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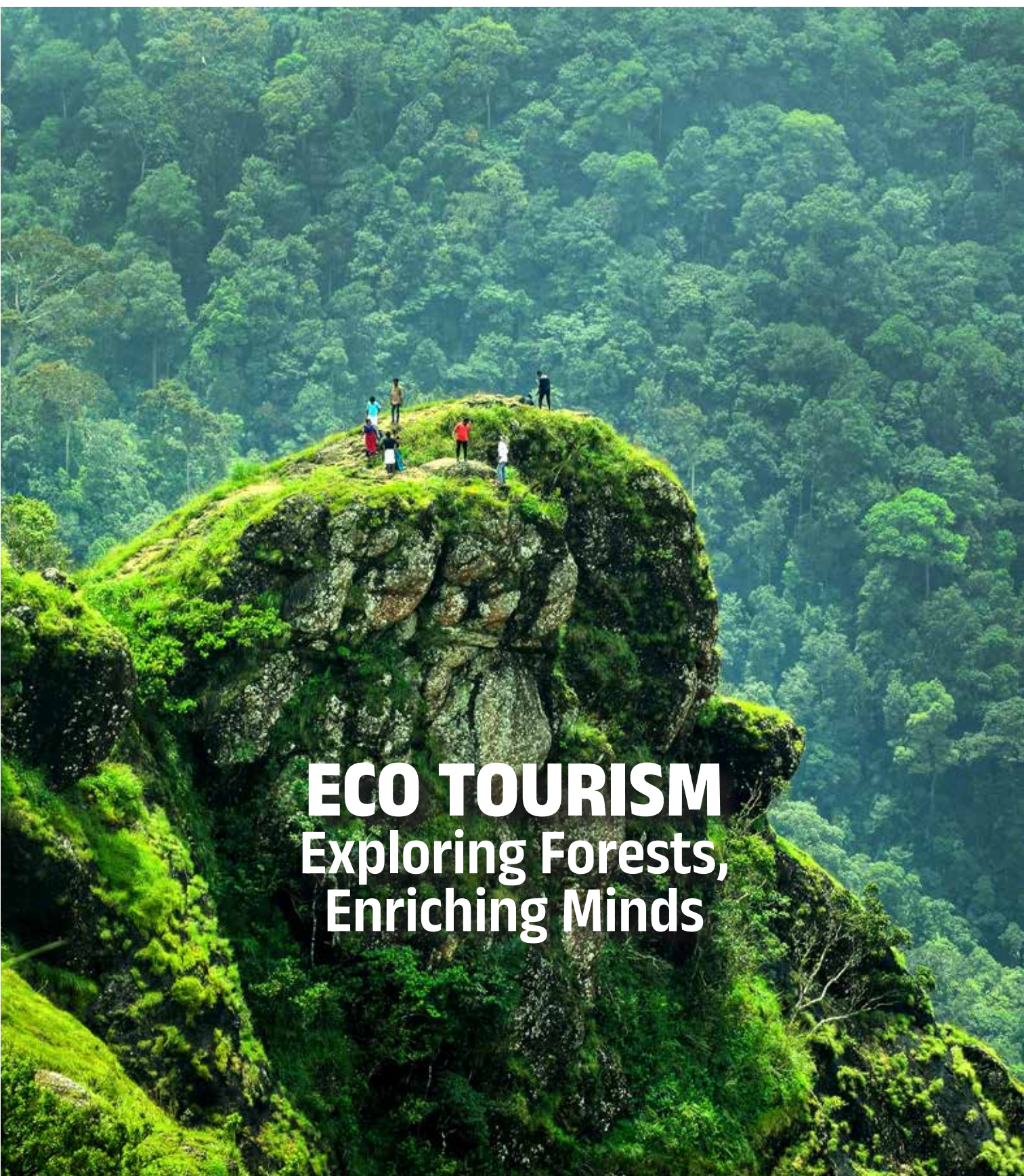


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# ARANYAM



Forest and Wildlife Environment Magazine



## ECO TOURISM Exploring Forests, Enriching Minds



**മനുഷ്യ വന്യജീവി സംഘർഷ ലഘൂകരണത്തിന് വനം വകുപ്പിന്റെ അടിയന്തര പ്രതികരണ സംവിധാനം**

**സംസ്ഥാനത്ത് ഫോറസ്റ്റ് എമർജൻസി ഓപ്പറേഷൻസ് സെന്ററുകൾ 24 മണിക്കൂറും പ്രവർത്തന സജ്ജം**



തിരുവനന്തപുരം വനം ആസ്ഥാനത്ത് സ്റ്റേറ്റ് ഫോറസ്റ്റ് എമർജൻസി ഓപ്പറേഷൻസ് സെന്റർ **91884 07510, 91884 07511**



**വിവിധ ജില്ലകളിലെ വനം ഡിവിഷനുകൾക്കു കീഴിൽ 36 ഫോറസ്റ്റ് എമർജൻസി ഓപ്പറേഷൻസ് സെന്ററുകൾ**

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**അടിയന്തര സാഹചര്യങ്ങളിൽ വിളിക്കൂ... നിങ്ങളെ സഹായിക്കാൻ ഞങ്ങളുണ്ട് കൂടെ.**



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## Preserving Our Biodiversity: A Shared Responsibility

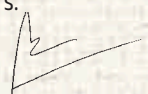
**T**he incredible diversity of flora and fauna is what makes our planet a thriving habitat for life. Biodiversity is not just a scientific concept—it is the foundation of human existence. From forests and rivers to oceans and deserts, every ecosystem plays a vital role in maintaining the balance of nature. Each species, big or small, is intricately linked to its environment, forming an unbreakable chain of life.

Globally, countries rich in biodiversity are recognized as 'mega biodiversity nations.' India, with its vast and varied ecosystems, is one such country. The Western Ghats, the Eastern Himalayas, and the Andaman and Nicobar Islands holds the richest biodiversity hotspots in the country. The Western Ghats, in particular, was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2012, a testament to its ecological significance.

Nestled within the Western Ghats, Kerala stands as a beacon of biodiversity. The lush evergreen forests on the western slopes gradually transform into dry deciduous woodlands on the eastern side offer a glimpse into the region's rich ecology. The region's diverse landscape, coupled with high rainfall and humidity, support a wide range of life forms. From tropical evergreen forests and shola woodlands to grasslands and laterite plateaus, the Western Ghats is home to an astonishing array of endemic flora and fauna.

Each year, India's biological wealth is assessed in a scientific manner annually. While the Botanical Survey of India documents plants, the Zoological Survey of India lists new animal species. In 2023, a total of 326 new species were discovered, which includes a new plant family and 20 new genera. Kerala ranked second in the discovery of new plant species, contributing 38 new species to the record. On the wildlife front, out of 641 new species identified, Kerala has the highest number—101 species—underscoring its pivotal role in conservation. This trend is not limited to 2023 alone; a review of past records from national agencies such as BSI and ZSI shows Kerala's consistent presence among the top contributors. This highlights the immense biodiversity of the Western Ghats, including Kerala, and signifies that there is still much to explore and document in our biodiversity landscape.

The Earth's ecological equilibrium relies on the harmonious coexistence of all living beings. Biodiversity is not just about preserving nature—it is about sustaining life itself. As we step into 2025, let us reaffirm our commitment to conservation. Protecting our natural heritage requires collective action, and it is imperative that we extend our full support to the efforts of the Forest Department and other environmental agencies. The responsibility to safeguard biodiversity is not just theirs—it is ours.

  
**Ganga Singh I.F.S.**  
Chief Editor

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Chief Minister



Cover photo credit : Pixabay



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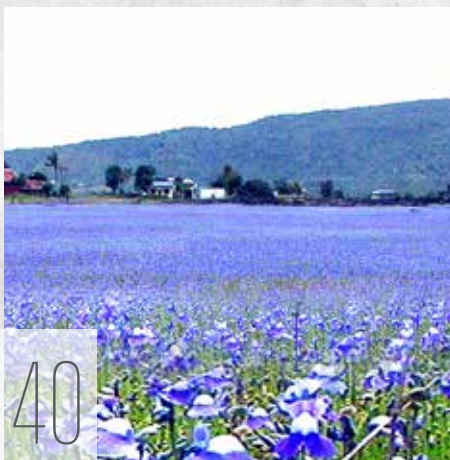
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# KERALA: Leading the World in Eco-Tourism

**Pinarayi Vijayan**

Chief Minister

**N**ature and its biodiversity are the foundation for human survival, and eco-tourism plays a crucial role in fostering this awareness. Across Kerala, under the Forest Department, there are around 80 eco-tourism projects. As per statistics, the number of people visiting the eco system spots has been increasing each year. As such, the state government is committed to expanding these initiatives.

Eco-tourism projects play a pivotal role in raising awareness among the public about forest and wildlife conservation. For those who wish to experience nature, these projects provide a great opportunity. However, eco-tourism serves as a livelihood and a means of survival for the local community. Eco-tourism is not just about enjoying nature; it also functions as a sustainable system that preserves nature for future generations.

Several international organizations and magazines from across the globe, are increasingly recommending Kerala as one of the most visually stunning regions in the world, and this recognition is due to eco-tourism initiatives in the state.

The future of eco-tourism in Kerala lies in its ability to remain grounded in the principles of sustainability and conservation. Time will prove that only eco-friendly initiatives will thrive in the state. The Forest and Wildlife Department's tireless work, ensure that eco-tourism will continue to evolve in a way that benefits both people and nature. ●

Eco-Tourism





# KERALA: A Model for Ecotourism Excellence



**A.K Saseendran**  
Minister for Forests  
and Wildlife

**T**he Western Ghats, a treasure trove of biodiversity and natural resources is one among the world's 34 richest biodiversity hotspots. In July 2012, UNESCO declared Western Ghats as a World Heritage Site. These mountain ranges are renowned for their lush forests, grasslands, and heavy rainfall, which make them ecologically diverse and blessed with nature's beauty. The streams originating from here serve as a primary freshwater source for millions.

Although covering only five percent of India's landmass, the Western Ghats is home to over 30 per cent of the country's flora and fauna. These mountains serve as a crucial habitat for many species. Their rich biodiversity and natural beauty are key elements that make them unique. This uniqueness is why Kerala, as part of the Western Ghats, is known as "God's Own Country."

The backwaters in the coastal regions, paddy fields, hills, rainforests, tea plantations and streams are all landscapes that attract nature lovers. The elephants of Thekkady, Nilgiri Tahr, lion-tailed macaques in Silent Valley, and exceptional beauty of Agasthyakoodam and Chembra Peak are all our heritage. And thus eco-tourism in Kerala is a movement that makes these natural blessings accessible to all.

Eco-tourism offers environmentally sustainable travel experiences, with emphasis on preserving nature and improving the welfare of local communities. Eco-tourism centers across Kerala have become popular destinations for travel. Apart from focusing on environmental conservation and awareness, eco tourism in Kerala also caters to the welfare of the local population. The Forest Department's eco-tourism initiative works toward providing tourists with a great experience while raising awareness about nature conservation and supporting the economic development of the local people.

Today, under the Forest Department, nearly 80 eco-tourism centers are operational across the state. These centers offer various activities, including trekking, birdwatching, boating and visiting butterfly parks. Accommodation options include nature-friendly facilities, such as tree-top huts. Vanasree shops and rest areas, catering to the needs of tourists, are also set up. Online booking for tickets is also available.

Eco-tourism provides knowledge and experiences with respect to nature conservation. It aims to create an environmentally conscious generation that understands the importance of preserving forests and wildlife. Through this, the Forest Department hopes to inspire people both in India and globally. Kerala has become a model state in several eco-tourism ventures, setting an example of how nature and biodiversity can be preserved and enjoyed. ●



# Ecotourism: A Journey Through Time



### **Pramod G Krishnan IFS**

Additional Principal Chief Forest Conservator (Admin)

**T**ourism, in its most simplest form, refers to the movement of individuals or groups from one place to another for recreation, education, or new experiences. Over the years, this broad concept has evolved into a rich blend of entertainment, adventure, and immersive learning experiences and this evolution gave rise to eco-tourism, a concept that focuses on sustainable travel while appreciating nature and supporting local communities.

### **Origins of Eco-Tourism in India**

Eco-tourism in India has its roots in the formation of wildlife sanctuaries by the elite, including royal families and British civil servants. These sanctuaries, initially created as game reserves, laid the foundation for eco-tourism as we know it today. India's major tourist destinations, particularly those related to wildlife, were born out from this legacy. This phenomenon that began in the 1700s took a more structured form in 1896 when India's first wildlife sanctuary was established in Vedan Thangal, Tamil Nadu.

### **Kerala's Journey into Eco-Tourism**

India's Eco tourism has continued to grow, with Kerala emerging as a key player. Kerala's eco-tourism journey began in 1934 with the establishment of the Periyar Tiger Reserve, then known as the Nellikappetti Sanctuary. Following independence, Kerala expanded its network of wildlife sanctuaries, such as Pechi and Neyyar, during the 1950s. By 1960s, these sanctuaries had achieved international recognition for their ecological value. A large percentage of Kerala's tourist attractions are located in forested areas.

Though these wildlife sanctuaries were a significant draw for tourists, the local communities, especially those living on the forest fringes, didn't benefit economically from the influx of tourists. When going back to the 1990s, one can see that these people, particularly those living in the forest fringe areas, faced economic hardships and they were not part of the booming ecotourism. At the same time, conservation efforts were also lacking. In the 2000s, the Kerala government came out with a crucial decision to involve local communities in eco-tourism, particularly those living on the peripheries of forests. This initiative aimed to provide economic benefits while turning these communities into active participants in conservation.

The Periyar Tiger Reserve became the pioneering model for this community-based ecotourism



approach, which centered on three pillars: local community engagement, immersive tourist experiences, and forest conservation.

### **Social and Economic Transformation**

It has been 25 years since Kerala began its eco-tourism initiatives. Looking back, eco-tourism in Kerala has led to significant social and economic changes, fostering a deeper appreciation for nature and its preservation. Those familiar with forest became its guardians. New projects were

introduced and more opportunities for tourists to know forest were evolved. Locally, people, especially those in rural areas, began to experience economic gains. Today, eco-tourism generates around 60-80 crore rupees annually for Kerala, with over half of this benefiting local communities.

### **Challenges And Opportunities**

In the last 25 years, Kerala has overcome many of the challenges. However, there is still much to be done. One emerging concern is the construction activities that defy nature.

Another phenomenon is "overkill," where popular tourist destinations experience overcrowding. Another challenge is keeping pace with the rapidly changing interests of tourists. Furthermore, global issues such as climate change need to be incorporated into future planning.

Despite these hurdles, the potential for eco-tourism remains high. The current ratio of tourists to Kerala is 1:50, far lower than in other countries, where in some nations it is 1:1. By attracting international tourism, Kerala

**Kerala, with its awe-inspiring biodiversity and rich cultural landscape, holds great potential for eco-tourism.**

could boost its economy substantially. However, the focus should not solely be on increasing the number of tourist centers; instead, efforts should prioritize enhancing the economic contribution of each tourist. It's far better to have fewer tourists who spend more money than to have large numbers of visitors who contribute less.

Apart from this, tourists could also be engaged to contribute financially to the conservation of natural areas. A small contribution by each tourist can make a big difference. For instance, if a tourist visiting Munnar Pays a small fee for tourism promotion, there is no doubt that the local body would be able to enhance tourism development in the region. If a tourist just pays a minimal fee of Rs ten, and suppose ten lakh tourists visit the place, then the

revenue generated could be Rs one crore, which could add to the tourism sector in region. If this model were implemented across Kerala's panchayats, particularly in the 100 most popular tourist regions, it could result in substantial local economic development. For this to be effective, policies and regulations must be developed to ensure fair distribution of these resources.

### **Bright Future for Kerala's Eco-Tourism**

Kerala has the potential to become a global model for eco-tourism, where nature preservation and community development go hand in hand. By maintaining a balance between environmental conservation and welfare of local community, Kerala can ensure a long-term sustainability of eco-tourism. The core experience for any tourist should be to connect with Kerala's unique natural beauty. As the state adapts to modern technologies and amenities, it will continue to offer an experience that both preserves nature and promotes responsible tourism, ensuring that future generations can enjoy Kerala's remarkable ecological heritage. ●

## **PONMUDI** An Unforgettable Experience

Ponmudi, a prominent tourist destination in Thiruvananthapuram district, is located 61 kilometers from the city and stands 1,100 meters above sea level. The journey up to Ponmudi takes you through winding hairpin bends, and once you reach the top, you are greeted by mountains draped in snow. As part of the Western Ghats, Ponmudi remains cool and mist-covered even during intense summer heat. For most of the year, the place is characterized by cool temperatures and dense fog.

The name "Ponmudi" is believed to come from the local tribal communities, who consider the mountain to be a sacred place where the mountain gods protect gold. Around Ponmudi, you can find numerous streams and waterfalls deep within the forest, adding to its charm. Vithura Golden Valley is another attractive spot nearby.

The lush green forests, stunning waterfalls, and pure air make this eco-tourism hub a truly refreshing experience for travelers. Adventure enthusiasts will also find opportunities for trekking along scenic trails. In addition to its natural beauty, Ponmudi is also home to ancient temples and tribal villages, adding a unique cultural element to the experience.

To enrich the traveller's experience, the Kerala Forest Department offers sightseeing and trekking packages.

**CONTACT : 8547601005 / 9847325027**

# Eco-Tourism: What Kerala Has to Say



**Raju K. Francis IFS**  
Deputy forest conservator

**K**erala, renowned for its lush landscapes and rich biodiversity, has long embraced eco-tourism as a way to protect its natural wonders while offering travelers a unique opportunity to connect with nature. The state's eco-tourism journey began in 1997 with the launch of the Periyar Tiger Trail, a pioneering project that combined trekking through Thekkady's dense forests with sustainable community engagement. This initiative marked the birth of Kerala's first eco-tourism venture, blending adventure with conservation.

The Periyar Tiger Trail, a trek through the

forests of Kumali and surrounding areas, was originally conceived by the Ex-Vayana Eco Development Committee (EDC) for bringing back forest thieves who used to throng the region, back to life. It was a broad step to provide both an immersive wilderness experience and a revenue stream for these people as well as the local communities. In the beginning, trekking groups of no more than five tourists were guided through the forest, spending nights under the canopy in temporary tents, offering a close encounter with nature. The project quickly gained popularity, earning about 35 lakh rupees in annual revenue by 2000. Its success led to it

being hailed as Kerala's first true eco-tourism model. Initially, a private organization, Kerala Travels, took over the marketing and management of this project. Later, Tour India took over the responsibilities.

When Tour India withdrew from the contract, the Ex-Vayana EDC faced financial challenges. To overcome these difficulties, the Bamboo Rafting project was introduced in 2003. This new venture invited visitors to glide through serene waterways on bamboo rafts, offering both relaxation and close-up encounters with wildlife. With minimal investment, it became an instant hit. This project, initially



**Eco-tourism, which can contribute significantly to local tribal development and the state's economy, needs to be expanded to its full potential**

limited to ten tourists per day, quickly gained popularity and received approval from the public. Subsequently, many similar models of both the Tiger Trail and Bamboo Rafting were adopted in other forest divisions of Kerala. Even now, similar models are being implemented outside Kerala.

### **Eco-Tourism: A Vision for Kerala**

The term 'eco-tourism' was first coined in 1983 by Mexican ecologist Héctor Ceballos-Lascuráin, highlighting tourism's potential to generate income, conserve nature, and sustain local cultures. The eco-tourism initiatives implemented in Periyar followed this model.

Kerala, with its awe-inspiring biodiversity and rich cultural landscape, holds great potential for eco-tourism. The state is

home to over 5100 species of flora and fauna, which includes more than 500 species of birds. In Kerala alone 486 of these bird species are seen. The preservation of these species and the opportunity to experience them are infinite possibilities in the field of eco-tourism.

Globally, one of the most popular forms of eco-tourism is bird watching, an area in which Kerala holds significant promise. In 2023, approximately 6.5 lakh foreign tourists visited Kerala, while an estimated 2.9 crore domestic tourists explored the various districts. Around 50 lakh people visit the various destinations under the Kerala Forest Department each year.

### **Challenges and Opportunities**

Kerala Forest Department currently manages



## **THEKKADY** A Unique Experience

Located amidst the verdant landscapes of the Western Ghats, Thekkady is a renowned tourist destination famous for its wildlife sanctuary, aromatic spice plantations, and natural beauty. It is one of the most popular tourist spots in India.

With its diverse wildlife, tranquil natural habitats, and sustainable tourism practices, Thekkady offers a unique experience for nature enthusiasts. Among the most biodiverse regions in the Western Ghats is Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary, a haven for a variety of species. The sanctuary's dense forests and expansive grasslands shelter elephants, tigers, bison, exotic birds, and more. The Periyar Lake boat safari offers an unparalleled opportunity to view wildlife in their natural environment, adding to the charm of the sanctuary. Periyar Tiger Reserve is one of India's most visited protected areas, attracting nature lovers from all over the country.

The Kerala Forest Department offers various activities for visitors, including trekking, bamboo rafting, nature walks, and staying.

**CONTACT : 8547603066**

over 200 eco-tourism programs across 80 locations, including places like Periyar Tiger Sanctuary, Eravikulam, Vazhachal, and Wayanad. These initiatives provide direct employment to over 2,000 individuals, including tribal communities, forest dwellers, and women and also indirectly benefits more than 10,000 people. Despite these commendable efforts, it is crucial to assess whether the Kerala Forest Department is receiving adequate national and international visibility for its projects. Insufficient marketing strategies, lack of web-based promotion and a lot more limit our eco tourism promotion in the national and international arena. While many agencies and institutions have adopted models developed by the Kerala Forest Department, the department itself must adapt to the evolving global circumstances. Eco-tourism, which can contribute significantly to local tribal development and the state's economy, needs to be expanded to its full potential.

To address the challenges faced by eco-tourism, several steps can be taken. The first priority is to train qualified eco-guides who can provide an in-depth understanding of the state's biodiversity. The Eco-Tourism Directorate has allocated Rs 20 lakhs for the training of eco-guides and officials in the last fiscal. Training is being conducted in collaboration with the State FDA.

It is also important to conduct a thorough financial analysis of the 200 eco-tourism programs run by the Kerala Forest Department. Risk assessments, cash flow analysis, economic evaluations, and carrying capacity studies should be conducted to optimize these programs. Agencies such as the Kerala Forest Research Institute (KFRI), College of Forestry, and Periyar Foundation could be engaged in this scientific approach.

### Reworking Eco-Tourism Models

The common misconception that eco-tourism simply involves creating eco-lodges or laying cemented pathways is not all true. Eco-tourism should focus on presenting the forest's natural beauty while minimizing its ecological impact. For example, instead of building washrooms near waterfalls or constructing cottages on grasslands, we must reconsider such development ideas



and create narratives around each eco-tourism project. This does not mean that facilities should not be part of development activities. Besides, travelers could also be provided with a telling story of the eco tourism spots they visit. Just like the story of how forest thieves became tourist guides as part of the Tiger Trail or the story of sandalwood smugglers of lower tamilnadu camp who organized "Vidiyal", we could also have stories of our eco tourism initiatives. The travelers will be curious to know the reasons behind the initiatives, making the

experience more meaningful.

A new generation of travelers seeks pristine, untouched destinations, and it is essential to create beautiful eco-tourism models for them. New eco-tourism startups can be developed in collaboration with local people. These could include arranging vehicles to transport tourists, providing accommodation options outside forests and organizing teams to clean up the litter along passing roads.

The Government's upcoming initiative -- Eco-





## NEYYAR WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

### The Beauty of Valleys

Located approximately 30 kilometers from Thiruvananthapuram, the Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary is a haven for nature lovers. It offers a rare opportunity to witness both the lush flora and fauna in their natural habitats, complemented by several trekking options. The sanctuary is known for its breathtaking views of the hills, valleys, and dense forests. These scenic landscapes provide a perfect setting for a rejuvenating escape into nature.

The various trekking trails in Neyyar Wildlife Sanctuary help you get closer to the natural beauty of the area, allowing you to enjoy its serenity and biodiversity. A boat ride on the Neyyar River is another unforgettable experience, offering unique views of the sanctuary's lush surroundings.

In addition to trekking and boating, the Kerala Forest Department provides stay packages, making Neyyar a perfect destination for eco-tourism.

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Tourism Authority – could play a crucial role in this process. The Forest Department could organize B2B meetings with international tour operators to promote Kerala's eco-tourism, along with hosting an international eco-tourism mart every two years.

Approaching eco-tourism with a scientific mindset, distinct from other tourism activities, is essential. Given the delicate nature of the biodiversity in Kerala's forests, any intervention needs to be carefully planned and executed. For example, eco-tourism programs focusing on coastal forests and

beach camps along the coast, such as those initiated by the Alappuzha Social Forestry Division, are promising. In 2023-24, an amount of Rs 41 lakh was earmarked for the division in this respect.

The coordinated efforts of agencies involved in the forest sector is very much essential and it will not only ensure the preservation of natural resources but also contribute to the sustainable livelihood of local communities. Through effective eco-tourism programs, Kerala can significantly enhance its economic prosperity. ●

# Kerala: A Trailblazer in Eco-Tourism and Conservation



## Subrhamanian P

Member, Kerala Tourism Advisory Board/President,  
Kerala Forest G M Club)

**W**hen we talk about eco-tourism, the first names that come to mind are Parambikulam and Periyar. The Parambikulam-Periyar model has become the symbol of Kerala's eco-tourism. This model has placed the state on the global eco-tourism map, earning significant recognition worldwide.

Initiatives like the Periyar Tiger Trail have been a turning point for Kerala's tourism industry. One of the most remarkable achievements is the transformation of poachers and forest encroachers into tourist guides. This change, from destroying the forest to preserving nature, has given a new meaning to their lives.

Today, Kerala stands as an exemplary model of balancing environmental conservation with economic growth. Eco-tourism in Kerala offers an experience that combines adventure, education, and an intimate connection with nature, bringing tourists closer to the forest and wildlife. At the same time, it helps improve the living standards of local communities by providing a steady income. Eco-tourism has also raised awareness about the importance of nature conservation.

Kerala is a state with endless possibilities in eco-tourism. The government and the private sector should collaborate in developing sustainable tourism models while ensuring the active participation of local communities. Key steps to achieve this include developing sustainable tourism models, securing local involvement, and strictly

implementing environmental protection laws.

When it comes to eco-tourism in Kerala, we can never forget the tribal people like Sreenivasan from Parambikulam, Bomman from Nedunkayam, Lachi from Silent Valley and Kannan from Thedkkady. Their deep knowledge of the forest and the knowledge they shared with us have always been the foundation of our growth. Additionally, several officials from the forest department in the early stages worked diligently and planned several initiatives that helped Kerala achieve its present prominence in eco-tourism.

However, challenges still remain. Waste management and environmental conservation are of utmost importance. Strict actions are necessary to curb environmental disaster caused by plastic waste. Waste processing and sustainable tourism packages are key to overcoming these challenges. Promoting excellent services and nature camps will further help in expanding eco-tourism. Moreover, new tourism trails that offer deeper engagement with the forest and wildlife should be created.

Eco-tourism has now evolved from being just a travel experience into a social responsibility that aims at environmental conservation and uplifting local communities. There is no doubt that Kerala will become a global example through this journey. ●



# Kadu Jeevitham

From Hunter's Aide to Forest Guardian



**P.G. Kunjumon**  
watcher

**M**y journey into the forest began when I was just 12 years old. Back then, my role was to help hunters with preparing their food. Little did I know that decades later, I would be leading tourists on trekking expeditions through the very same forests.

Back then, I wore the attire of a hunter; today, I proudly wear the uniform of the Forest Department.

This remarkable transformation in my life happened through the Forest Department's Eco-Development program, which is part of the Vanashree initiative. Through this project, the Forest Department changed my life and the lives of many others, by converting poachers and illegal loggers into forest conservationists. For me, this program gave me a second chance, one that I never expected.

I remember how difficult my early years were. My mother who struggled to make ends meet, raised us by doing menial work. Hunger led me to join a group of forest thieves who harvested valuable barks. Poverty stripped away my fears, and soon, I was deep in the forest, doing whatever was needed to survive.

In the beginning, I was tasked with preparing food for the forest thieves. When the forest officials cracked down on bark smuggling, we turned to sandalwood smuggling, which fetched a handsome price. We smuggled sandalwood to Tamil Nadu but later to Thiruvananthapuram as a better price

was got here.

By the time I was 23, I had 15 cases against me. It was during this dark period that the Forest Department reached out to me through the Vanashree program. Initially, I was skeptical. But after several discussions and training sessions, I began to trust the department. In 1997, I officially became a part of the Forest Department. My first tasks involved small jobs like constructing trekking paths, digging trenches to keep elephants at bay, and creating fire lines to prevent wildfires.

After becoming a part of the Forest department, I managed to guide many former poachers away from illegal activities. Many former poachers were inspired by my story and decided to leave behind their illegal activities. One of the most unforgettable moments in my career came in 1997 when my team and I bravely apprehended elephant poachers from Tamil Nadu. It was a dangerous task but fulfilling mission—one that reaffirmed my commitment to protecting wildlife.

The past 27 years working with the Forest Department have brought me immense joy and peace. It's hard to believe how much has changed and it is a far cry from the life I once led. Once, I exploited these forests for survival. Today, I dedicate my life to preserving them. I know now how vital they are for the planet, and I will continue to protect them with all my heart. ●

**P.G. Kunjumon, who has dedicated 28 years to forest and wildlife conservation, was recently honored with the prestigious Wildlife Service Award for his exceptional service in this field. The award, given by the Forest Department and Cricket stars, is one of the country's most recognized honors in environmental preservation.**

# ECO TOURISM; A New Chapter in Nature Study



In an insightful discussion, **Justin Mohan, IFS** (Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, Eco-Development & Tribal Welfare), shares his thoughts on the development, importance, and challenges of eco-tourism in Kerala.

## Can you elaborate on the Growth and Progress of Ecotourism in Kerala?

**K**erala's ecotourism initiatives have been envisaged to bring people closer to the rich biodiversity while improving the livelihoods of forest-dependent communities. Implemented by the state's Forest Department, these projects focus on conservation, sustainable tourism, and community empowerment. Ecotourism

projects in Kerala are executed with active participation from local forest-dependent communities under the participatory forest management system. The key objectives include promoting environmental education, conserving biodiversity, and enhancing the economic well-being of indigenous communities. Each project is integrated into the working management plan of the respective forest division and the Tiger

Conservation Plan, ensuring approval from the central government.

The management and execution of these programmes are overseen by Vana Samrakshana Samithis (VSS) and Eco Development Committees (EDC), which consist of local tribal members. To maintain ecological balance and ensure the upkeep of these eco tourism spots, travelers are charged a nominal fee based on the "Polluter Shall



**Kerala has the potential to become a global model for eco-tourism, where nature preservation and community development go hand in hand.**



DESTINATION KERALA

## Enchanting Views of KALLAR

Nestled away from the hustle and bustle of Thiruvananthapuram, Kallar is a picturesque village located in the foothills of Western Ghats. Flowing through this serene village is the Kallar River, making it a favorite spot for nature lovers.

The village is rich in rare bird species and a variety of butterflies, adding to its charm and biodiversity. For those interested in trekking, angling, or birdwatching, a visit to Kallar offers a truly enriching experience..

Pay to Clean up the Pollution” principle. The collected funds managed at the forest division or Forest Development Agency (FDA) level under the Eco-System Management Fund (ESMF) supports conservation efforts, site maintenance, waste management. It is also used to provide wages for community members involved in ecotourism activities.

At present, around 2,170 individuals are directly employed in Kerala’s ecotourism sector, with over 10,000 people benefiting indirectly. The state has successfully implemented ecotourism projects in 80 locations, demonstrating a strong commitment to sustainable tourism

and environmental conservation.

**What do you think has contributed to Kerala's success in eco-tourism?**

Kerala is often referred to as a "dream destination" for tourists, with international agencies recognizing it as one of the must-visit places in life. What makes our eco-tourism unique is the active involvement of indigenous communities. These communities are not only the custodians of the land but also its promoters. Through this collaboration, we’re preserving their culture, promoting environmental education, and simultaneously improving their economic conditions. The

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state's ecotourism activities focus on the sustainable development of rural regions, providing a unique opportunity for tourists to experience village life. Moreover, we have also taken measures to ensure safety of travelers. In case of unexpected incidents, the Forest Department also has an insurance system in place to provide compensation.

Kerala's sustainable ecotourism initiatives, aimed at the upliftment of indigenous communities and nature conservation, have been hailed as a model for the country. These efforts showcase Kerala's commitment to balancing development with environmental responsibility.

### **How much importance does the Forest Department give for Ecotourism?**

The Forest Department views eco-tourism as a powerful tool for nature conservation. It offers a unique opportunity for people to experience the invaluable treasures of nature—forests, rivers, and mountains—closely. Beyond this, it fosters a deeper understanding of wildlife and their significance in our ecosystem. Through ecotourism, we raise awareness about the importance of nature conservation, instilling a sense of responsibility for the environment in future generations. Ecotourism also plays a crucial role in educating the public about pressing environmental issues such as plastic pollution and deforestation, encouraging sustainable practices. By engaging the community, these efforts inspire individuals to adopt lifestyles that are in harmony with nature. One of the Forest Department's key goals is to protect forests and preserve the rich biodiversity. Over the past 25 years, Kerala's ecotourism initiatives have contributed significantly for the growth of tourism sector as well as improving livelihoods of forest-dependent communities.

### **How does eco-tourism provide employment opportunities to local communities?**

Eco-tourism has created diverse employment opportunities for local and tribal communities. It also generates income that supports rural development. Through the Forest Department's ecotourism initiatives,



2,170 people are employed directly, while over 10,000 individuals benefit indirectly. Roles such as tour guides, trekking guides, ecotourism staff, and boat operators are common. Apart from this, Forest products, marketed through eco-tourism ventures, also create income opportunities, particularly for women, thus fostering empowerment. Ecotourism has thus become a sustainable development model that significantly improves the livelihoods of people in rural areas, contributing to a more prosperous and empowered community.

### **How has eco-tourism improved the living standards of tribal communities?**

Eco Tourism has opened new avenues for tribal communities, providing consistent income and a sense of pride in their unique cultural heritage. They are given roles like tour guides, trekking guides, ecotourism staff, forest product marketers, and boat operators. These opportunities help to give them a steady income, which in turn improves their economic stability. By introducing tourists

to the diverse arts, crafts, and traditions of tribal communities, ecotourism creates new job opportunities and sources of income. This not only leads to financial stability but also minimizes their reliance on forest resources, promoting better conservation practices. Through eco-tourism, we offer a sustainable path for tribal populations to thrive economically while safeguarding their environment.

### **How can we balance Development and Conservation Challenges in Forest Protection and Ecotourism?**

It is a major challenge. As already said, once the forest dependent communities get a steady income, they would never return to forests, thus helps in forest conservation. Participatory forest management practices help curb illegal deforestation and support conservation of biodiversity. Additionally, to ensure the smooth operation of ecotourism projects and minimize the environmental impact caused by excessive visitor numbers, visitor capacity studies (visitor load studies)



Forest Department has started initiatives to develop ecotourism circuits by connecting prominent tourist destinations in the state. These circuits will help tourists plan their visits more efficiently and increase the possibility of visiting multiple ecotourism centers in a shorter period

are conducted for each ecotourism project area. By controlling the number of tourists, ecotourism centers can be managed more sustainably. Environmental impact assessments conducted before the initiation of development projects allow the Forest Department to develop tourist infrastructure while simultaneously ensuring environmental conservation. Raising public awareness about the importance of environmental protection encourages greater participation in forest conservation efforts.

#### **What innovative ideas are being implemented to attract tourists?**

We are constantly enhancing the experience for visitors. To give travelers a new experience, the quality of products and services at ecotourism centers will be enhanced through infrastructure development and staff training programs. Efforts are ongoing to make packages and facilities more popular. The ecotourism centers will feature comfortable and convenient accommodations, excellent parking areas, restrooms, cafeterias, forest

products shops, innovative information centers, and photo shoot locations. We're also introducing more convenient services like online booking through [keralaforest.ecotourism.com](http://keralaforest.ecotourism.com) or Kerala Forest Ecotourism app, and cashless transactions with Point-of-Sale (POS) machines.

#### **Are there any plans to develop an eco-tourism circuit?**

Yes, the Forest Department has started initiatives to develop ecotourism circuits by connecting prominent tourist destinations in the state. These circuits will help tourists plan their visits more efficiently and increase the possibility of visiting multiple ecotourism centers in a shorter period.

#### **What measures are in place to ensure eco-tourism centers remain free of waste?**

The Project Green Grass initiative plays a vital role in curbing plastic waste and promoting scientific waste management. We also involve the local communities in

collecting waste, which is then handed over to the Green Army. Funds collected through the Environmental Maintenance Fund (EMF) from tourists are allocated for waste management, local development, and environmental conservation activities. Furthermore, waste management units have been established in various forest divisions.

#### **What steps are being taken to limit the number of tourists at eco-tourism centers?**

To ensure smooth operation of eco-tourism projects and also to reduce the environmental impact caused by overcrowding, a Carrying Capacity Study is being done at all eco tourism spots. This helps in determining the maximum number of visitors each eco-tourism location can sustainably hold.

At present, studies have been completed for several eco-tourism centers under different forest divisions, including Banasura Hill-Meenmutty, Chembra Peak, Soochipara, and Kuruvai in the South Wayanad Forest Division; Eravikulam National Park, Silent Valley National Park, Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary in the Munnar Wildlife Forest Division; and the Thekkady center under the Periyar East Forest Division. The Institute of Forest Genetics & Breeding (IFGB) in Coimbatore has completed studies for eco-

tourism centers in the Parambikulam Tiger Reserve, Silent Valley National Park, Aralam Wildlife Sanctuary, Muthanga, Idukki Wildlife Sanctuary, Athirappilly, Gavi, Ponmudi, Kallar, and Neyyar-Peppara. Efforts are ongoing to conduct studies in other areas as well.

**How does eco-tourism influence new generation in terms of environmental awareness?**

Eco-tourism plays a major role in fostering environmental awareness and providing

opportunities for direct interaction with nature. Through eco-tourism programs like forest trips, nature observations, and other related activities, the new generation is encouraged to connect with nature. These experiences help deepen their relationship with nature, increasing awareness of issues such as plastic waste and deforestation. Eco-tourism

**Through eco-tourism programs like forest trips, nature observations, and other related activities, the new generation is encouraged to connect with nature**



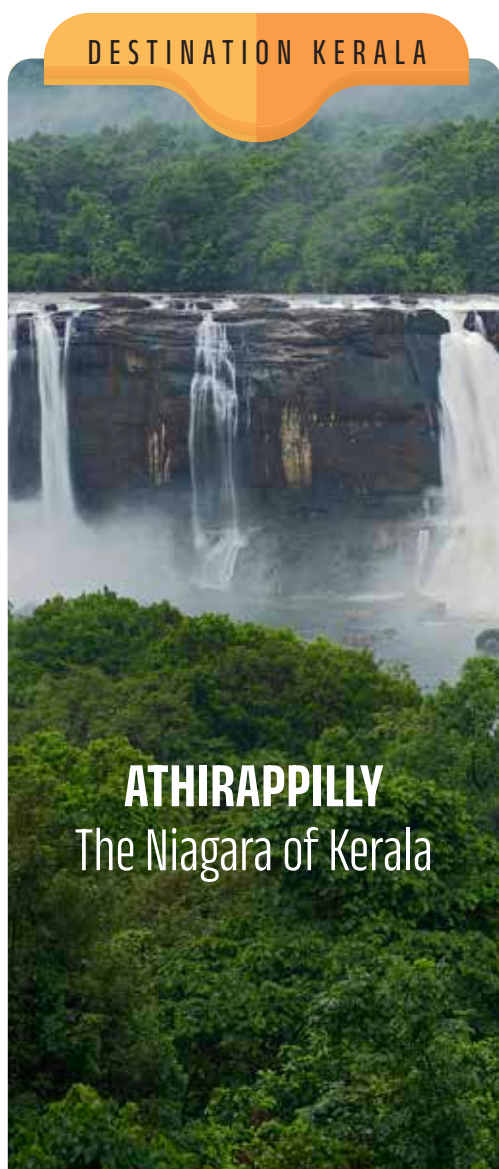


also promotes sustainable living practices and motivates active participation in environmental conservation. Additionally, it provides an opportunity to learn about local art forms, languages, and culinary traditions. This not only contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage but also supports the economic development of local communities.

### Is a safety audit conducted for protection of tourists?

As part of ensuring visitor safety, security

assessment has been carried out through the National Safety Council at 27 eco-tourism centers that are heavily visited. For other eco-tourism centers, divisional forest officers and wildlife wardens have been directed to conduct safety evaluations. Although precautionary measures are in place to ensure smooth and accident-free operations at eco-tourism centers, in the event of any accidents, visitors are eligible for compensation. The Forest Department has partnered with United India Insurance Company to provide accident insurance. ●



## ATHIRAPPILLY

### The Niagara of Kerala

Often referred to as the "Niagara of Kerala", the Athirappilly Waterfalls is located 30 kilometers east of Chalakudy. This stunning destination is one of the most visited and visually captivating sites in the state.

Rising 80 feet above the ground, the Athirappilly Waterfalls dazzles with its majestic flow, whether it is crashing with force during monsoon or gently cascading during summer. The fusion of nature's power and beauty makes this waterfall a remarkable sight to witness up close.

The Forest Department offers trekking and sightseeing packages, allowing visitors to explore the area more deeply.

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# Green Calendar 2025

## January

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12	13	14	15	16	17	18
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## June

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## September

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## October

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## November

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## April

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## August

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## December

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29	28	29	30	31		

### January - 2025

05.01.2025 - National Bird Day

### February - 2025

02.02.2025 - World Wetland Day

15.02.2025 - World Pangolin Day

### March - 2025

03.03.2025 - World Wildlife Day

18.03.2025 - World Recycling Day

20.03.2025 - World Sparrow / World Frog Day

21.03.2025 - World Forestry Day & World Wood Day

### April - 2025

03.04.2025 - World Aquatic Animal Day

17.04.2025 - Bat Appreciation Day

22.04.2025 - World Earth Day

### May - 2025

10.05.2025 - World Migratory Bird Day (2nd Saturday)

16.05.2025 - Endangered Species Day (3rd Friday)

22.05.2025 - International Day for Biological Diversity Day

23.05.2025 - World Turtle Day

### June - 2025

05.06.2025 - World Environment Day

08.06.2025 - World Ocean Day

16.06.2025 - World Sea Turtle Day

17.06.2025 - World Combat Day to Desertification and Drought

22.06.2025 - World Rainforest Day

### July - 2025

01.07.2025 to 07.07.2025 - Vanamaholsavam

14.07.2025 - Shark Awareness Day

16.07.2025 - World Snake Day

26.07.2025 - International Day for the Conservation of Mangroves

28.07.2025 - World Nature Conservation Day

29.07.2025 - International Tiger Day

31.07.2025 - World Ranger Day

### August - 2025

12.08.2025 - World Elephant Day

14.08.2025 - World Lizard Day

30.08.2025 - International Whale Shark Day

### September - 2025

06.09.2025 - International Vulture Awareness Day (1st Saturday)

16.09.2025 - International Day for the preservation of Ozone Layer Day

18.09.2025 - World Bamboo Day

28.09.2025 - World River Day (4th Sunday)

### October - 2025

02.10.2025 to 08.10.2025 - Wildlife Week Celebrations

04.10.2025 - World Animal Welfare Day

11.10.2025 - World Migratory Bird Day (2nd Saturday)

13.10.2025 - International Day for Natural Disaster Reduction

### November - 2025

12.11.2025 - National Bird Watching day

### December - 2025

11.12.2025 - International Mountain Day

14.12.2025 - International Monkey Day



**Kerala Forest Department**  
Our Earth Our Future

# KERALA'S TIMELESS FOREST WEALTH: A Retrospective



**Dr. J.G. Ray**

(Retired professor from the School of Biosciences at Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam.)

*A Land of Verdant Splendor  
Wherever you turn your gaze,  
There stand trees in full bloom,  
And when a little breeze passes by,  
A gentle shower of flowers follows!*

These nostalgic lines by evergreen poet Changampuzha Krishna Pillai from his romantic poem Ramanan, beautifully capture the vivid splendor of Kerala's forests. No matter where a Malayali is in the world, these words evoke an unbreakable bond with the homeland. Kerala's lush green landscape

is a testament to its breathtaking beauty, often earning it the title of 'God's Own Country.' Travelers and nature lovers have long admired its mesmerizing greenery, which has existed for millennia. But how far back does Kerala's rich forest heritage go? Can we trace the botanical history of this land to a time beyond recorded human existence?

## Tracing Kerala's Botanical Past

Understanding history is essential for preserving and managing natural resources effectively. Just as history allows us to

comprehend the past, it also guides us in making informed choices for the future. One of the key scientific fields that help uncover ancient plant life is Paleo palynology—the study of fossilized pollen grains. When plants bloom, they release vast amounts of pollen, which, due to its resilient nature, can survive in soil layers for thousands of years. Like fingerprints, pollen grains carry distinctive biological markers that enable scientists to identify their parent plants. By analyzing these ancient pollen deposits, we can reconstruct past ecosystems and gain



Travellers and nature lovers have long admired Kerala's mesmerizing greenery, which has existed for millennia.

insights into primeval forests.

My journey into Kerala's prehistoric botanical past was during an unexpected discovery in Changanassery, when a research team—of which I was a part—unearthed something remarkable. During the excavation of a well, deep layers of black clay were found beneath granite boulders. Unlike ordinary clay deposits, these layers raised intriguing questions—why were they buried under solid rock? What secrets did they hold? Driven by curiosity, we collected samples and sent them to the Indian Institute of Paleontology,

where renowned palynologist Dr. Anjum Farooqi assisted in further analysis.

### Uncovering an 80,000-Year-Old Secret

Initial analysis of the clay, retrieved from approximately 25 feet below the surface, revealed an astonishing find: the material was nearly 80,000 years old. It contained remnants of an ancient volcanic eruption, brimming with organic compounds and acidic residues. The dating of the clay linked it to the "Toba" supervolcanic eruption that occurred nearly 100,000 years ago in

## DESTINATION KERALA



### KOTTUR Get Closer to Elephants

Nestled at the foot of the Western Ghats in the valley of Agasthyakoodam, Kottur is a popular destination for nature enthusiasts. Visitors can access the forest through the Kottur Checkpost, which is 1.5 kilometers from the entrance. From here, one can view landmarks such as Thottumpara, Kathirumudi, Agasthyakoodam, and Pandipath. The northern part of the area offers a stunning view of Ponmudi Hills. While trekking towards the Watch Tower, one can often spot wild elephants in their natural habitat.

Kottur is home to the largest elephant rehabilitation center in Asia, providing an extraordinary opportunity to observe these magnificent creatures, especially during their bathing or feeding times. The Forest Department offers various facilities, including boat safaris, pedal boating, accommodation, and trekking packages, ensuring a fulfilling wildlife experience for all visitors.

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present-day Indonesia. This eruption had a massive impact on Earth's climate, enveloping the atmosphere in volcanic ash and triggering a prolonged Ice Age. Geological studies had not previously detected traces of Toba's ash deposits along India's western coastline. This was the first time they were identified in Kerala. The volcanic ashes had buried Kerala's tropical forests, preserving a snapshot of the environment during that era. The clay samples retrieved from the well contained charred wood fragments, seeds, unburnt plant fibers, and an extensive collection of fossilized pollen grains. They also contained Gum and Resins, which shows that Resinous trees were abundant in Kerala.

A detailed study of pollen grains has shed light on the ancient plant life along Kerala's coastline. The findings reveal that nearly 30 km inland, in areas like Changanassery, dense mangrove forests once thrived. The study identified several species of mangroves,





Looking back at Kerala's timeless forest heritage, it's clear that the region's natural wealth is both ancient and vital.



including *Avicennia*, *Aegiceras*, *Aegialitis*, *Excoecaria*, and *Heritiera*. Additionally, traces of marine zooplankton confirmed the presence of seawater influence in the region.

The analysis also uncovered pollen from various inland forest trees such as *Gluta travancorica*, *Mangifera indica*, *Jaberna Montana*, *Annona*, *Canarium strictum*, *Garcinia* and *parviflora*. These species, still found in Kerala's forests today, indicate the presence of extensive tropical evergreen forests in the past.

Additionally, pollen from grasses, aquatic plants, and various non-flowering vegetation spores were identified, suggesting a rich and diverse ecosystem. The study concludes that while Kerala's interior regions were once dominated by tropical evergreen forests, the coastal areas, extending as far inland as Changanassery, were covered by vast

mangrove forests—far more widespread than they are today.

### Preserving a Natural Legacy

Looking back at Kerala's timeless forest heritage, it's clear that the region's natural wealth is both ancient and vital. This retrospective glance at Kerala's timeless forest heritage underscores the urgent need for conservation. Long before human settlements, Kerala was home to an incredibly rich ecosystem that nurtured civilizations, provided medicinal plants, and supported the agricultural prosperity of the region. Today, as we face unprecedented environmental challenges, preserving Kerala's forests has never been more crucial. Just as our poet envisioned a land brimming with towering trees and blossoming flowers, we must come together to safeguard this invaluable green legacy for future generations. ●

# Harnessing AI for Real-Time Forest Conservation



**Dr. Ajith Prabhu**

(Former Chief Scientist at the Kerala State Council for Science, Technology and Environment and Principal at St. Thomas Engineering College, Chengannur)

**F**orests play a crucial role in ecological balance and biodiversity preservation, providing livelihoods for countless people. Yet, sadly, our ecosystem is facing an unprecedented existential threat. Deforestation is rapidly expanding, and climate change, coupled with irresponsible human intervention, has led to forests fighting for survival. To address this, three approaches are needed: monitoring, defending, and

preserving forest-environmental systems. A modern solution to this challenge is Artificial Intelligence (AI).

## Deforestation Crisis

Forests cover about 31 per cent of the Earth's land area, roughly 400 million hectares. In simpler terms, each person on Earth has access to approximately 0.52 hectares of forest. Over half of the world's forests (54%)

are concentrated in just five countries: Russia, Brazil, Canada, the United States, and China.

The impending shortage of productive land, unchecked land use for various purposes, and climate change are going to be significant threats to forests in the coming days. A recent study revealed that Amazon rainforest lost a staggering 88 million hectares in four decades, a grim reminder of how mining and agricultural expansion are devastating the



Recent advances in data science and digital satellite technology have enhanced the potential of AI applications in the fields of forest and wildlife conservation.

environment.

According to an international study, global forest loss was estimated at 4.7 million hectares annually between 2010 and 2020. The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimate that every year, ten million hectares of forest are lost to deforestation. This loss equals a landmass twice the size of the United States.

As per the Forest Survey of India report, only 29.66 per cent of the land in Kerala is covered by forests.

### Human Intelligence and Artificial Intelligence

When human capacity is exceeded, we often turn to technology for solutions. Just as machinery and automation were developed to replace physical labor, Artificial Intelligence (AI) now promises to handle complex tasks that go beyond human cognitive capabilities. In the coming years, this technology will profoundly impact various sectors, including health, education, industry, retail, and banking. AI is already being applied across several fields, showing immense potential. The global AI market is expected to reach 300 billion dollars by 2025, growing at an annual rate of 36 per cent.

### AI in Forest Conservation

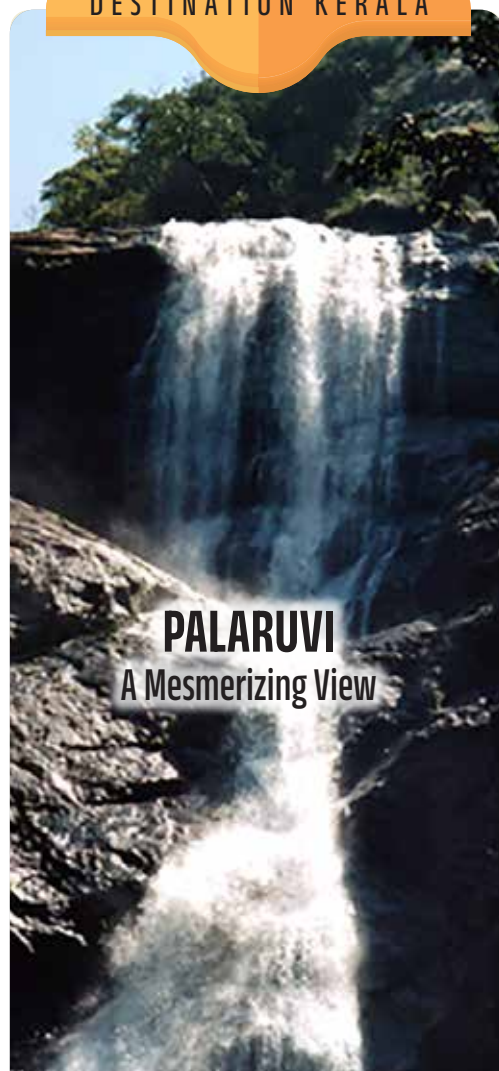
The integration of modern technology in forest management has revolutionized the way forest resources are monitored, protected, and utilized. Recent advances in data science and digital satellite technology have enhanced the potential of AI applications in the fields of forest and wildlife conservation.

These tools have made significant strides in forest mapping, monitoring, asset data collection, and related activities. Drones, for instance, are playing an increasingly vital role in mapping, monitoring, replanting, and logging operations, providing real-time surveillance of deforestation efforts.

AI is also being used to improve weather forecasting, assess fire risks, and create smart forest management systems. It enables evaluation of ecosystems, impacts of climate change, and carbon sequestration in forests, providing the tools for comprehensive environmental impact studies. Moreover, AI has the capability to analyze vast data, making predictions faster than traditional supercomputers.

Illegal logging, agricultural expansion, and mining activities are the primary drivers of deforestation. By processing satellite data and using AI, we can precisely identify deforested areas, monitor the spread of agricultural land, and detect unlawful logging. Real-time monitoring systems powered by AI help to prevent irreversible environmental damage and enable timely scientific interventions to stop destructive practices.

AI's ability to predict and control forest fires has opened up new possibilities in disaster management. Wildfires, increasing due to climate change, can now be even predicted and detected at the earliest. AI can recommend appropriate preventive measures and, in some cases, initiate prompt actions to mitigate damage. The technology's predictive capacity allows for better understanding of fire intensity,

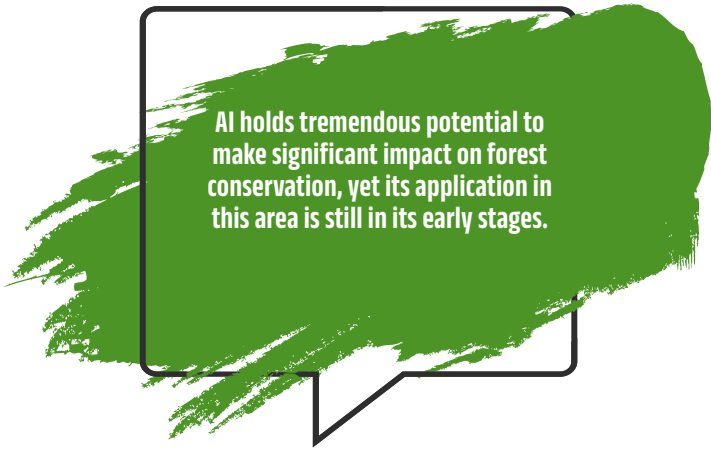


## PALARUVI A Mesmerizing View

Located in the eastern side of Kollam District, nestled in the hills of Edanadu region, Palaruvi Waterfall is one of the most stunning natural sights in Kerala. Standing as the 32nd tallest waterfall in India, Palaruvi cascades down from a height of 300 feet amidst rocky terrain, creating a breathtaking sight, especially during the monsoon season. This captivating waterfall is situated in Aryan kavu, and the journey through the lush tropical forests leading to the falls offers a truly mesmerizing experience for travelers. The lush greenery and the soothing sounds of the waterfall make it a must-visit spot for nature lovers.

The Forest Department provides various travel facilities and trekking packages for visitors to explore the beauty of the area, ensuring a memorable and adventure-filled experience.

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AI holds tremendous potential to make significant impact on forest conservation, yet its application in this area is still in its early stages.



spread, and the impact on ecosystems and human settlements.

### Biodiversity and Wildlife Conservation

The extinction of vertebrates has accelerated at a rate 100 times faster than the last century. To preserve biodiversity, we must implement conservation strategies and assess the health of ecosystems. Understanding the presence, abundance, and distribution of species is essential. While human intelligence can contribute, AI is much more efficient in data collection and analysis. Satellite imaging, drones, and sensor networks allow us to gather and analyze massive datasets at unprecedented speeds and accuracy.

AI's ability to track wildlife populations, monitor habitat quality, and predict biodiversity risks is incredibly valuable. By detecting and studying trends, AI can prevent potential extinction events before they occur.

### Wetland Management

In 2023, the Muskoka Integrated Water Shed Management Project in Central Ontario, Canada, utilized cutting-edge AI technologies like GIS, drone, and machine learning to enhance water resource management and

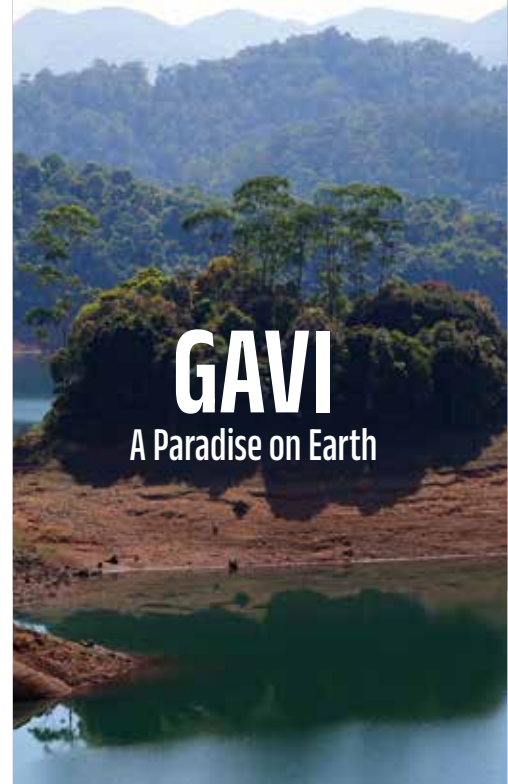
biodiversity conservation. The Muskoka Integrated Water Shed Management Project demonstrates how AI can integrate with environmental conservation efforts.

Machine learning models were employed to predict the potential growth locations of selected species, based on their habitats and natural reproductive characteristics. The integrated use of advanced technologies in watershed management and ecological conservation played a crucial role in providing accurate and comprehensive assessments of nature.

AI holds tremendous potential to make significant impact on forest conservation, yet its application in this area is still in its early stages. Data and AI are powerful tools for halting deforestation, but international collaboration and comprehensive projects are essential for their successful implementation. Interdisciplinary efforts that combine computing, environmental science, and public-private sector cooperation are crucial. Additionally, creating policies that support AI-driven monitoring in forest management and open data sharing will further enhance its role in environmental protection. ●



DESTINATION KERALA



# GAVI

A Paradise on Earth

Nestled amidst the hills, plateaus, meadows, and lush forests, Gavi is a natural wonder crafted by the hands of nature. Located within the Periyar Tiger Reserve, this destination offers an unforgettable experience for nature lovers. The abundant forests, gushing waterfalls, and diverse wildlife add to the charm of Gavi, making it a truly mesmerizing spot. The journey to Gavi itself is an adventure, filled with scenic views of evergreen forests from areas like Mooviyar, Kakki, and Anathodu. The region is home to various wildlife, including the Nilgiri Tahr, majestic lion-tailed macaques, elephants, and wild boars. It also serves as a habitat for various bird species such as the large-billed crow, woodpeckers, and kingfisher.

Upon reaching Gavi, the Kerala Forest Development Corporation's Eco-lodge known as 'Green Mansion' welcomes you. There are also treehouses and tented accommodations for those who prefer a closer connection with nature.

Gavi offers opportunities for trekking, boating, and camping, making it an ideal place for a variety of recreational activities.

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# A Journey Through the Avian Wonderland: THATTEKKAD BIRD SANCTUARY



**Anwita parashar**  
(Nalsar university of law, Shomirpet, Hyderabad)

(The article came top in the Wildlife Week  
Travelogue competition)

**H**idden within Kerala's embrace, where the Periyar River carves its way through lush, dense forests, lies an unspoiled haven for birds and nature lovers alike: the Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary. Known for its rich biodiversity and being home to some of the rarest species of birds, the sanctuary is often referred to as a birdwatcher's paradise. It's a place where the boundary between human and nature blurs, where every step leads deeper into a world of vivid colors, resonant calls, and peaceful solitude. My journey to this incredible sanctuary was more than just a birdwatching experience—it was a deep dive into nature's symphony, a return to the wilderness where life flourishes in harmony.

The road to Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary begins in Kochi, a bustling coastal city about

60 kilometers away. Arriving at Thattekkad felt like stepping into another world. The sanctuary's modest entrance is deceptively unassuming, but the second you walk in, you realize that beyond that simple gateway lies a thriving ecosystem teeming with life. Renowned ornithologist Dr. Salim Ali, who surveyed the region in the 1930s, described Thattekkad as the "richest bird habitat on peninsular India," and it's easy to see why.

The sanctuary boasts more than 300 species of birds, and my first glimpse into this avian wonderland did not disappoint. Standing atop a viewing tower that rose just above the treetops, I was immediately greeted by a kaleidoscope of colors and sounds—birds of all shapes and sizes darting between the branches, each more fascinating than the last. The first bird to catch my eye was

the Malabar Grey Hornbill, its large bill and distinct grey feathers making it easy to spot against the green backdrop. As I marveled at its graceful flight, my guide pointed out the Black-headed Oriole, a vibrant splash of yellow, perched elegantly on a nearby branch. The Oriole's call, a soft yet melodious whistle, was a fitting soundtrack for the beginning of what promised to be an unforgettable journey.

My guide, an experienced local birder with an impressive knowledge of the area, led me down one of the many trails that crisscross the sanctuary. These trails, though narrow, are well-marked and lead deep into the forest, allowing visitors to experience the sanctuary's incredible biodiversity firsthand. As we ventured further into the forest, it became clear that every step brought us



**The sanctuary's richness lies not only in its diversity of bird species but also in the delicate balance of its ecosystems, where every plant, insect, and animal plays a role in sustaining the whole.**

closer to a different world. The forest was alive with movement—leaves rustling under the weight of tiny feet, birds fluttering between the dense canopy, and insects buzzing around the undergrowth. One of the first birds we encountered was the elusive Indian Pitta. Known for its striking rainbow-hued plumage, this small bird with its vivid blue, green, and yellow feathers darted quickly across the forest floor. It was a fleeting but magnificent sight, a reminder of how delicate and fleeting moments in nature can be.

Further along the trail, we spotted the White-bellied Treepie, another bird native to the Western Ghats. One of the most enchanting aspects of Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary is the way in which the forest seems to hum with life. Even when you can't see the birds, their presence is always felt through their calls, some melodic and sweet, others harsh and guttural. This symphony of sounds creates a constant reminder that the forest is alive and thriving. Among the birds, the most mesmerizing calls came from the Malabar Trogon, whose deep, resonant

voice echoed through the trees long before we saw it. When we finally did catch sight of the Trogon, perched quietly on a high branch, its striking red belly and dark black wings made it stand out against the muted greens of the forest. Another bird whose call I came to recognize during my time at Thattekkad was the Crested Serpent Eagle

Thattekkad isn't just about birds; it's about the intricate ecosystem that sustains them. As we continued our trek through the forest, my guide explained how the sanctuary's diverse habitats support an incredible variety of flora and fauna. The wet evergreen forests provide the perfect environment for species that thrive in high humidity, while the patches of scrubland are home to species that prefer drier conditions. We passed several towering teak and mahogany trees, their massive trunks standing as silent sentinels of the forest. Beneath them, the forest floor was a tangle of roots, vines, and fallen leaves, alive with the movement of insects and small animals. We spotted a family of Coppersmith Barbets nesting in the hollow of a teak tree, their tiny heads poking out as they called to each other with their characteristic "tuk-tuk-tuk" sound.

The sanctuary's rivers and streams also play a crucial role in supporting its birdlife. As we crossed a small stream, I spotted a Kingfisher perched on a nearby rock, its sharp eyes scanning the water for fish. Thattekkad's proximity to the Periyar River is one of the factors that make it such a thriving bird habitat. In the late afternoon, we arrived at the riverbank, where the still waters reflected the surrounding forest like a mirror, creating a scene of perfect

tranquility. Sitting by the river, I watched as a group of River Terns flew gracefully over the water, their white bodies and black caps standing out against the shimmering surface. Further downstream, a Great Cormorant was busy diving for fish, its sleek, black form cutting through the water with ease. The sight of these birds in their element was both peaceful and awe-inspiring. The riverbank was also home to several species of waders, including Egrets, Herons, and the occasional Stork-billed Kingfisher, with its oversized bill and striking blue wings.

As the sun began to dip below the horizon, casting a golden glow over the forest, Thattekkad entered a new phase of life. The diurnal birds began to retreat into their nests, while the nocturnal species started to emerge. The air, now cooler and tinged with the scent of damp earth, was filled with the calls of Nightjars and Owls.

Just before we left the sanctuary, we caught a glimpse of a Jungle Owlet perched high in the branches, its wide eyes reflecting the fading light.

My time at Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary was more than just a birdwatching adventure—it was a journey into the heart of nature, a reminder of the beauty and complexity of the natural world. The sanctuary's richness lies not only in its diversity of bird species but also in the delicate balance of its ecosystems, where every plant, insect, and animal plays a role in sustaining the whole. For bird enthusiasts, Thattekkad offers the chance to see rare and endemic species in their natural habitat. But even for those who may not consider themselves avid birdwatchers, the

**Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary isn't just a paradise for birdwatchers; it's also a symbol of successful conservation efforts in India.**

sanctuary is a place of peace and reflection, where the simple act of being surrounded by nature can restore a sense of wonder and connection. As I left the sanctuary, I found myself reflecting on the immense significance of places like Thattekkad. In an era where urban expansion and human interference continue to encroach upon natural habitats, sanctuaries like this serve as crucial refuges for wildlife. They are more than just destinations for tourists—they are bastions of biodiversity, preserving fragile ecosystems that are increasingly under threat. My visit was a profound reminder of the delicate interconnectedness of life and how, even in the most remote corners of the world, everything is intertwined. Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary isn't just a paradise for birdwatchers; it's also a symbol of successful conservation efforts in India. The sanctuary, declared in 1983, has long been a model for how local communities can work together to preserve their natural heritage. Much of the credit for the sanctuary's establishment goes to Dr. Salim Ali, whose work laid the foundation for its recognition as one of India's richest bird habitats. His efforts not only drew attention to the incredible avian diversity of Thattekkad but also highlighted the importance of protecting such areas from deforestation and habitat destruction.

As I walked through Thattekkad, I couldn't help but think about the delicate balance between preserving such sanctuaries and opening them up to ecotourism. On one hand, sanctuaries like Thattekkad provide an invaluable opportunity for people to connect with nature and experience the beauty of

the natural world. On the other hand, there's always the risk that increased human activity could disturb the very ecosystems we seek to protect. Thattekkad, thankfully, seems to have struck a careful balance. It's a model of responsible ecotourism, where the focus is on education and preservation rather than profit. However, the growing popularity of birdwatching and nature tourism does present challenges. In our conversation, the warden mentioned that the sanctuary is considering ways to manage an expected increase in visitors in the coming years.

Looking back, my trip to Thattekkad was more than just a journey into a beautiful landscape—it was also a personal journey of self-discovery. There's something about being in the presence of such incredible natural beauty that invites introspection. As I spent hours quietly observing the birds, my mind wandered to thoughts of life, connection, and the passage of time. The simple act of birdwatching, of patiently waiting for something as fleeting as the flutter of wings or the flash of a bright feather, taught me the value of stillness and observation—skills that are so often lost in the fast-paced world we inhabit. The forest, with its endless cycles of life and renewal, reminded me of the transient nature of existence. The birds I saw that day—some rare, others common—were living their lives in harmony with the environment, oblivious to the concerns of the human world. Their only focus was survival, driven by instinct and the rhythms of nature. In a way, the birds represented a kind of freedom that we, as humans, often forget exists—a freedom



to live simply, to be present in the moment, and to move with the flow of life. As the sun set over Thattekkad and the last birds of the day retreated into the forest, I felt a deep sense of gratitude for the experience. In our modern lives, we rarely get the chance to disconnect from the noise and chaos of daily existence. But in Thattekkad, I found a refuge—a place where the only sounds were the calls of birds and the rustling of leaves in the wind. It was a reminder of the power of nature to heal, inspire, and renew. Leaving Thattekkad was bittersweet. I had spent only a few days in the sanctuary,



but the experience felt much deeper, as if time had stretched to accommodate all the beauty and wonder I had witnessed. The birds I had seen, the people I had met, and the lessons I had learned would stay with me long after I left. Driving away from the sanctuary, I couldn't help but feel a pang of longing to stay just a little longer. But as the forest slowly receded in the rearview mirror, I realized that Thattekkad wasn't just a place to visit—it was a place to return to, again and again. It's the kind of place that calls you back, not just because of its beauty, but because of the

peace and perspective it offers. In the end, Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary is much more than a collection of trails and trees, birds, and rivers. It's a reminder of the delicate balance that exists between nature and humanity, between the past and the present, and between survival and serenity. It's a place where time slows down, where the world fades away, and where the only thing that matters is the present moment. For anyone seeking a deeper connection to the natural world—or to themselves—that journey into the heart of Thattekkad will be one they never forget. ●

## ADAVI: Splashing the waters in Coracle Boat



Amidst lush green landscapes, Adavi offers an unforgettable experience for all adventure seekers and nature enthusiasts. Located in Pathanamthitta, Adavi is the highlight of eco-tourism in the region. It provides an ideal escape into nature, blending adventure and tranquility perfectly. One of the key attractions at Adavi is the Coracle Boat rising on the clear waters of Kallar River. Travelers can enjoy breathtaking views, stay in tree houses nestled in the forest, and embark on exhilarating treks through the wilderness. The Coracle Boats, uniquely crafted from locally available materials like bamboo and reeds, provide an eco-friendly way to experience the beauty of the river.

The area is known for its rich greenery, vibrant rivers, and fresh air, creating an atmosphere of peace and serenity. It offers a perfect respite from the hustle and bustle of urban life, allowing visitors to recharge and reconnect with nature.

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# Blue Wings of Madayipara



**Ammu Chungathu**

(Botany teacher at the Central School,  
Ezhimala Naval Academy)

It was a rainy, breezy evening when my friend Shaini and I went to Madayipara. Our aim was to witness the lavender spring blooming across the green rocks. The trip was not in vain; we found clusters of delicate blue wing flowers in full bloom, creating a floral paradise unlike any other.

Occasionally, we spotted small white buds, resembling stars. This plant belongs to the carnivorous species within the *Utricularia reticulata* family. It is commonly seen in India and Sri Lanka, growing as an annual plant in damp, rocky areas. The plant is mentioned in *Hortus Malabaricus* by Hendrik van Reede.

The fascinating aspect of this plant lies in its ability to trap tiny creatures. The bladderwort's trap-shaped sacs, often compared to small pouches, effortlessly ensnare insects (especially rotifers) as they attempt to feast on the flower's nectar. These tiny creatures provide essential nutrients to the plant, which compensates for the nitrogen scarcity in the rocky soil.

The blue wing flower doesn't follow the typical growth pattern of most

plants. Lacking leaves, stems, or roots, it survives using a stalk-like stolon that floats in the air. This unusual structure is perfectly adapted to its environment, and over time, the trap sacs have evolved to better serve their purpose.

The flower plays an important role in controlling mosquito-borne diseases. They also help maintain the ecological balance of the environment, especially in food webs. With a floral structure as complex as an orchid, the flowers have purple flowers that measure between 1/4 to 2 inches in size. The stamen and stigma are hidden beneath the petals, and the sepals are light yellow in color. The plant relies on air, water, and animals for pollination.

The blue wing flowers generally bloom around the time of Onam, just when the monsoon recedes. During this season, the flowers are used to honor the local deity of Madayipara and for traditional Onam celebrations. As the golden hue of dusk began to fade, Shaini and I prepared to leave, carrying the warmth of the evening and a few photographs, along with the sweet fragrance of the blue wing flowers, back to the Seven Hills. ●





## DO YOU KNOW !!!

1. Which tiger sanctuary in Kerala is celebrating its 75th anniversary in 2025?
2. Which country hosted the 29th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29)?
3. *Uniyala multibracteata* (locally known as *Kattupoovamkurunnila*) was discovered after 140 years in a prominent tourist destination in Kottayam district. Which place is it?
4. What is the Marine species with the highest rate of extinction in the world?
5. Elephants use sound waves to communicate with each other, as discovered by scientists at the University of Colorado. In which country's forests was this study conducted?
6. The previously considered single species of the Indian Cobra has now been reclassified into four different species. Which is the species found in the Western Ghats?
7. What is the smallest protected forest area in Kerala?
8. What is the only community reserve in Kerala?
9. Which wild animal has been selected as the symbol for the Shola National Park?
10. What is the theme for World Wetlands Day 2025?



Prepared by **Reni R Pillai**, Deputy Director, Wildlife Education

- ANSWERS**
1. Periyar Tiger Reserve/National Park (Formed as a wildlife sanctuary in 1950 and declared a tiger sanctuary in 1978)
  2. Azerbaijan (Baku)
  3. Vagamon
  4. Vaquita (Estimated to have fewer than twenty individuals left)
  5. Kenya
  6. *Ophiophagus kaalinga* (King Cobra)
  7. Pambadum Shola National Park
  8. Kadalundi Vallikkunnu Community Reserve
  9. Galaxy Frog (*Melanobatrachus indicus*) (Endangered & Endemic)
  10. Protecting Wetlands for Our Common Future



**In an effort to foster a greater sense of responsibility and awareness, and encouraging young voices to engage with conservation and wildlife protection, articles are invited from college and school students and the best submissions will be rewarded.**

Topic of the Month:

**Your experience of Visiting an Eco Tourism Spot**

The articles should be sent to  
**Director,**  
**Forestry Information Bureau,**  
**Vazhuthacadu, Thycaud**  
**Thiruvananthapuram - 695014**  
**Email; forestmediacell@gmail.com**

# KAVARAKUNNU

## A Hidden Gem in the Forest



**C.R. Ravi**

(Freelance Writer and Historical Researcher)

**O**ur forests hold remnants of countless historical structures, some of which still remain undiscovered. Unearthing these relics is no easy task, especially when no records exist to document their history. Many of the building remains we encounter deep in the woods belong to the British colonial period, particularly the bungalows constructed during that era. These structures were built to offer shelter and protection from wild animals, yet none of them come with clear documentation about their

construction. Many such buildings, preserved by the Kerala Forest and Wildlife Department, retain their grandeur and are often restored to maintain their historical value.

One of the recent restorations is the Patiyyar bungalow in Shiruvani, and the Kavarakunnu Bungalow in Dhoni, Palakkad.

### The Scenic Beauty of Dhoni

Located just 12 kilometers from Palakkad town, Dhoni lies nestled in the Malampuzha mountain range in the northern part of the

Akkathethra and Puthuppariyaram Panchayats. The area is known for its natural beauty, with rich wildlife, including elephants, tigers, leopards, monkeys, and even black panther. The Kerala Forest and Wildlife Department has meticulously preserved this area, making it a haven for adventurers, especially for activities like rock climbing.

Dhoni is located in the Olavakode range under the Palakkad Forest Division. This 34-square-kilometer forest area also hosts an eco-tourism center. To access the forest



### The British Colonial Charm

It is likely that the Palamala bungalow and the Olavakode structure were also completed during the same period as Kavarakunnu. The Palamala bungalow, however, has deteriorated beyond repair.

A typical example of British colonial architecture, the walls of Kavarakunnu bungalow are built from black stone, and the roof is a sturdy structure supported by 14 teak pillars. The bungalow spans an area of 870 square meters, with the three sides of the structure stretching across a 10-foot-wide verandah. The upper walls of the bungalow feature intricate stonework. The renovation of these walls has been a challenging process, but it has retained its historic charm.

It is believed that the British, centuries ago, built the Kavarakunnu bungalow in a slightly elevated area to take advantage of

persons, which includes activities like trekking to Pandan Rock, visiting the Dhoni Waterfalls, and bird watching. Meals are also provided. From here, guests can enjoy views of the Western Ghats and the surrounding forest, and a trek up the hills offers a panoramic view of the Malampuzha Garden below. The chilly weather adds an extra touch of allure to Kavarakunnu .

The Kerala Forest Department, with the oversight of the Mullakkara Tribal Forest Conservation Committee, runs the Kavarakunnu bungalow as part of its eco-tourism initiative.

### Dhoni Waterfalls and Wildlife

Just about one and a half kilometers north of Kavarakunnu lies the Dhoni Waterfalls, a protected area. Visitors are allowed entry only after passing through designated safety barriers. The waterfall is home to a unique species of fish known as Kalleri. The region also hosts plantations of teak

for trekking, visitors must enter through the Eco-tourism Center in Sappal Valley, where a guide is available to assist.

A four-kilometer trek from Sappal Valley will lead you to the Kavarkunnu bungalow, which can only be accessed by the Forest Department's vehicle. It is believed that the British built the Kavarkunnu bungalow between 1921 and 1925. The structure faces north and has a building attached on the east side, which was once used to house horses (though now in ruins). The bungalow sits within a vast, beautifully landscaped compound, now secured with a solar-powered fence to protect it from wildlife. Water is brought from the nearby Naykkan Kettu mountain, about two kilometers away, to supply the bungalow. For guests, a guide and a cook are always present to ensure a comfortable stay.



the favorable air circulation and breathtaking views. The mild, cool climate and scenic beauty of the surrounding forest likely inspired its construction.

For a one-day stay at the Kavarakunnu bungalow, the cost is Rs 7,000 INR for two

and Mahogany trees.

No doubt, Kavarakunnu remains one of the best places to enjoy the natural beauty of the forest. Its picturesque setting and historical significance make it a true destination for nature lovers and history enthusiasts alike. ●



Minister for Forests and Wildlife A. K. Saseendran inaugurating peruvannamuzhi Forest ladies barrac



## Mission Fencing - 2024

As part of efforts to reduce human-wildlife conflict, an intensive program was conducted in November-December 2024 to maximize the functionality of solar-powered fences installed to prevent wildlife from entering human settlements. Solar-powered fences are considered one of the most cost-effective solutions for mitigating human-wildlife conflicts. The initiative, named "Mission Fencing 2024," was successfully completed in most divisions with public participation.

Under the leadership of field officers, a detailed inspection of the solar panels was conducted to assess their status. A report was prepared outlining the current conditions, and the necessary tools, materials, and funds required to restore any damaged fences. Based on the findings, a comprehensive plan was prepared.

In the second phase, repairs to the damaged solar fences were carried out with the involvement of the public. These repairs were done with the participation of local communities, such as Panchayat workers and awareness committees, ensuring that the fences became operational again. To ensure the continued maintenance of these fences, committees comprising local residents and representatives of local governments were formed, with awareness committees taking the lead in the ongoing management and supervision.



## Revamped Forest Central Library

The revamped Forest Central Library, located at the Forest Headquarters in Thiruvananthapuram, officially opened its doors to the public, offering a modernized collection of books. On December 18, Minister for Forest and Wildlife A. K. Saseendran inaugurated the revamped library, which houses a total of 27,584 books, including rare and ancient titles.

Some of the notable works in the collection include the Travancore State Manual, Proceedings of the Travancore Sreemoolam Assembly, Proceedings of the Travancore Legislative Council, administrative reports, and regulations and proclamations of Travancore.

Books required for civil service exam preparation, as well as research materials,

are available at the library. In addition, the general public can also refer to these books for various research needs.

The Forest Central Library has an extensive collection of administrative reports from the Travancore-Kochi-Malabar region dating back to 1860. Among the rare treasures in the library's collection are working plans of each forest division, which document the activities during specific periods. These, along with many other rare texts, form an important part of the library's heritage collection.

Among the historical resources, the Forest Manual by L.A. Krishna Iyer, published in 1947 by the Forest Department, is also available for reference.

The Land Revenue Manual, which holds

close ties with the historical land ownership of the forest land, is a crucial part of the library's collection. The library also holds various volumes across different periods, including related works by Dr. S. Padmanabha Iyer, and the 1894 Land Acquisition Act and Forest laws of Kerala.

Additionally, the library offers management plans related to Kerala's wildlife sanctuaries, national parks, and Project Tiger areas, documenting their evolution from inception.

The library also stores rare works by renowned forest experts such as R S Troup, Brandis, and others who were instrumental in the development of forest conservation, alongside contemporary works on forest, wildlife, and environmental sciences published in recent times.

The Forest Central Library is also home to several invaluable publications, particularly the Indian Forester journal, which began publication in Dehradun in 1875. The library holds copies of this journal from its early years, along with other old periodicals such as Indian Engineering, Forest Research Bulletin, Bombay Natural History Journal, Travancore Law Reports, keralaranyam, Vanarasmii, and Aranyam.


This treasure trove of resources makes the Forest Central Library an invaluable asset for forestry research, historical documentation, and environmental studies in the state.



Officials from New Zealand under New Zealand Forest Director Sam Keenan having discussions with the officials of the Kerala Forest Department. The delegation was here to study about the conservation and preservation of forests in the state.

# New Applications to Augment Efficiency

To enhance accessibility and efficiency in public services, the Kerala Forest Department has launched a redesigned website along with eight digital applications. Minister for Forests and Wildlife, A K. Saseendran inaugurated these e-governance initiatives on December 18, 2024. The newly launched applications cater to various forestry-related services: Four of these software solutions were developed as part of the Forest-PLUS Program, a joint initiative by the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) and USAID.



**Timber** – For granting permits related to tree felling.

- Simplifies and ensures transparency in the process for landowners and farmers to cut timber from private land.
- Speeds up verification process regarding the source of timber.
- Applications can be submitted via smartphones or Akshaya service centers.
- Allows tracking of application status and downloading of permissions.




**Wild Watch** – For reporting human-wildlife conflicts.

- A dedicated system to report wildlife sightings in human-inhabited areas in real time. Alerts the nearest Forest Division Emergency Operation Center (FDEOC) and provides public safety warnings.
- Integrated alert mechanism developed using GIS technology.
- Facilitates data management and analysis.
- Offers dynamic dashboards and maps of conflict-affected areas.




**Fire Watch:** Web Portal for Forest Fire Management

- A platform for reporting forest fires, collecting related data, and assisting in fire management planning.
- Supports fire management planning from block level to state level.
- Helps in preparing fire plans before each fire season and planning necessary actions during the season.
- Identifies fire-prone areas and ensures rapid response mechanisms.




**WildNet** – For preparing management plans for protected areas.

- A platform for preparing management plans and evaluating activities in protected areas.
- Collects field data and uses it to develop precise management strategies.



**Nature Stay:** Online Portal for Nature Study Camps

- An online platform to apply for nature study camps in forest areas.
- Designed for students, NGOs, journalists, and local government representatives to raise awareness about ecosystems and biodiversity conservation.
- Enables applicants to track application status through the portal.
- Allows downloading of permissions without visiting forest offices.
- Integrated with the e-Treasury system for seamless payments.



**Eco Frame:** Online Portal for Filming & Photography in Forest Area

- An online portal to apply for filming and photography permissions in forest areas.
- Ensures a smooth and transparent process for submitting applications and securing permissions online.
- Applicants can track their application progress and download approvals conveniently.
- Payments can be made securely and seamlessly through Kerala Government's e-Treasury system.



Plastic waste being collected as part of the Narikunni NSS camp, jointly organised by the Baithul Izza Arts and Science College and Thamarasery Range Kanaladu section.

A free eye check-up camp was organized on December 29, 2024 under the leadership of the Chembakandam Bharatamala Vana Samrakshana Samithi and Chalakudy Forest Development Agency, in collaboration with Ahalia Foundation Eye Hospital.



The Forest Department organized a special awareness program for students in Kodanchery to educate them about forest conservation and wildlife protection. Forest Officer P. Vijayan and Beat Forest Officers from Edathara Section Edison E, Ajeesh K T and watcher Sreekanth took part.



**Information Center** The hub for all details about eco-tourism activities in Shendurney Wildlife Sanctuary.



**Paradise Home - A Retreat in the Wild** Nestled in the evergreen forests of Rockwood, this retreat is often referred to as a 'paradise in the wilderness.'



**A Natural Marvel - The Meristic Swamp**



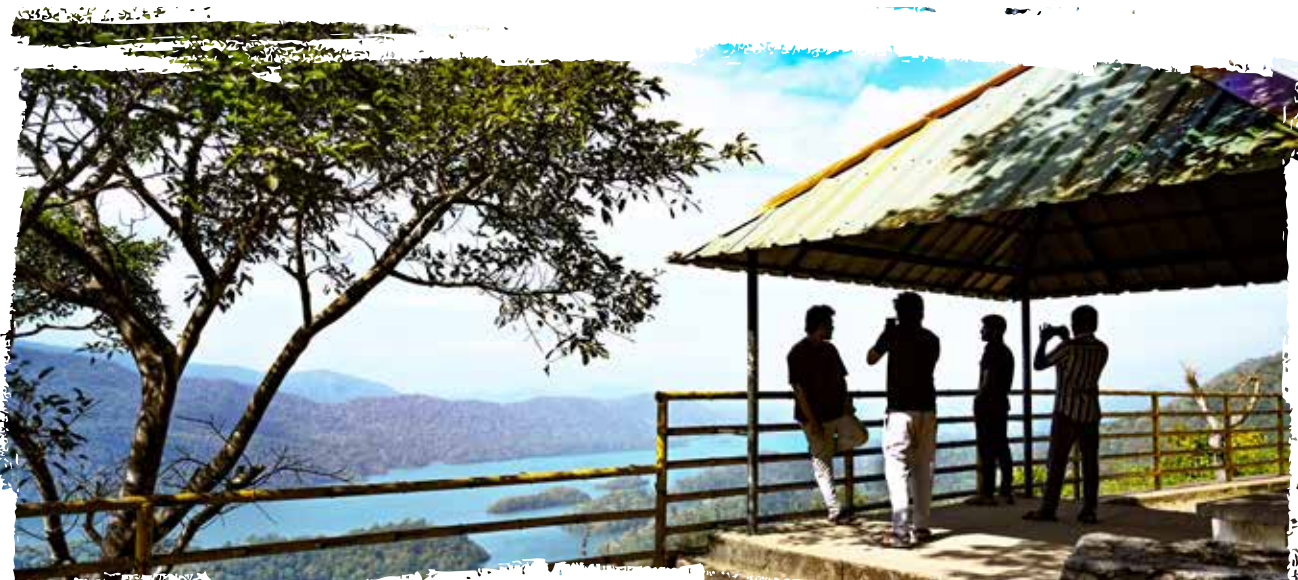
**Unique and Unparalleled - The Chenkurinji Trees**  
These rare trees are exclusive to Shendurney and the name of the sanctuary gets its name from this tree.





**Kuttavanchi Safari** (coracle boat riding)

**The Rare Beauty of Kalamkunn** A breathtaking landscape where soil, water, sky, and lush greenery blend harmoniously. The Jungle Retreat accommodation can be seen in the inset.



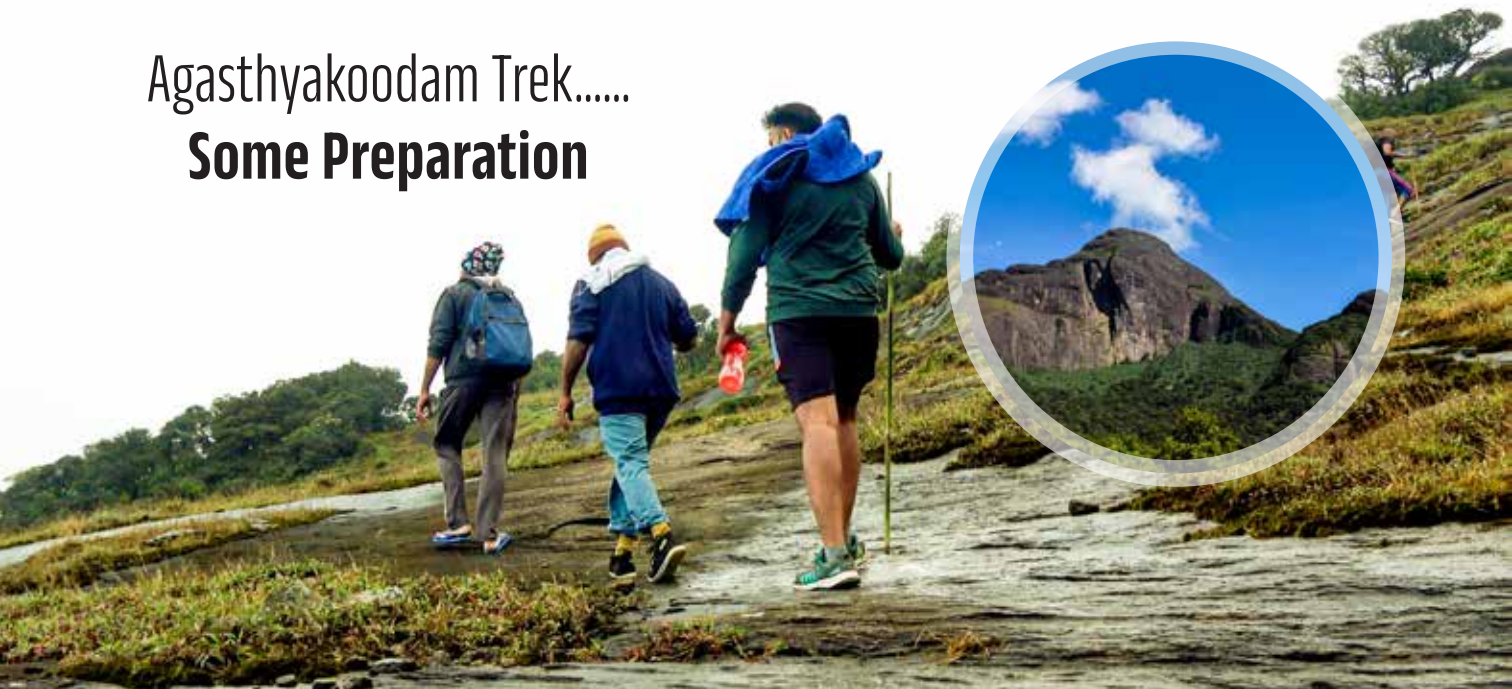
**View Tower - A Scenic Marvel** Enjoy the mesmerizing view of tiny, green islands in the Parappan Reservoir. One of the sanctuary's biggest attractions.



**The Pristine Waters of Shendurney Reservoir** A gateway to the magnificent Thunder Rock, known for its natural beauty. (Inset: Nature's Bounty building)

# Agasthyakoodam Trek.....

## Some Preparation



The Agasthyakoodam trek is one of the most sought-after treks in Kerala. The trekking season is from January 20 to February 22. Below are some important tips and preparations for the journey:

### Physical Fitness

Although the trek is not extremely difficult, it requires a decent level of physical fitness. Start walking regularly at least a month before the trek. Training five days a week with 5 km walks will help build stamina.

### Water and Hydration

There are several streams and rivulets throughout the trek. Carrying a water bottle should suffice, as you don't need to carry much water. However, after crossing the Pongalappara, there will be no water supply for the next three kilometers until you reach the top. Water conservation is necessary here.

### Proper Footwear

Good trekking shoes are essential for a comfortable trek. Avoid new or unused shoes. Choose shoes with ankle support for optimal comfort and safety during the trek.

### Luggage

Minimize your luggage as carrying excess clothing can make the trek uncomfortable.

### Snacks and Energy

Food arrangements are made at the base camp (Athirumala). However, it is wise to carry dates, bananas, nuts, trail mix, and chocolates for an energy boost during the trek.

### Identification Cards

Ensure you carry valid identification cards.

### Medications

If you are on any regular medication, make sure to carry them along and not forget them.

### Torch

A small torch is recommended for visibility, especially in the early morning or evening hours.

### Jacket

While the region isn't extremely cold, there could be strong winds. A light jacket can be very helpful during such conditions.

### Hat and Sunscreen

Carry a hat to shield your face from the sun. The sun can be harsh, and a good sunscreen lotion can also help protect your skin.

### Lightweight Slippers

The base camp area can have rough ground, and slippers can be useful after completing the trek when you want to rest or move around without your trekking shoes. (This is not applicable for those who are going up barefoot).

### Bed Sheet

If needed, carry your own bed sheet as the base camp provides floor sleeping arrangements, and additional bedding may not always be available.

### Avoid Strong Scents

Avoid using strong-scented soaps or perfumes during the trek. Refrain from using oil while

bathing in the stream near the base camp.

### Clothing

Avoid wearing brightly colored clothes. Camouflage clothing that blends with the forest environment is ideal. Wear comfortable clothing suited for trekking.

### Stay with the Group

Never wander alone. Even if you are passing through a narrow pass, it is advisable to stay with a group.

### Watch Out for Wildlife

The forest path is home to elephants and tigers. Be extremely cautious during your trek. Do not leave the base camp at night, as wild animals like tigers may be present nearby.

### Hydration During the Trek

Drink water regularly to avoid dehydration. Insufficient water intake can lead to muscle cramps, making the trek more difficult.

### Walking Stick or Hiking Poles

Those in need can carry a walking stick or hiking pole from the beginning of the trek. It will help reduce strain on your knees during the descent.

### Leave No Trace

The most important tip is to ensure that no waste is left behind on the trails or in the forest. Avoid bringing plastic food wrappers or other trash into the forest. Keep the wilderness pristine.

Prepared by: **Muhammad Anwar**  
Assistant Conservator of Forests



# KERALA CHIEF MINISTER'S FOREST MEDAL WINNERS

2023, 2024



2023



NIDHIN LAL



MANOJ K



SREEKUMAR P.S.



MUTHUKUMAR K.S.



REJIMON P.R.



PANCHAN N.



RATHEESH KUMAR K.K.



BIJU L.T.



VIDYAKUMARY R.



JOHNSON P.



SREERAJ KRISHNA



PRASEEDA E.P.



AJEESH M.M.



UNNIKRISHNAN V.



DEEPAK K.



RAHUL R.K.



DEEPTHI S.



NIDHIN A.S.



JOJI MON P.R.



GOPI K.



AKHIL SURYADAS A.S.



JAYAN A.K.



SINDHU M.



SEETHA S.



SHANMUGHAN X.

2024



RATHEESAN V.



SANTHOSH G.G.



AJAYAN S.



SHAJI V.K.



JOMON P.



HABBAS V.P.



YASODHA P.C.



ACHUTHAN V.S.



SUNILKUMAR K.J.



ANEESH A.



GIREESH H.



SREEKUMAR S.



SARATH PRASAD S.



BIJU E.K.



RAMJEESH N. RAJAN



SANTHOSH KUMAR B.



SAKKEENA P.P.



VIPINRAJ S.



MANOJKUMAR K.



ASIF S.



SHYNI R.



RAJEECH K.



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