

BACKWATERS: WHERE TO STAY

Our list of recommendations on where to rest in the backwaters and beyond



PHOTOGRAPHY: CHIVA LERDA

BACKWATERS

Kayal Island Retreat The only way to reach this tiny retreat on Vembanad Lake is to take a boat ride. With just two villas, one with a garden view and another on the waterfront, you can book the entire place. Both the villas are inspired by local architecture (with open-to-sky bathrooms) and created using reclaimed and recycled materials. If you're in the mood to step out, the staff can arrange village tours for you. (www.kayalstrandretreat.com; from ₹10,000)

Vivanta by Taj – Kumarakom

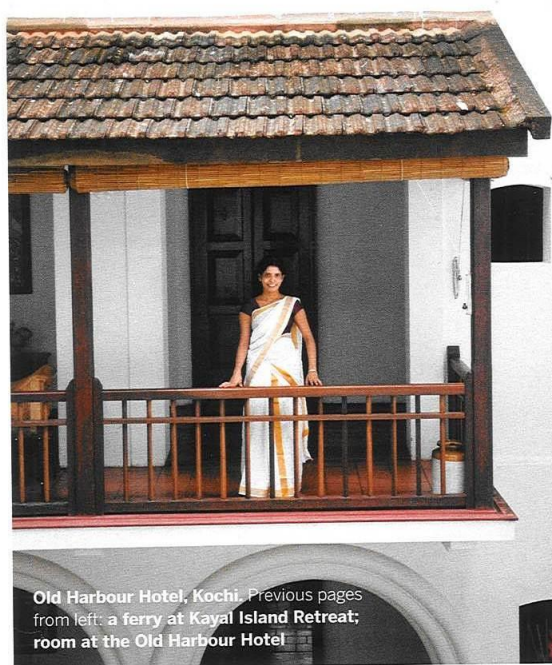
The 150-year-old Baker Bungalow, now a luxurious garden retreat, has lagoon or lake view rooms and villas with private pools. During your stay, explore the backwaters—go cycling, walking, canoeing or fishing. Sign up for a cruise that takes you to the backwaters village of Ayemenem, the backdrop of Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, and includes a traditional Sadya lunch. (www.vivanta.tajhotels.com; from ₹11,000)

Kumarakom Lake Resort

All guest rooms here are built as traditional manas—16th-century homesteads of Kerala—with courtyards, open-to-sky bathrooms but all modern comforts. Grab a cup of chai at Thattukada, a rustic, evening-only venue inspired by traditional tea shops, or dine at the Ettukettu restaurant. Explore nearby villages on bicycle or on foot, learn pottery or weaving, go fishing. If you have no agenda, just lounge by the infinity pool. (www.kumarakomlakeresort.in; from ₹19,500)

The Zuri Kumarakom Kerala Resort and Spa

Set along Vembanad Lake, this award-winning resort is postcard-perfect with its view of the calm backwaters, swaying palms and sea breeze. While most Kerala getaways are about ayurveda



Old Harbour Hotel, Kochi. Previous pages from left: a ferry at Kayal Island Retreat; room at the Old Harbour Hotel

and abstinence, here, the Trunk Call Bar serves exotic cocktails made using local ingredients. Sit with a single malt at the lagoon-facing Marquee, which offers a fine selection of malts, cognacs and cigars. (www.thezurihotels.com; from ₹12,000)

The Raviz Resort and Spa, Ashtamudi

A mix of modern design with traditional aesthetics is visible in the timber cottages and heritage suite of this resort. You can opt for ayurvedic treatments, cycling or a round of billiards, tennis or table tennis. Looking to catch the annual snake-boat race on Ashtamudi Lake on November 1? Raviz offers the best vantage point in the vicinity. (www.theraviz.com; from ₹5,250)

Vasundhara Sarovar Premiere Suites, rooms,

houseboats and floating cottages—there's something for everyone here. Each of the 60 rooms feature heritage motifs matched with contemporary design. The property has a spa,

a yoga deck (overlooking the pool and poolside café-bar), a medicinal herb garden, organic vegetable garden and a fishing deck. The staff can arrange a canoe, speedboat, pedal boat or passenger boat for those who want to explore the backwaters. (www.vasundhararesorts.in; from ₹8,700)

Coconut Lagoon In the quiet village of Kuttanad ('land of the short people', named such as locals were always knee-deep in paddy fields), this 30-acre property is criss-crossed by canals, which means you can only reach it by boat. The hotel overlooks Vembanad Lake and offers the chance to experience the heritage of the old feudal villages of Malabar. A typical day here includes yoga and meditation sessions at dawn, practising kalaripayattu, watching butterflies and dragonflies flitting about in the garden, a sunset cruise, and attending a cooking class with the chef in the evening. (www.cghearth.com; from ₹22,550)

The Raviz Resort and Spa, Kadavu

Spread across nine acres on the banks of Chaliyar River, this resort replicates Nallukettu-style architecture, using Kerala's art and ethnic symbols. About 80 percent of the property is constructed using local materials and landscaped with indigenous plants. Great for relaxing but if you're the active kind, the hotel can arrange kayaking, canoeing or fishing trips. Savour grilled meats and seafood at Garam, the alfresco, waterfront restaurant. (www.theraviz.com; from ₹5,500)

Punnamada Resort

Characterised by traditional aesthetics in a modern setting, this resort on Vembanad Lake is where you can hone your culinary skills with the chef, take a yoga class or explore secluded islands and isolated churches on the one-bedroom houseboat. (www.punnamadaresort.com; from ₹12,000)

Poovar Island Resort

This resort is segregated into two sections—one for those seeking ayurvedic treatments and the other for those looking for a retreat. Spread over 25 acres of coconut gardens, this 86-room property has an Ayurvedic Village that comes with 18 cottages, its own restaurant and kitchen that cater exclusively to guests on the wellness package. (www.poovarilandresorts.com; from ₹10,800)

The Athreya Ayurvedic Resort

Set amid paddy fields, all 16 cottages are made in typical Kerala style of architecture. The resort is exclusively for those seeking serious ayurvedic treatments. It is one of three centres that offer the highly specialised kutee praveshika rasayana, a treatment for those who've completed at least two weeks of panchakarma. (www.theathreya.com; from ₹8,000)