli (the copper mosque). One of Kerala's oldest mosques, built around the 1520s to 1540s in the Kerala-Islamic style. Chemblita means copper; its roof was laid with copper. Ask before entering.

46 Kerala's tallest light, and a lift

Vypin (Puthuvyppe) Lighthouse. Moved from Fort Kochi to Puthuvyppe in 1979: at 46 m, Kerala's tallest lighthouse, with a lift to the gallery for views over the beaches, backwaters and harbour mouth. Cross on the Ro-Ro, then a bus or auto.

27 Mangroves and birds behind the High Court

Mangalavanam Bird Sanctuary. A pocket of mangrove round a tidal lake behind the High Court, Kochi's green lung: more than 70 kinds of bird recorded, from redshanks to Brahmany kites, and egrets roosting. Come early, walk quietly.

29 No cars, all backwater: Ernakulam's walk

Marine Drive. Ernakulam's car-free promenade on land claimed from the backwater: from the High Court junction over the Rainbow Bridge to Rajendra Maidan. Come at sunset for the water, a tender coconut and a boat ride.

52 India's first model tourism village, glowing at night

Kumbalangi. An island village of mangroves and over 100 Chinese nets, India's first model tourism village: fishermen and farmers show their work. Kayak at dusk, and on dark nights around March and April look for kavaru, the glowing water.

53 Fourteen islands, paddy and quiet water

Kadamakudy. Fourteen islands north of the city, the Kuttanad of Kochi: backwaters, Chinese nets, pokkali paddy and nine churches. Come early or late, and see it from a kayak.

7 Where Fort Kochi's art cafes began

Kashi Art Cafe. A gallery and a courtyard cafe on Burgher Street, the pioneer of Fort Kochi's art revival: contemporary Indian art on the walls, breakfasts, cakes and coffee in the courtyard. Look, then linger.

11 Watch Princess Street from the balcony

Loafers Corner Cafe. Upstairs on the corner that took its name: a balcony seat over Princess Street's cobbles, hot chocolate and breakfasts, bookshelves and a reading nook.

20 A pepper godown with a courtyard cafe

Pepper House. Waterfront warehouses where pepper was stored, round a grassy courtyard: a cafe, an art library, galleries, residences and a design store; a Biennale venue in season. Breakfast, then the water's edge.

21 Kochi's own biryani, since a 1948 tea shop

Kayees Rahmathulla Hotel (Kayikka's biryani). Kayikka's tea shop of 1948 in Mattancherry, a restaurant since 1951, famous across Kochi for its mutton biryani cooked on wood fires. Come at lunch. A second Kayees is in Ernakulam.

48 A hundred kinds of dosa, give or take

Pal Dosa. A Kochi dosa house with branches across the city, one near our Ernakulam home: over a hundred dosas, from podi to mutton, and one made your way. Share a few.

50 The toddy shop famous for its curries

Mullappanthal toddy shop. One of the best-known toddy shops round Kochi, at Udayampore south of Tripunithura: fresh palm toddy and fiery home-style food, kappa with fish curry, karimeen, beef roast. Go early; take a cab back.

23 Dholela in a Kerala port

Shantilal Mithaiwala. The oldest sweet shop of Mattancherry's Gujarati community, at the corner of Gujarati Road: dholela and papdi ghalla, a crisp snack from Kutch. Buy a box for the ferry; the Jain temple is steps away.

30 Not broad at all, and that's the charm

Broadway, Ernakulam. One of Kochi's oldest shopping streets, narrow despite the name: about a thousand shops of spices, cloth, copper pots, books and umbrellas between Marine Drive and MG Road. Car-free: walk slowly.

KATHAKALI TO THE BIENNALE

5 A spice house that became the Biennale

Aspinwall House. The waterfront compound of the trading house John H. Aspinwall founded in 1867, shipping pepper, cori and coffee. The Biennale's main venue since 2012. Between editions it may be shut: check before you go.

9 Colonial fronts, cafe tables, gallery doors

Princess Street and Burgher Street. Colonial house fronts with cafes, souvenir shops and galleries inside: the corner by the beach road is Loafers' Corner. Burgher Street runs alongside with Kashi Art Cafe. Walk it in the early evening.

10 Come early and watch the faces painted

Kerala Kathakali Centre. Kerala's dance-drama of painted faces and crowns, every evening in a small theatre: come early to watch the make-up go on. Kalaripayattu and Mohiniyattam too.

12 Church silver upstairs, a fort wall below

Indo-Portuguese Museum. The Portuguese side of Kochi, from the diocese's churches: five sections from Altar to Cathedral, a 16th-century teak altar piece, a silver processional cross from Santa Cruz. In the basement: excavated remains of the old fort wall.

36 The rajah's court hall, now a gallery

Durbar Hall Art Gallery. The Kochi Maharajas' court hall, now the city's main art gallery: contemporary shows and installations. About 4 km from our Ernakulam home.

51 Three floors, three styles, a theatre on top

Kerala Folklore Museum. A museum built as a carved Kerala house, each floor in one region's style: Malabar, Kochi, Travancore. Thousands of masks, costumes, lamps and jewels, and an old wooden theatre hall on top. Opened in 2009.

FERRY, METRO, REPEAT

2 A 20-minute boat beats an hour's traffic

Fort Kochi jetty and Water Metro. The Water Metro's electric boats cross to the High Court terminal by Marine Drive in about 20 minutes: the State Water Transport ferries run alongside, slower and open to the breeze. Queues build in the evening.

4 Ride the floating bridge with the scooters

Fort Kochi-Vypin Ro-Ro ferry. One flat ferry for cars, buses, scooters and walkers across the harbour mouth to Vypin: about 15 to 20 minutes, against an hour by road. Watch for ships and dolphins; stay clear of the ramps.

21 Eat Kayikka's biryani in Mattancherry

Mutton biryani on wood fires, in a tea shop of 1948 turned restaurant. Lunchtime, shared tables.

10 Watch a Kathakali face being painted

Come early: the performers make up in front of the audience, layer by layer, before the show.

4 Cross the harbour mouth on the Ro-Ro

Fifteen to twenty minutes to Vypin among cars and scooters. Watch for dolphins at the rail.

2 Ride the Water Metro from Fort Kochi to the High Court

About twenty minutes in an electric boat; then walk Marine Drive.

13 Join a football game on the Parade Ground

Locals play in the evenings, and a traveller is usually welcome. Ask, then kick off.

52 Kayak into Kumbalangi's mangroves

Our Kumbalangi home has a kayak with your name on it. Go at dusk, when the nets lift.

52 See the water glow at Kumbalangi

On dark nights around March and April the plankton light up the water: the village calls it kavaru.

28 The Dutch governor's island house

Bolgatty Palace. Built by the Dutch in 1744 for the commander of Dutch Malabar, later home of the British Resident: a heritage hotel since 1976. A short Water Metro ride from the High Court terminal.

35 The city's own Shiva, by Durbar Hall

Ernakulathappan (Ernakulam Shiva) temple. The temple of Ernakulathappan, the city's protector, one of the Kochi rajahs' seven royal temples, in its present form since 1846. Its January festival fills Durbar Hall Ground with elephants and drums.

39 Called Dutch, built by the Portuguese

Mattancherry Palace (the Dutch Palace). Built by the Portuguese for the Raja of Kochi in the mid-1500s, repaired by the Dutch: a courtyard palace of coronations, with portraits of the rajahs and walls of Ramayana murals. Closed on Fridays.

49 The Maharaja's palace of 49 buildings

Hill Palace, Tripunithura. The Kochi Maharajas' palace of 1865: 49 buildings on 54 acres, now Kerala's largest archaeological museum, with the crown jewels, paintings, weapons and a deer park. Closed Mondays; check the timings.

BACKWATER, BEACH AND MANGROVE

13 The town's open pitch, football every evening

Parade Ground. Fort Kochi's open ground: football and cricket in the evenings, and you may be asked to join; the Biennale opens here. Opposite stands the wooden VOC gate of the Dutch East India Company.

17 A walkway, old cannons, rough water

Fort Kochi Beach. A walking beach: a granite walkway past Fort Manuel's ruins, an old boiler and a giant anchor, and sunset crowds. The sea is rough near the channel: don't swim where told not to. The Navy's stretch is closed.

54 The island of crows, famous for sunsets

Kakkathuruthu. The island of crows in Vembanad Lake, south of Kumbalangi: its dusk is known far beyond Kerala. No road: cross by country boat. Come for the sunset and take your rub-bish back.

MEEN, APPAM, BIRYANI

3 Pick your fish, they'll fry it

The catch at the nets. The nets' catch and the boats' haul on ice: pick a fish, prawns or squid, then a stall behind cooks it for you, fried, grilled or in curry. Agree the weight and the cooking price first.

6 Fish curry the Syrian Christian way

Fusion Bay. A small family place near Santa Cruz for Syrian Christian fish dishes: karimeen pollichathu in a banana leaf, meen mollee in coconut milk, prawn mango curry. Expect a short wait; ask what's fresh.

24 A vegetarian lunch among the Gujarati lanes

Sri Krishna Cafe. A family-run vegetarian restaurant in Mattancherry's Gujarati lanes: thalis, duss, curries, cutlets and bhatura. Vegan-friendly too. A pause between the palace and the Jain temple.

34 An Ernakulam landmark for karimeen

Grand Pavilion. The old Grand Hotel's restaurant on MG Road, a city landmark: Kerala, North Indian and continental food, and in the evenings, karimeen pollichathu. A sit-down last dinner in Ernakulam.

37 The same biryani, on the mainland

Kayees Hotel, Ernakulam. The Kayee family's second restaurant, opposite the Durbar Hall Ground: the Mattancherry biryani on the mainland. Pair it with the gallery and the temple next door. Go at lunch.

40 Ginger in everything, antiques all around

Ginger House. An old ginger warehouse on the water at Jew Town's end, now a restaurant in an antiques showroom: ginger in nearly every dish, ice cream included. Service takes its time: browse the antiques while you wait.

31 Silk, gold and handicrafts under the metro

MG Road, Ernakulam. Ernakulam's main road under the metro: silk and sari houses, jewellers, bookshops and fixed-price state handicraft emporiums. Cross only at the signals.

43 Black gold, sorted by hand

Mattancherry spice market and Bazaar Road. Colonial godowns on Jew Town Road and Bazaar Road still trade pepper, the black gold, with ginger, cardamom, cloves and turmeric, sorted by hand. Ask before stepping in; buy whole spices, weighed in front of you.

44 Bargain hard: 'antique' may mean last year

Jew Town's antique shops. Warehouses of colonial furniture, brass lamps, carved panels, trunks and souvenirs down Jew Town Road. Bargain hard: many 'antiques' are new, and real ones may need papers to leave India. Skip the tourists.

15 A Dutch bungalow turned gallery and cafe

David Hall. A Dutch bungalow of the late 1600s opposite the Parade Ground, named for the Kodar family who later owned it, linked by tradition to van Rhee of the Hortus Malabaricus. Now a gallery for young artists with a garden cafe.

18 A Dutch house on a vanished bastion

Bastion Bungalow. An Indo-Dutch house with a tiled roof, built where the Dutch fort's Stromberg bastion stood; now the district heritage museum. Fort Kochi's walls are gone: look for Fort Manuel's ruins on the shore nearby.

26 Laundry beaten clean, by hand, since the Dutch

Dhobi Khana (the washermen's laundry). The Vannan washermen, whose families came from Tamil Nadu, still wash the town's laundry by hand here: beaten on stones, dried on lines, pressed with heavy irons. A trade about 300 years old. Ask before photographs.

32 Where the island ferries begin

Ernakulam boat jetty. The State Water Transport Department's main jetty: ferries to Fort Kochi, Mattancherry, Willingdon Island and Vypin, often quicker than the bus. Read the board: some boats skip some jetties.

33 One line, Aluva to Tripunithura

Kochi Metro. One line in a U from Aluva to Tripunithura: Maharaja's College for Marine Drive and the jetty, Kadavanthra for our Ernakulam home, Vyttila for the Water Metro and buses. Keep your ticket to exit.

38 Arrive at Jew Town by boat

Mattancherry Jetty. State Water Transport ferries from Ernakulam call here, a short crossing past the port's cranes, landing you steps from the Dutch Palace and the synagogue. Not every boat stops: check the board.

47 Kochi's main station

Ernakulam Junction (South) station. Kochi's main station, on most long-distance routes. Use the prepaid stand outside. Our Ernakulam home is a short auto away; for Fort Kochi take the bus or a boat, for Kumbalangi a cab or bus.

27 Spot five kinds of bird at Mangalavanam

More than 70 species recorded in this pocket of mangrove. Early morning, binoculars, quiet.

46 Take the lift up Kerala's tallest lighthouse

46 m at Puthuvyppe: the harbour mouth, the beaches, the backwaters below.

43 Buy a bag of whole black pepper on Bazaar Road

The black gold that built Kochi, weighed in front of you. Small before you buy.

44 Ask 'ethra?' before you buy anything

How much? Then smile, and bargain. 'Venda' means no thanks.

5 Find a Biennale work outside a gallery

erson the art spills into warehouses, cafes and walls across the old town. Check the Biennale's site first.

REACHING US

Colonial street, wall art, a rooftop

Zostel Kochi (Fort Kochi). Bus to Njalliparambu Junction, walk towards the Police Quarters, follow our signboards.

Monochrome walls, bright splashes, a swing

Zostel Kochi (Ernakulam). Kumaranasan Road, Kadavanthra: a short auto from Ernakulam Junction or the KSRTC stand.

A kayak with your name on it

Zostel Kochi (Kumbalangi). Bus to Kumbalangi from Ernakulam South bus stand; ask for South Pazhangad.

1 Not a square: a promise-made with nets

Vasco da Gama Square. A promise-made, not a square: the Chinese nets, the harbour mouth, the catch on sale and stalls that cook it for you. Come at sunset, when the sky glows through the nets. Our map starts counting here.

8 Two white spires, seven murals inside

Santa Cruz Cathedral Basilica. First built by the Portuguese in 1505, a cathedral from 1558, pulled down under the British; the white twin-spired building of 1905 has Gothic arches and seven murals. Find the old granite pillar outside. Dress modestly.

14 Vasco da Gama's first grave was here

St Francis Church. Built by the Portuguese in 1503, wood first, then stone. Vasco da Gama, who died in Kochi in 1524, lay here fourteen years before going home to Lisbon. Old tombstones line the walls. Shoulders and knees covered.

Kochi

Every number is a tip around the map, in its colour. Every star is a quest.

Stay with us

Zostel Kochi (Fort Kochi) Bus to Njalliparambu Junction, walk towards the Police Quarters, follow our signboards.

Three homes: a wall-art house on a colonial street in Fort Kochi, a city home in Ernakulam, and kayaks on the backwater at Kumbalangi.

Up the coast from Varkala's cliff. At the nets, watch the stones on their ropes lift the whole beam.

Down from Munnar's tea. In the synagogue, look down: the floor is hand-painted blue Chinese tiles.

Down the coast from Gokarna. Take the ferry from here across the harbour: Kochi looks best from the water.

Around Kochi

The box is the big map. Edge pins point the way (not to scale).

46 Vypin (Puthuvyppe) Lighthouse 4.1 km

53 Kadamakudy 10.7 km

NETS, SPIRES AND A SYNAGOGUE

1 Not a square: a promise-made with nets

Vasco da Gama Square. A promise-made, not a square: the Chinese nets, the harbour mouth, the catch on sale and stalls that cook it for you. Come at sunset, when the sky glows through the nets. Our map starts counting here.

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● Nets, Spires and a Synagogue

● Backwater, Beach and Mangrove

● Meen, Appam, Biryani

● Black Gold and Brass

● Kathakali to the Biennale

● Ferry, Metro, Repeat

● our three Zostels

★ a quest (the list is round the map)

--- Fort Kochi, the walk (side A)

● a dot: its true place, where a number stands aside

● a drawing by a number: what is there at the edge: beyond the map, its way and distance

● landmarks

● parks and gardens

● a station

N

0 125 m 250 m

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