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FKHA Magazine

Volume 02 | Issue 03 | July - August 2025 | ₹100

SWAGAT

OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE FEDERATION OF KERALA HOTELS ASSOCIATION

BI-LINGUAL BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION

FEATURE

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THE CITY OF EARTH

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COVER STORY

THE DUTCH INTERLUDE
FORT KOCHI'S DUTCH LEGACY

EDITORIAL

NAVA KERALAM vs NARCOTICS
KERALA'S FUTURE-DEFINING BATTLE

**FKHA
GETS A NEW
HOME**





SWAG

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OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF THE FEDERATION OF KERALA HOTELS ASSOCIATION

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Editorial

Nava Keralam vs. Narcotics: Kerala's future-defining battle



V. Sunil Kumar
President, FKHA
Editor, Swagat

Kerala is initiating a mass movement against the grave menace of drugs. Excise and police raids, along with daily news reports, reveal that deadly narcotics—from cannabis to synthetic drugs like MDMA—are now easily available in the State. The government and society have been awakened by the alarming rise in crimes—robberies, murders, and violent attacks—committed by drug addicts and the mafia behind the drug trade, leading to chaos, anxiety, and fear in families and communities. Under the leadership of the Chief Minister, extensive campaigns and action plans have been devised to curb this epidemic and free students and youth trapped in addiction. The Police and Excise Departments have already stepped up vigilance. The Chief Minister has called upon local government institutions, school and college authorities, political parties, voluntary organizations, youth associations, resi-

dents' associations, and religious-community organizations to join the fight against this crisis.

Kerala accounted for drugs worth less than ₹100 crore over the past five years, against the total drug value of ₹82,478 crore. It is a fact that Kerala has the lowest drug availability in India and is the State that has caught and punished the most drug syndicates. However, a key factor behind Kerala's current predicament must be highlighted. Since 2015, the Federation of Kerala Hotels Association (FKHA) has repeatedly warned the government that unregulated liquor and drug sales would lead to major social issues. In 2014, the then-UDF government shut 712 bars and 78 FLI outlets. Following this, the production and distribution of illicit liquor and narcotics, including drugs, surged. Additionally, when the legal drinking age was raised to 23, youth shifted from low-potency alcohol to stronger narcotics, including

SAY NO TO DRUGS



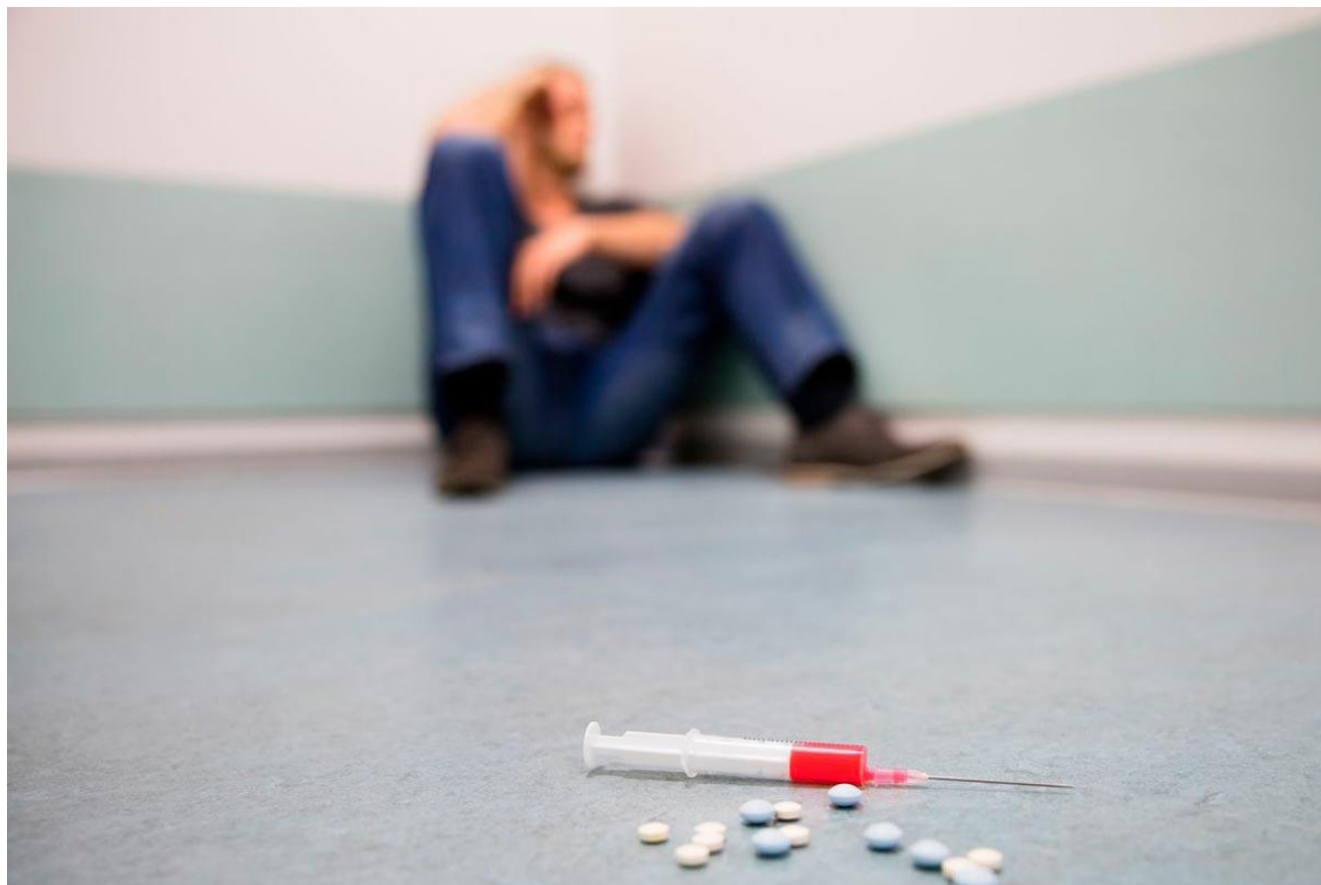
synthetic drugs.

The Excise Minister's recent reply in the State Assembly confirms this trend: In 2011, only 438 NDPS cases were registered. This rose to 1,065 in 2014, 1,430 in 2015, 2,981 in 2016, and 5,945 cases in 2017. Over the past few years, at an average of 6,600 cases being registered annually, the total number of such cases has skyrocketed to 26,000. This unnatural spike is directly linked to the unavailability of legal alcohol. While cannabis consumption has existed in society for long, the shift to deadly narcotics and synthetic drugs among youth is primarily due to the scarcity of low-potency alcohol. Kerala law prohibits sale of alcohol to those under 23, but no such age restriction exists in the case of drugs and none is possible because drug trade happens beyond the confines of law. Today, children as young as 10 are found using narcotics, knowingly or unknowingly. Drug abuse is rampant among youth and stressed professionals. Ninety per cent of drug users are under 23. The Excise Min-

ister recently disclosed that 588 children below 18 have sought treatment at de-addiction centres in the past two months. Over the last four years, 194 NDPS cases were registered against minors alone. In March, 'Operation Clean Slate' was launched, and within the first 10 days, the Excise, Police, and Motor Vehicles Departments conducted a massive State-wide inspection targeting vehicles, schools, colleges, bus stands, railway stations, labour camps, and toddy shops. Narcotics worth ₹2.15 crore, including MDMA, heroin, methamphetamine pills, brown sugar, cannabis-laced chocolates, charas, and hash oil, were seized. 'Operation D-Hunt' that followed has seen over 100 arrests daily. These figures validate our earlier warnings.

The government should have acted earlier to nip the drug mafia in the bud. Still, it is heartening to note that the system has been awakened. While the government's awakening to this crisis is welcome, stronger measures are needed. Police,

**Kerala's
crackdown
on narcotics
must
succeed.**



Kerala's war on drugs is a fight for its future.

Excise, and all agencies must collaborate in a coordinated crackdown. The real challenge is to trace the drug sources and ensure that drug cases reach convictions without delay. Out of 26,453 NDPS cases registered in five years, only 139 identified suppliers, exposing their mostly-untraceable inter-State and international links. Central and inter-State cooperation is crucial here. NDPS cases often languish in courts for years, discouraging police from filing charges. Fast-track justice is needed for NDPS cases. Special courts and investigation teams must expedite trials. A joint task force must be created to intensify enforcement, trace drug sources, and dismantle inter-State and international networks. Once, Kerala faced a flood of illicit liquor; today, it's minimal. Similarly, drug supply chains must be blocked. Dedicated teams, not just local police or excise, should handle this. Airports, seaports, and check-posts need stringent checks. Sniffer dogs should monitor suspicious gatherings. Unauthorized liquor production and distribution must be curbed, but this should not be at the cost of the State's

tourism promotion efforts. Low-alcohol beverages like beer should be promoted in tourist hubs. The government's revised liquor policy is a step forward in this direction.

Alternative highs—hope, arts, sports—must replace drugs. Kerala's Sports Council, cultural bodies, and tourism sector must engage with youth. Physical and mental wellness programmes, strengthened tourism infrastructure, and recreational facilities are vital. Schools need scientific monitoring. Committees of teachers, parents, and volunteers should track students' movements, friendships, and mental health. Student organizations like NCC, SPC and Scouts & Guides can help. Colleges must enforce strict penalties, including university-level bans for offenders. Youth must understand that drug use and possession carry severe consequences, including a ruined future. Only by eradicating this scourge can Kerala's march towards 'Nava Keralam' continue unhindered. We sincerely hope that the government's efforts to rid the State of the drug menace would succeed. ■

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Fort Kochi's Dutch Legacy

The enduring legacy of Dutch architecture in Fort Kochi and Mattancherry continues to tell a story of adaptation, resilience, and a fascinating cultural confluence that defines this captivating corner of India, writes **Anil Menon**.

Sidelights

DUTCH IN KERALA

Though overshadowed by British and Portuguese rule, the Dutch once held sway over Kerala's spice trade, commanding key ports like Cochin, Kollam, and Cranganore from 1604 to 1795, writes **George Thundiparambil**.

ODATHA PADI

The birthplace of 'Hortus Malabaricus', a seminal work that became a cornerstone for understanding tropical plants and their medicinal uses, influencing botany and medicine for centuries, writes **Anil Menon**.



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WELCOME CHANGES IN LIQUOR POLICY

While political pressures have stalled some reforms, the government's partial acceptance of FKHA's proposals while finalising the 2025-26 liquor policy is a step forward, writes **Sqn Ldr K.B. Padmadas (Retd.)**, General Secretary, Federation of Kerala Hotels Association (FKHA).



REPORT

A DECADE OF CHALLENGES AND VICTORIES

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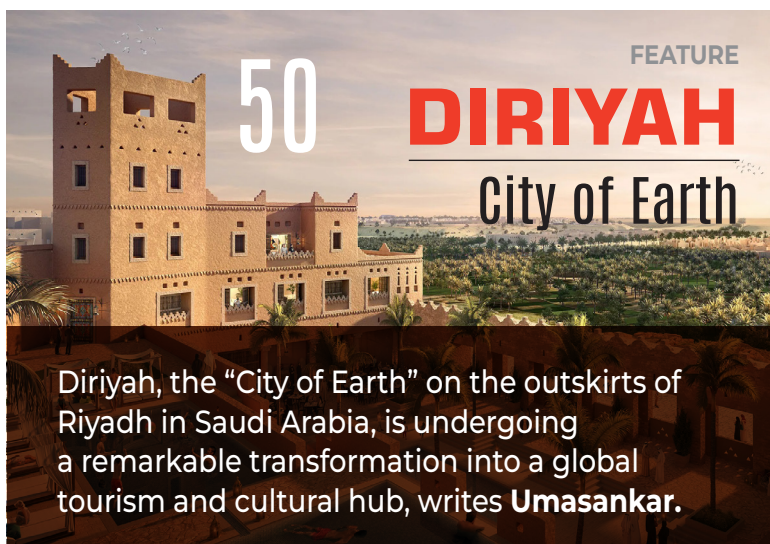
Kerala's hotel industry weathered a decade of unprecedented crises. Through resilient leadership and strategic advocacy, the Federation of Kerala Hotels Association (FKHA) not only ensured survival but also spearheaded the sector's revival, growth, and professional transformation.



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കാഴ്ചയുടെ
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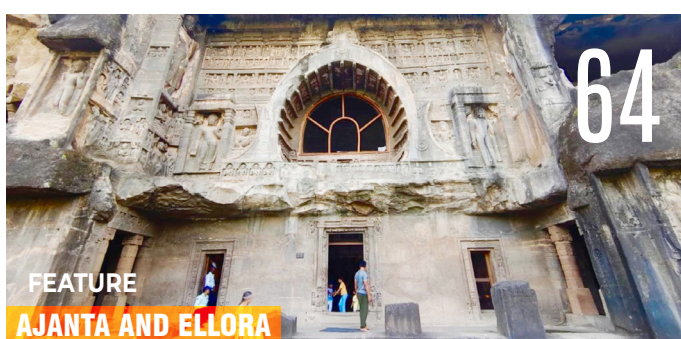
Health Beat

BUILD YOUR CORE STRENGTH

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by the Mayo Clinic.

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TIMELESS WONDER CARVED IN STONE

Ajanta and Ellora, timeless marvels of ancient Indian architecture, are awe-inspiring creations that blend culture, faith and masterly artistry. writes **Rajeev G Pereira**



Canakkale Bridge in Turkey, the world's longest suspension bridge, has unlocked immense travel and tourism potential at the intersection between Asia and Europe, writes **Jyothish R**



WELCOME CHANGES IN LIQUOR POLICY



Sqn Ldr K.B. Padmadas (Retd.)

The budget announcements of this financial year and the new liquor policy have sparked much debate, especially concerning the hotel industry. The Opposition and some community organizations have accused the government of siding with liquor manufacturers and bar hotels to promote alcohol consumption in the State. However, the government has clarified that in a State with an industry-friendly environment, allowing new distilleries will benefit tax revenue and employment. They argue that some existing excise laws are not favourable for tourism growth, and that the changes in liquor policy were necessary adjustments in response to persistent demands from stakeholders. So, what is the truth?

Every year, before the budget and liquor policy announcements, the government holds discussions with relevant stakeholders. This time, representatives of the

Federation of Kerala Hotels Association (FKHA) participated in two government-called meetings, highlighting the challenges faced by the hotel industry and urging necessary measures to protect this integral part of tourism. Their demands included collecting Turnover Tax (ToT) at the first point, granting amnesty for ToT arrears, and granting industry status to the tourism sector, among others.

While it cannot be said that all the demands were fully accepted in the budget, neither were they entirely rejected. The Finance Minister has taken a mature approach to one of the long-standing demands. Although an amnesty for tax arrears of bar hotels from 2005-06 to 2017-18 was announced in the 2019 budget, most hotels could not avail it because almost the entire industry was in a crisis following the UDF government's closure of 712 bar hotels in 2014. Though the 2017 LDF government had taken steps to reopen these hotels, the financial burden of investing crores in star facility upgrades had created a significant economic strain.

The subsequent years were even more crisis-ridden as hotels had to be shut down during the Covid-19 pandemic. In short, the industry remained stagnant for years, making it difficult to obtain personal loans or bank loans due to poor credit scores. This is why the 2019 amnesty scheme could not be utilized. Consequently, we have been demanding relief to clear pending tax arrears from 2021 onwards. This demand was not considered in the last four budgets. However, in this budget, the government has shown the willingness to provide some minor relief. A three-month amnesty scheme has been announced, allowing full payment of the principal tax amount along with 50% of the interest to waive off the remaining interest and penalties for arrears up to 2021. We welcome this decision by the government.

Although the demand to grant industry status to tourism was not considered, several new initiatives announced in the budget to promote tourism are commendable. These include: health tourism projects, coastal highway and inland waterway-linked tourism initiatives, loan schemes for constructing hotels to promote MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism, pilgrim tourism projects, plans to enhance tourism connectivity, infrastructure development projects at tourist centres, and nightlife projects in major cities. However, since tourism has not been granted industry status, investors in the hotel sector do not receive the same benefits available to other industrial entrepreneurs. Last year, the liquor policy was not announced. Though this year's policy includes some changes in line with the tourism sector's demands, the government has made no significant alterations to the long-standing liquor regulations. The Federation of Kerala Hotels Association (FKHA) had proposed several reforms, including: adjusting bar operating hours, relaxing distance norms for new bars and liquor shops, lowering the legal drinking age, issuing bar licenses based on the number of hotel rooms, and removing dry days on the 1st of every month and festival days. However, the government did not respond favourably to any of these demands. As a result, Kerala's liquor regulations remain uniquely restrictive compared to other

Indian States.

Bevco, the State-run liquor retail chain, has been opening new outlets near existing bar hotels, blatantly violating the mandated distance rules-5 km in urban areas and 10 km in panchayat regions. While the new policy claims to maintain these restrictions, in practice, Bevco has been relocating previously closed shops as "premium outlets" near bars, effectively flouting its own rules.

Bars in Kerala used to operate from 8 AM-12 AM earlier, but they can operate only from 11 AM to 11 PM, with only tourist hubs allowed to operate until midnight. No other State imposes such restrictive timings. While Bevco outlets open at 10 AM, bars must wait until 11 AM to open-an unfair disparity. This contradicts Kerala's push for nightlife, destination weddings, and international conferences, which require flexible liquor service hours. Also, Kerala remains the only state enforcing dry days on the 1st of every month-an illogical rule the FKHA has





long opposed. Though the new policy exempts MICE tourism, destination weddings, and conferences from dry days, bars must pay an exorbitant ₹50,000 fee per day for this exemption. Given that bars already pay ₹35 lakh annually in license fees, this additional charge is unjustifiable. The government should abolish dry days entirely.

Kerala, a land of festivals, sees hundreds of celebrations between December and May. Local authorities increasingly impose liquor bans during these events, sometimes for multiple days. While festivals should be joyous occasions, unscientific liquor bans only fuel illegal alcohol and drug trade. Historically, the Excise Department permitted liquor sales at festival grounds with special permits, even extending operating hours post-midnight. However, since 2019, liquor bans have been imposed even in non-sensitive areas, creating opportunities for bootleggers and drug peddlers. Bars lose 25–30 working days a year due to such restrictions—a situation unheard of elsewhere in India.

The new liquor policy focuses heavily on combating narcotics and synthetic drugs—a crisis the FKHA had warned about years ago. In 2014, the UDF government closed 712 bars and 78 FL-1 outlets, leading to a surge in spurious liquor and drug trafficking. Raising the legal drinking age from 21 to 23 further pushed youth towards harder substances. While Karnataka reduced its drinking age to 18, Kerala's restrictive policies backfired, making drugs more accessible than regulated alcohol. A

well-organised mafia, often with Police and Excise complicity, dominates the illicit liquor trade, especially during dry days. Weak penalties allow offenders to resume operations after minor fines. Despite FKHA's demands for stricter enforcement, the new policy lacks concrete measures to curb this menace. The unchecked sale of 'arishtam' (ayurvedic liquor) as a cover for illegal alcohol also remains unaddressed.

The policy encourages Kerala's traditional toddy industry, allowing hotels and restaurants to sell it. While efforts to ensure growth of the toddy industry is welcome, it cannot be at the expense of the hotel industry. The lack of quality control risks consumer harm and could hurt foreign liquor sales in bars. Additionally, permitting liquor licenses for private yachts raises concerns about misuse.

Despite flaws, the policy has some merits. These include: nil increase in license fees, promise of stronger anti-narcotics enforcement, eased partnership/directorship changes and promise of liquor licenses for IT parks and for setting up breweries. Under the new regime, change of partnership/directorship need not have prior approval. The same need be communicated to the Excise Commissioner within 30 days, failure to do so attracting only a nominal ₹10,000 penalty. This was FKHA's long-standing demand. While political pressures have stalled some reforms, the government's partial acceptance of FKHA's proposals is a step forward. ■

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A DECADE OF CHALLENGES AND VICTORIES

Staff Reporter

Over the past decade, Kerala's hotel industry has endured some of the most turbulent years in its history. The complete shutdown of bars in 2014-15, a series of natural disasters, and the Covid pandemic severely impacted the sector. Despite these setbacks, the Federation of Kerala

Hotels Association (FKHA) and its current leadership confronted each crisis directly, ensuring the survival, sustenance, and continued progress of the industry. The closure of bar hotels in 2014-15, following controversies over the liquor policy, threatened the very existence of the FKHA, which was established in 1991. The situation

improved when the LDF government assumed power in 2016 and revised the UDF Government's liquor policy. At a pivotal meeting in Thiruvananthapuram on July 22, 2017, bar hotel representatives from across Kerala elected a new leadership team, tasking them with steering the industry forward through collective effort.



Under the stewardship of Mr. V. Sunil Kumar (President), Mr. K.B. Padmadas (General Secretary), and Mr. Binoy Joseph (Treasurer), the FKHA transformed into a disciplined, united, and socially committed organization. For the past eight years, this leadership has served with dedication, earning the trust of its members.

With the support of the LDF government, the FKHA leadership effectively presented industry concerns to authorities, engaged in skillful negotiations, and secured crucial support. Their consistent efforts have significantly improved the industry's position compared to a decade ago. The 2014-15 crisis had forced all but

29 of Kerala's 748 bar hotels—those with five-star status—to close. Entrepreneurs faced massive losses, and thousands of workers' livelihoods were at risk. The situation began to improve only after the LDF government amended the Abkari Policy, allowing star-classified hotels to operate bars. This, however, required significant investment from hotels to upgrade facilities and attain star status. Following these efforts, the government restored licenses to 442 hotels under the revised policy, though 306 hotels remained unable to upgrade due to financial constraints.

Just as recovery seemed possible, the Covid pandemic struck, dealing another blow to the industry. Hotel operators, burdened by loans taken for facility upgrades and star classification, found themselves unable to repay debts or clear substantial tax arrears. During this challenging period, the FKHA leadership engaged persistently with the government, ultimately securing relief measures for hotel owners. This process, spanning the last four years, required careful, strategic action, always considering the broader interests of Kerala society and the sensitivities surrounding the bar hotel sector.

Today, Kerala boasts over 1,000 operating bar hotels. The industry-friendly environment is largely due to the FKHA leadership's inclusive approach and the supportive policies of successive LDF governments. The government's willingness to address FKHA's demands and incorporate them into liquor policy and the State budget is a testament to the leadership's credibility. This year, key FKHA proposals were again adopted by the government, underscoring the recognized importance of the hospitality sector in Kerala's development.

The FKHA has also actively supported government relief efforts



V. Sunil Kumar
President, FKHA



Sqn Ldr K.B. Padmadas (Retd.)
Secretary, FKHA



Binoy Joseph
Treasurer, FKHA

during natural and health crises, such as the 2018 floods, the Covid pandemic, and the Wayanad disaster. The organization contributed Rs 3.5 crore to the Chief Minister's Distress Relief Fund for flood mitigation, Rs 1 crore during the Wayanad disaster, and donated five ambulances and substantial medical supplies during Covid.

Over the years, the FKHA leadership has remained responsive to members' financial and business needs as well, establishing a mutual benefit scheme that allows members to access emergency funds. This initiative benefits both members and the organization as a whole.

Recognizing the need for professionally trained staff, the FKHA launched the Institute of Hotel Management (IHM) in 2019 to train candidates from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Since then, about 1,000 young men and women have been trained and are now employed in Kerala, other Indian states, and abroad. The IHM offers free education and accommodation, a Rs 4,000 stipend, a government-recognized diploma, and 100% placement in member star hotels.

IHM centres operate in six districts: Thiruvananthapuram, Kollam, Kottayam, Ernakulam, Thrissur, and Kozhikode. Additionally, a staff empowerment program allows

current hotel employees with no professional qualification to receive training while working. No other organization in India offers such comprehensive training in this field.

The FKHA is also committed to

The government's willingness to address FKHA's demands and incorporate them into liquor policy and the State budget is a testament to the leadership's credibility. This year, key FKHA proposals were again adopted by the government, underscoring the recognized importance of the hospitality sector in Kerala's development.





FKHA's contribution to the Wayanad Disaster Relief Fund being handed over to Hon'ble Chief Minister Sri. Pinarayi Vijayan by FKHA General Secretary K.B. Padmadas and Treasurer Benoy Joseph.



FKHA ambulance being flagged off by Hon'ble Minister for Tourism and Public Works Sri. P.A. Mohammed Riyas in the presence of Hon'ble Health Minister Smt. Veena George. FKHA President Sri. V. Sunil Kumar is also seen.

promoting Kerala's tourism and hospitality sectors and addressing misconceptions about the bar hotel industry. The organization launched 'Swagat', a robust bi-monthly publication that showcases Kerala's arts and culture to tourists and addresses hospitality sector issues. The magazine has become a valuable resource for both hotels and their guests.

A major milestone for the FKHA was establishing its own office in the capital. The new complex, located on 30 cents of land on the Pattom-PMG One Way, houses the State Committee office, District Committee office, IHM head office, and Swagat magazine office. The office complex will be inaugurated by the Honourable Minister for Education & Labour, Shri. V. Sivankutty, on July 2.

Today, the FKHA stands as a strong, unified organization. Over the past eight years, the current leadership has kept the membership united, built public trust, and fostered positive relations with the government. Yes, these years have been marked by significant challenges, but there have been meaningful victories. Full credit to the FKHA leadership team. ■



THE DUTCH INTERLUDE

Fort Kochi's Dutch Legacy



Pic. Vikas Ramdas

When you walk through the weathered streets of Fort Kochi, the scent of the sea lingers in the humid air, mingling with the faint aroma of spices and foodstuffs. Sounds are almost like everywhere else in Kerala but, at Fort Kochi, the sights are an amalgam of the indigenous and the foreign, with the colonial structures from the Portuguese, Dutch and British periods, adding to the sublime charm of the place. The town carries the weight of history, its streets lined with relics of Portuguese, Dutch and British colonial rule—town houses with austere facades, gabled roofs, and deep-set windows. The Portuguese were the first to set up shop in Fort Kochi, at the dawn of the 16th century. They were followed by the Dutch and then the British, each wave altering the face of this quaint part of Kerala with new structures that reflected the cultural climate of the Europeans. Almost nothing of what the Portuguese built in the area remain now, every structure having been

Pic. Vikas Ramdas



Fort Kochi: Where History Walks the Streets

Fort Kochi is a blend of sea breeze, spice-laden air, and colonial charm. Portuguese, Dutch, and British architecture lines its streets, each structure telling a story of trade, conquest, and cultural fusion.

razed to the ground by the Dutch, whose architectural creations, along with those of the British, now dominate the tree-lined streets of Fort Kochi. The Dutch buildings have their outer walls supported by long, slanted beams jutting out toward the street. There's more to their posture than mere aesthetics. The Dutch, ever the pragmatic builders, designed their homes this way to prevent the front walls from collapsing—an essential adaptation for a settlement built on reclaimed land, much like Amsterdam itself.

The Dutch influence here is more restrained, emphasising clean lines, symmetrical facades, and functional elegance. Many buildings feature shuttered windows with slatted wooden panels designed to let in the breeze while keeping out the relentless tropical sun. The masonry is solid and practical within white plaster details.

Dutch Palace (Mattancherry Palace)

One of the finest examples of Dutch colonial architecture is the Dutch Palace (Mattancherry Palace). Though originally built by the Portuguese to appease the then sovereign of the princely state of Cochin, the Dutch destroyed it and later renovated it in their characteristic style, blending their love for symmetry with Kerala's native sloping roofs and intricately carved wooden ceilings. Inside the palace, the walls are adorned with breathtaking mural paintings depicting Hindu epics. The Portuguese built the palace around 1545 CE as a present to King Veera Kerala Varma of the Kochi dynasty and was used by the rulers of Kochi to conduct official ceremonies like coronations. It is modelled on the traditional *nalukettu* (four-winged homes). This is a two-storey structure, the four wings forming part of the first story. The ground storey forms the enclosure of the Pazhayannur Bhagavathy Temple, located in the large central courtyard of the palace. There are two other temples on either side of the palace, dedicated to Lord Shiva and Lord Krishna respectively.

The living chamber occupies the lower story of a wing that extends from the south east corner of the Palace and is therefore not part of the temple compound. Above it is a spacious hall. The ceilings of the large, spacious halls at both levels are embellished with floral designs carved in wood. The ceilings are decorated with brass cups and the floor done to perfection with a blend of lime, plant juices, burnt coconut shells and egg white. Life sized statues of Kochi kings who ruled from the year 1864 stand proudly adorned in their coronation robes in the coronation hall of the palace. There are also Dutch maps of ancient Kochi, royal umbrellas made of silk and brass, the ceremonial royal sword, royal palanquins with floral designs, silver sequined gowns and other such exquisite objects on display in the palace. Daggers, spears and sheathed swords are also on display.

The fame of the Dutch Palace rests mainly on intricate murals that adorn it. These murals in the royal bedchamber portray the entire story of Ramayana. It is believed that these paintings were done between



Pic. Vikas Ramdas

the 17th and 18th century. On the staircase walls are mural paintings of Hindu gods and goddesses. The Ladies Chamber features five mural panels depicting deities Vishnu, Krishna, and Shiva, emphasizing both themes of bhakti and romantic love. One mural illustrates Shiva and Parvathy in an intimate embrace, surrounded by their children and attentive devotees. Another mural portrays Krishna with the Gopis, highlighting his divine love and the affectionate interactions with his companions. The murals are framed by painted borders and reflect a style similar to those found in Hindu temples of Kerala. The chamber's secluded location suggests it may have been a space for the King to enjoy female companionship. The most outstanding among the murals are those that depict the Ramayana epic in a unique narrative style and with great emotional depth. The paintings prioritize emotional expression, particularly the veera (heroic) and raudra (furious) emo-

tions of the rasa aesthetic system. Vishnu's appearance in the first panel signifies the divine nature of Rama, who is otherwise portrayed as a human hero. The battle scenes, especially Rama and Lakshmana's confrontation with Ravana, dominate the west wall and are three times longer than the other panels. The legacy of Mattancherry Palace is not confined by its architectural grandeur or artistic treasures but rather, it is one that transcends time. It is a symbol of the cultural confluence that defines the State and even today it is a reminder of the region's resplendent history of trade and trade--and, above all, the astoundingly syncretic culture that flourished in this part of the globe.

Bastion Bungalow

Situated near the Vasco da Gama square, on River Road in Fort Kochi, the Bastion Bungalow is a testament to the fusion of European and indigenous styles that were

Dutch Palace: A Fusion of Art and Empire

The Dutch Palace in Mattancherry is a symbol of Kerala's syncretic past. With its sloped roofs, Dutch symmetry, and vivid murals of Hindu epics, it showcases a seamless blend of European design and Indian tradition.



Pic. Vikas Ramdas

a signature of colonial era constructions in Kerala. Originally one of the seven bastions of the 17th-century Fort Immanuel built by the Portuguese, the fort had bastions, ramparts and many other structures. When in 1663 the Dutch defeated the Portuguese and conquered Kochi, they destroyed the fort and only a third of it was left. The fort originally had seven bastions, but all that remained after the Dutch assault was the Stormberg bastion, which was later transformed into the Bastion Bungalow. With spacious rooms, high ceilings, open, long verandahs and tiled roofs with beautiful geometric patterns, the bungalow has been built into a wall of the

erstwhile fort. The materials used for construction largely include laterite, wood and brick. The Bungalow was such a beautiful structure that even when the British destroyed the walls during their 1806 invasion, they left the building untouched. The building has been declared a protected monument by the State Archaeology Department.

The Thakur House

The Thakur House, which reflects the opulent lifestyle of the colonial era, has lovely lawns, caressed ceaselessly by sea breeze. Built in the 1700s, this is a two-storeyed building with characteristic spacious rooms, wooden floors and bay windows. Both the floors are

A blend of Dutch design and Kerala charm, Bastion Bungalow is the last standing piece of Fort Immanuel—gracefully preserved with high ceilings, open verandahs, and historic walls.





marked by astonishing symmetry. The original building consisted of several halls and verandahs, and though the original structure was altered several times by its various occupants, its essential Dutch character is still resplendent. Glass lamps hang from the roof beam, and several paintings decorate the walls.

During the 17th century, the building, on account of its strategic position, served as a prominent look-out point near the Cochin Harbour. It is believed that the house has several tunnels leading to far-off places in Fort Kochi such as the St. Francis Church and Bishop's House.

The Dutch built the Thakur House as a club and community centre for the Dutch East India Company. During the last decades of the 19th century, the bungalow was occupied by a prominent spice trading family of Mattancherry. In the early 1900s, it was used as lodging

for the managers of the National Bank of India. The ownership of the bungalow again changed hands and went to a well-known tea-trading firm.

The Dutch Cemetery

The Dutch Cemetery, established in 1724, is believed to be the oldest of its kind in the country. Within these hallowed grounds lie 104 epitaphs and tombs, modest and pared down, each describing the person who found his or her final resting place in this land far off from their homes.

The Dutch Cemetery is today managed today by the Church of South India (CSI) and St. Francis CSI Church nearby maintains meticulous records of those interred, preserving their memory for future generations. One notable figure among those buried here is Captain Joseph Ethelbert Winckler, whose resting place in 1913 marked the end of an era in this solemn resting ground.



Pic. Vikas Ramdas

The Dutch Legacy in Kerala

George Thundiparambil

While reading the colonial history of India, the involvement of the Dutch is minimal or unheard of, considering the dominance of Great Britain and other European players like France and Portugal in the unravelling of India's modern history. It is not because of any lack of intentions or ambitions that the Dutch became an obscure player in Indian history. It may perhaps be called fate, but it could also be a certain naiveness or a lack of understanding of the Indian cultures on the part of the Dutch that led to their early departure.

At one time, the Dutch were a formidable force on the Malabar Coast. The Dutch colonial presence in Kerala, primarily on the Malabar Coast, was a significant chapter in the history of European trade and power struggles in India. The Dutch East India Company

(Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie or VOC) arrived in the early 17th century intending to monopolise the lucrative spice trade. Their presence lasted from 1604 to 1795, during which they established control over several key territories and engaged in battles with the Portuguese and local rulers. However, their influence gradually waned, particularly after their defeat by the Kingdom of Travancore in the Battle of Colachel (1741) and the eventual takeover of their territories by the British in 1795. Dutch Arrival and Establishment (1604-1663)

The Dutch arrived on the Malabar Coast in 1604, motivated by the lucrative spice trade. At that time, the Portuguese held significant power over the region's ports and trade routes. The Dutch initially attempted to establish trade agreements with local rulers but soon realised that direct military

intervention was necessary to challenge Portuguese dominance. The Dutch VOC engaged in naval and land battles with the Portuguese and captured Cochin in 1663. A particularly gruesome takeover of Fort Cochin marked the beginning of their dominance on the Malabar Coast. This victory

Though overshadowed by British and Portuguese rule, the Dutch once held sway over Kerala's spice trade, commanding key ports like Cochin, Kollam, and Cranganore from 1604 to 1795.





also led to their acquisition of several other strategic ports and fortresses, significantly weakening Portuguese influence in Kerala.

Dutch Territories in Kerala

At the peak of their control, the Dutch held several important territories and forts in Kerala. The Dutch had Cochin (Kochi) as their primary headquarters and administrative centre. They controlled Cochin from 1663 to 1795 after expelling the Portuguese. Another significant trading post for spices was Quilon (Kollam), which remained under Dutch rule from 1661 to 1795. Cannanore (Kannur), a fortified location crucial for maritime control, was under Dutch dominance between 1663 and 1790. Cranganore (Kodungalloor), an inland trade hub, was controlled by the Dutch from 1662 to 1789, ensuring their hold over the spice trade routes. Additionally, they seized Pallippuram in 1663, maintaining control until 1789. Though their presence in Kayamkulam

was brief in the late 17th century, it still played a minor role in Dutch trade activities.

These territories were supposed to consolidate the Dutch's trade monopoly, particularly in pepper, cardamom, and cinnamon, but the idea backfired due to the non-cooperation of the local rulers, following many unruly incidents on the Malabar Coast involving Dutch soldiers, including a raid on the Guruvayur temple.

Dutch Trade and Economic Policies
Unlike the Portuguese, who focused on religious conversion alongside trade, the Dutch were primarily interested in commerce. They established trade agreements with local rulers, particularly the Zamorin of Calicut, and attempted to regulate the spice trade to benefit Dutch merchants. They restricted local traders and imposed high prices, leading to dissatisfaction among native merchants and rulers.

The Dutch also contributed to agricultur-

Battle of Colachel: Turning the Tide

In 1741, Travancore's Marthanda Varma defeated the Dutch at Colachel—a landmark victory that marked the first time an Asian power triumphed over a European colonial force in open battle.

Legacy Beyond Rule

Despite their short-lived reign, the Dutch left lasting imprints on Kerala's architecture, military reforms, and even language—with words like “kakoos” (toilet) tracing back to their presence.

al techniques and improved local trade infrastructure. However, their rude monopolistic policies created resentment, which contributed to their downfall in the region.

They completely misread the situation and failed to understand the local trade laws, which, at that time, were traditional unwritten rules generally called the Perumal Code. While signing the monopoly agreements with local Rajas, they were unaware that these rulers had little or no control over local chieftains, producers and merchants, and whose privileges existed since the time of the Perumals, the Chera rulers that declined towards the end of the first millennium CE.

Dutch Decline and the Rise of Travancore (1741–1795)

The Dutch faced strong resistance from Marthanda Varma, the ruler of Travancore. The most decisive conflict was the Battle of Colachel (1741), where the Dutch forces suffered a historic defeat. This battle was significant because it marked the first time an Asian kingdom had decisively

defeated a major European colonial power in open combat.

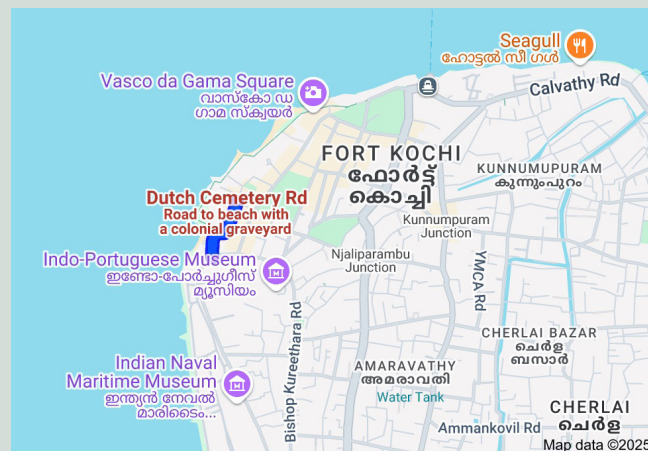
Incidentally, Marthanda Varma was successful not only in challenging the Dutch commercial ambitions but also in turning around the ancient Perumal laws by radical reforms that included raising a European-style army.

After their defeat, the Dutch influence in Kerala began to decline. They lost control of Cranganore and Pallippuram to Travancore in 1789, further weakening their hold over the region. The Dutch shifted focus to other parts of their Asian empire, particularly Indonesia, where they were more successful.

British Takeover and the End of Dutch Rule (1795)

By the late 18th century, the Dutch were weakened not only by local resistance but also by European conflicts. The Napoleonic Wars (1792–1815) led to British intervention in Dutch colonial affairs. In 1795, by what is known as the Kew Letters, the British took control of Dutch settlements on the Malabar Coast as part of their





Pic: Vikas Ramdas

broader colonial expansion in India. The Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1814 formally ended Dutch rule in Kerala, as the British consolidated power over former Dutch territories. Despite their decline, the Dutch left a lasting impact on Kerala, particularly in Architecture. Dutch-style buildings and forts, such as the Dutch Palace in Mattancherry, which still stands today. The Dutch are also known for introducing new trade regulations and infrastructure that influenced Kerala's economy all along the coast. They also innovated spice cultivation techniques, some still in use. Militarily, too, the Dutch contribution is significant. The Battle of Colachel remains a symbol of native resistance against Euro-

pean colonisation. However, the victory of their enemy, Travancore, was a turning point. Almost all of the defeated soldiers joined the Travancore army. Raja Marthanda Varma of Travancore appointed the commander of the enemy forces, Eustachius De Lannoy, as the new Commander-in-Chief of his army. De Lannoy was a captain in the Dutch East India Company and led the Dutch forces in the Battle of Colachel (1741) against the Kingdom of Travancore. The Dutch were decisively defeated, and De Lannoy surrendered. However, instead of being executed, he was pardoned and offered a job. He accepted and became the commander-in-chief of the Travancore army. De Lannoy played a crucial role in

modernising Travancore's military by introducing European-style training, firearms, and fortifications. He served Travancore loyally for several decades and was instrumental in the kingdom's territorial expansion and defence. His tomb is located at Udayagiri Fort in present-day Tamil Nadu.

Indelible signatures

The Dutch colonial period in Kerala was marked by economic ambition, military conflicts, and strategic alliances. While they successfully displaced the Portuguese and controlled key ports for over a century, their ignorance of local traditions and customs, rigid trade policies and military losses—especially against Travancore—led to their downfall. Eventually, British expansion sealed their fate, ending Dutch rule in Kerala permanently in 1795.

Though their reign was short-lived compared to the Portuguese and British, the Dutch influence is still visible in Kerala's architecture, trade history, and cultural legacy. Today, Dutch-era buildings and forts serve as historical reminders of Kerala's role in global colonial history. A Fort Cochin baker still bakes an old traditional Dutch cake (that modern Dutchmen have forgotten to make) in his bakery at Pattalam, and Kerala's toilets have the generic name of "kakoos", echoing the Dutch who contributed their "Kakhuis" to Malayalees.



Pic. Vikas Ramdas



Pic. Vikas Ramdas

While the cemetery is typically closed to the public, visitors can arrange special access to explore its tranquil corridors and pay homage to its storied past. Stepping through its gates is like stepping back in time - a journey into Fort Kochi's rich multicultural heritage and the lasting imprint left by the Dutch East India Company.

David Hall

David Hall, reminiscent of the Dutch glory of yesteryears, is situated on one side of the Parade Ground in Fort Kochi. The history and architectural grandeur of the halls woos many visitors. Today, it houses an art gallery and acts as a cultural centre to support young exponents of visual and performing art forms.

David Hall was built around 1695 by the Dutch East India Company as the residence of the renowned Dutch governor, Hendrick Adrian Van Rheede tot Drakestein, who initiated a pioneering study on the flora of Kerala that resulted in the 12-volume classic, the Hortus Malabaricus. However, the building gets its name from a later occupant David Koder, a Jewish

business icon.

The characteristic features of this Dutch building have not been altered drastically either by time or by its various occupants. The recent alterations made in the David Hall are in adherence with the Dutch typology. The typical Dutch architecture is visible on all elements including the wooden roof which is made of flat face rafters, supported by horizontal beams and trusses.

The three-foot wide walls and the four-column windows are the other characteristics of the building and they add to its elegance. A well-manicured garden and the old trees in the courtyard too help the David Hall retain its grace intact.

Brunton Boatyard

This seemingly old, seemingly Dutch building is actually neither old nor Dutch, but showcases detailing particular to Dutch architecture—high ceilings, laterite and lime walls, and large windows.

Old Harbour House

Built in 1808 tea brokers Carrit Moran

Thakur House

Once a Dutch club, now a colonial relic, Thakur House charms with sea-kissed lawns, wooden floors, and whispers of Fort Kochi's trading legacy.



Pic. Vikas Ramdas



Pic. Vikas Ramdas

ODATHA PADI

Birthplace of 'Hortus
Malabaricus'

Anil Menon

In the heart of Fort Kochi's Veli area lies a site of immense historical and botanical significance—Odata Padi, the birthplace of the renowned Hortus Malabaricus (The Garden of Malabar).

This monumental 17th-century botanical treatise, conceived by Hendrik Adriaan van Rhee de tot Drakenstein, the Dutch Governor of Malabar (1636–1691), remains a priceless treasure for scientists, medical practitioners, and historians worldwide. Yet, few know that its roots trace back to this unassuming corner of Kerala.

Van Rhee de's vision for Hortus Malabaricus was ambitious. He employed a team of 25 local botanists, scholars, and traditional healers to document and study the medicinal properties of Kerala's flora. Over nearly three decades, they meticulously described 740 plant species, cultivating many in a dedicated garden established in Fort Kochi.

This collaborative effort culminated in a 12-volume masterpiece first published in Latin between 1678 and 1693 in Amsterdam. The



text also recorded plant names in multiple languages, including Malayalam, Arabi-Malayalam, and Konkani, reflecting its inclusive approach to knowledge preservation. The work not only catalogued plants but also bridged cultures, blending indigenous botanical knowledge with European scientific methodologies. It became a cornerstone for understanding tropical plants and their medicinal uses, influencing botany and medicine for centuries.

Odatha Padi

While Hortus Malabaricus gained global acclaim, its birthplace—the garden in Fort Kochi—faded into obscurity. Today, all that remains are fragments: a solitary pillar and part of another that once marked

the entrance to the garden. These remnants stand at Odatha Padi, a name derived from the Dutch word “Hortha” (garden) and the Malayalam word “Padi” (step or entrance). The nearby Gumathore Odatha Road further hints at its origins; “Gumathore Odatha” is believed to be a localized version of “Commodore Hortus,” meaning “Commodore’s Garden.”

Historical accounts suggest that this garden likely housed a chemical laboratory where researchers studied plant properties. The frontispiece of Hortus Malabaricus even includes an illustration of the garden gate, offering a glimpse into what might have been. However, time has erased most physical traces of this once-thriving hub

of botanical research.

Odatha Padi’s connection to Hortus Malabaricus underscores its importance as a site of cultural and scientific heritage. Yet, this significance remains largely unknown to many. The neglect of this historical landmark contrasts sharply with the enduring legacy of the book it birthed—a testament to Kerala’s rich biodiversity and traditional knowledge systems.

Reviving awareness about Odatha Padi could serve as an opportunity to honor this forgotten chapter in history. It stands not only as the birthplace of one of botany’s greatest works but also as a symbol of cross-cultural collaboration and scientific inquiry. ■



Pic. Vikas Ramdās

Dutch-built heritage like David Hall and Kashi Art Café in Fort Kochi blend colonial charm with clever design, echoing a legacy of adaptation and elegance.



and Company., the Old Harbour House is a deceptively simple structure that blends of Dutch and Portuguese architecture. The Dutch influence is prominent in the arches of the building while the Portuguese feature is revealed in the setting up of the courtyard. Initially, used to house sailors, it later became the residence of the officials of the tea broking firm before being converted to a heritage hotel.

The Old Harbour House owes its grandeur to the skilled craftsmanship of the engineers and workers of the early 19th century. Large arched entrance and red-tiled roof are some characteristics of the Old Harbour House and its solid structure will never escape the attention of the visitors. The building, with its well-maintained garden and its great view of the waterfront, has a charm that is refreshing given the changing contours of the Kochi skyline.

Kashi Art Café

For art lovers and enthusiasts, this little cafe and art gallery housed in an old Dutch row-house on Burgher Street is a must-visit. In Dutch, Burgher means clerk. During the Dutch reign, clerks and other officials lived in these row-houses built houses adhering

to the Dutch style. It is in such a house that Kashi Art Cafe, a prime haunt of art lovers, is located. Dorries Younger, a Dutch woman, renovated the house to launch the beautiful cafe. Soon, the place turned out to be one of the favourite hangouts of both Kochi denizens as well as foreigners. Known for bringing contemporary art to Kerala, here you can find the freshest ideas in art, along with a freshly brewed cup of coffee to go with them...

Major structures at Fort Kochi reflect the Dutch and British architectural styles, each pulling down existing structures to mount their own. For the Dutch, Fort Kochi wasn't just about building on the past; it was about building for the future, a future that included the inevitable monsoon floods. The region's geography demanded a clever solution. And so, the Dutch two-storey houses rose, practical and resilient.

While the ground floor, cool and dark, served as a robust storage space for barrels of spices and the tools of trade, the living quarters, elevated and airy, provided a refuge from the dampness below. The Dutch architecture here reveals a direct response to the environment. The houses feel solid and grounded, with a sense of quiet strength.

These buildings are not mere historical relics; they are living testaments to the Dutch presence, a tangible connection to a bygone era. The thick stone walls, the high ceilings, the practical layout – they all speak of a people who adapted, who understood the land and built accordingly.

Image credits:

1. Fort Kochi (Old): British Library, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15646083>
2. Fort Emmanuel Gunner: Malayalam Wikipedia, CC BY 2.5, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=12611420>



KTM'S WEDDING AND MICE CONCLAVE FROM AUG 14 TO 16

India's first Wedding and MICE Conclave to be held in Kochi from August 14 to 16 will act as a B2B networking platform for the integrated development of the tourism sector in the State, Tourism Minister Mohamed Riyas has said. Announcing the conclave, being organized by Kerala Travel Mart Society (KTM Society) in collaboration with the State Tourism Department, Mr. Riyas said the conclave aims to tap Kerala's potential in the fast-growing Wedding and MICE segment, leveraging the State's unique advantages to transform it into a global MICE and wedding tourism hub. Recalling the government's farsighted efforts to sustain and develop the tourism sector during the Covid Pandemic, the Minister said the State Tourism Department has since then done extensive marketing within and outside the country to showcase Kerala's potential for Destination Wedding and MICE tourism. Other than

five-star hotels and resorts, the Tourism Department will focus on the development of home stays, PWD rest houses and tourism guest houses to attract more tourists into the State as part of the integrated development of the sector, he noted. The KTM and Tourism Department with the help of private enterprises facilitate a seamless and enjoyable experience for tourists who visit the state for destination weddings and MICE tourism, the minister said. Development of the tourism sector and a steady surge in tourist arrivals will propel the overall social and financial condition of the society. From auto drivers to resort owners, everyone involved will have the opportunity to prosper, said Mr. Riyas. "Our efforts have proved to be a success with an estimated 1000 destination weddings being conducted in various tourist locations across Kerala in the last one year alone. When we examine the post

Covid era, the graph of tourist inflow in the state is higher than global and national average, the minister noted. Apart from the natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, panoramic beaches, back waters and a host of other factors including world class hospitality, infrastructure and road connectivity make Kerala a highly promising destination for wedding and MICE tourism," said Mr. Riyas. Tourism Secretary K. Biju, KTM Society President Jose Pradeep, Secretary S. Swaminathan, Immediate past president Baby Mathew Somatheeram, and former presidents E. M. Najeeb and Abraham George also attended the press meet. So far 360 buyers from within the country and 40 from abroad have registered for the conclave, which is expected to go up in the coming days. Also 65 sellers who are part of the MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions) Wedding sector have

also registered for the event. The inaugural session of the conclave will be held at 5 p.m. at the Grand Hyatt in Bolgatty Island, Kochi on August 14. The business meetings and exhibitions on the subsequent days will be held at Le Meridien.

"With 'Center Stage Kerala' as the focal theme, the conclave seeks to leverage Kerala's reputation as one of world's most-preferred destinations to ramp up MICE and Wedding Tourism," said Jose Pradeep. "The conference will bring together organizers of wedding, corporate conferences, operators of large convention centers and tourism and hospitality service providers under a single umbrella, for a calibrated promotion of the

segment," he added.

The meet will host training camps, innovative marketing strategies, logistics and technology deployment in collaboration with large MICE and wedding companies, besides using local supply chains. An exhibition being held on the sidelines of the event will serve as a platform for businesses with extensive experience in the MICE sector to showcase their products. Wedding planners, luxury resorts, destination wedding venues, floral designers, photographers, catering units, and bridal services providers will have the opportunity to display their talent.

The buyers coming for the conference will be taken to places across the state such as Kochi, Munnar,

Kumarakom, Kollam, Kovalam, Thrissur, Kozhikode, Wayanad and Bekal. The meet will prominently showcase attractive wedding tourism sites such as beaches, backwaters and mountains. Cultural heritage, ancient architecture and delicious cuisine will also be integrated with the event's theme. The business meetings at the conclave will be held as per a schedule prepared in advance. The event will hold expert-led training workshops and exhibitions of all the attractions that Kerala has to offer in the wedding industry. There will be business meetings from 9:30 am to 5:30 pm on August 15 and 16, besides seminars with the participation of international experts. ■



GOVT. SANCTIONS RS 75 LAKH FOR MTB KERALA 2025

Kerala Government has sanctioned Rs 75 lakh for organising the seventh edition of the International Mountain Biking Challenge (MTB Kerala 2025), which has put Kerala on the global map of mountain biking competitions.

The MTB Kerala, promoted by the State Tourism Department, will be held at the Priyadarshini Tea Planta-

tion in Mananthavady. Indian and foreign cycling stars will participate in the championship.

The amount has been sanctioned for the championship, including the stars' travel expenses, accommodation, prize money, and other expenses.

The Kerala Adventure Tourism Promotion Society (KATPS) and Wayanad District Tourism Promotion Council (DTPC) are organising the championship in collaboration with the Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) and the Cycling Federation of India (CFI).

"Adventure tourism is drawing much attention globally," Tour-

ism and Public Works Minister PA Mohamed Riyas said. "Kerala has excellent potential to emerge as a destination for adventure sports." The five-kilometre track where the MTB Kerala competition is held is at an altitude of 3,000 feet. The championship's main attraction is the cross-country competition section, which covers terrains such as mud, rocks, and water. Cyclists from many foreign countries are expected to participate in the tournament. In addition, amateur competitions for Indian cyclists will be organised. The winners of this race will compete with foreign players in the MTB Kerala International Competition. MTB Kerala has also been included in the calendar of Union Cycliste Internationale, the Switzerland-based world governing body for sports cycling.

The competition categories are International Cross Country XCO (Elite Men), National Cross Country XCO (Elite Men), National Cross Country XCO (Elite Women), Intermediate Cross Country XCO (Elite Men), and Intermediate Cross Country XCO (Elite Women).

KERALA ALLOTS RS 6 CRORE FOR RT INITIATIVES IN ECO-FRIENDLY WASTE MANAGEMENT, TRAINING



Kerala Government has approved Rs 6.01 crore in funding for projects promoting eco-friendly waste management and providing training for various Responsible Tourism (RT) units, especially those of women. The funds have been allocated for biogas plants for homestays, carbon-neutral packages, training programs, and publicity campaigns through four orders.

Biogas plants will be provided to homestays operated by women registered with the State RT Mission Society. This project will initially be implemented in one homestay in each district. Additionally, two waste treatment plants will be allocated to one Experience Ethnic Cuisine and one Agri Tourism unit in each district. Five kayaking units registered with the RT Mission Society will receive Rs 40,000 each as financial assistance to implement carbon-neutral packages. Funds have

also been set aside to implement Kerala Digital Science Innovation and Technology Mission's recommendations for other programmes promoting environmental responsibility.

The total amount allocated for environmental projects is Rs 50 lakh, while Rs 75 lakh has been designated for various training initiatives under different RT Mission societies. This includes training on digital marketing and artificial intelligence in the tourism sector, as well as training on RT projects for newly elected local government representatives. As many as 100 workshops would be organised across the state to create awareness among teachers and Plus one, Plus Two and college level students about RT principles and packages so that they could consider visiting RT project sites during their study tours. Additionally, allocations have been made to raise awareness about

these projects, conduct special training programmes in the Athirapally region to engage the tribal community through responsible tourism and general tourism activities, operate the RT Mission Society Training Centre, and manage various training programmes, including a digital training initiative. The state has also allocated Rs 76 lakh for organising a cultural exchange programme and a cultural tourism policy preparation workshop to promote the significant local interventions of the RT Mission activities such as STREET, PEPPER and Model Tourism Villages, to an international audience. This initiative also includes a training programme to promote cultural tourism and develop policies that involve global RT communities. Further, the government has allocated Rs 2 crore to promote and market the RT Mission Society and another Rs 2 crore for other regular expenditures. ■



CENTRE CLEARS KERALA'S TWO BIG TOURISM PROJECTS

In a big boost to Kerala Tourism, the Centre has given administrative and financial sanction for two major projects with a total outlay of Rs 169.05 crore for enhancing the tourist appeal of water tourism in Alappuzha and the Malampuzha Garden in Palakkad.

Both the projects were submitted by the State Tourism Department, seeking clearance under the Swadesh Darshan 2.0 scheme of the Union Tourism Ministry. The Detailed Project Report (DPR) drawn up by the State Tourism Department was reviewed by the Central Sanctioning and Monitoring Committee of the Union Tourism Ministry.

The 'Alappuzha- A Global Water Wonderland' project, which seeks to integrate the water tourism of the area, involves a total cost of Rs 93.17 crore, while the 'Enhancement

of Tourist Experience at Malampuzha Garden and Leisure Park' project is estimated to cost Rs 75.87 crore.

Welcoming the Centre's decision, Kerala Tourism Minister P.A. Mohamed Riyas said these projects will reinforce Kerala's standing as a major destination of the country, boosting both international and domestic tourism.

The Global Water Wonderland project will firm up Alappuzha's position as a global water tourism hub and bring benefits to the sectoral stakeholders and the local community in the entire south Kerala, the Minister said.

"Malampuzha Garden and Leisure Park has for long been one of the most-visited tourism sites of north Kerala. The implementation of this project will be a further boost to tourism in north Kerala by making

the site more appealing to visitors," he said.

The Minister recalled that he had taken up these projects with the Union Tourism Minister during his visit to the State capital earlier this month for the review of tourism activities in Kerala.

The Alappuzha project envisages beach front development, canal side transformation, waste management systems, an international cruise terminal and facilities for cultural and community engagements.

The Malampuzha project envisages development of theme parks, water fountains, recreational zones, walkways, cultural sites, hospitality areas, landscaping, improved amenities and sustainable waste management systems.

Both the projects are to be completed before 31st March 2026. ■



COCHIN AIRPORT RAILWAY STATION TO BE INTERMODAL TRANSIT HUB

The Cochin International Airport (CIAL) is on track to become a pioneering global aviation hub with the establishment of a dedicated railway station, seamlessly integrating rail, road, water, and air transport networks. This ambitious project, initially conceived in 2010 and recently revitalized with a strategically relocated site, promises to enhance connectivity, reduce transportation costs, and stimulate economic growth in the region.

The newly proposed Cochin Airport Railway Station will be situated approximately 500 metres towards the Aluva side from the previously considered location near the Akkaparambu railway gate. The site comprises land already owned by the Railways, with the added advantage of adjacent land belonging to CIAL being available for future expansion on both the eastern and western sides.

A key benefit of the new railway station will be the provision of a cost-effective transportation alternative for both domestic and international tourists. Upon arrival by train, passengers will no longer be solely reliant on taxis, gaining access to budget-friendly onward travel options. Furthermore, the establishment of the railway station is anticipated to generate new employment opportunities and foster business growth in the surrounding areas.

CIAL's vision extends beyond mere rail connectivity. With the forthcoming operationalization of Kochi's waterways to the airport and the planned extension of the Metro Rail to the airport premises, Cochin International Airport is set to join an exclusive group of global airports offering a comprehensive integration of air, rail, road, and water transport modes.

Adding to the synergistic benefits,

the recently inaugurated cargo village at the airport is conveniently located in close proximity to the proposed railway station. This will provide a significant advantage to exporters, enabling the efficient and cost-effective transportation of cargo from various parts of Kerala and neighboring states directly to the airport via rail.

CIAL has indicated its willingness to consider handing over its land to the Railways for the realization of the Kochi Airport Railway station. The current design for the station includes two platforms, for which the existing railway-owned land is sufficient. Plans are also underway to introduce electric or hydrogen-powered bus services. Additionally, CIAL is exploring the feasibility of launching buggy services or constructing a skywalk to further enhance passenger convenience and accessibility. ■



Idukki site yields remnants of ancient human settlement

Excavation carried out by the Kerala Council for Historical Research (KCHR), at Aanappara in Anak-kara village in Idukki district, has thrown up evidence of dwellings situated in close proximity to burial sites in ancient Kerala. The excavation, conducted between December 2024 and February 2025, has revealed a significant co-location of a settlement and a megalithic burial ground, which is stated to be the first-ever such sighting in the State.

The remnants of a human settlement was found located approximately 150 metres from a burial site. KCHR chairperson K.N. Ganesh said this was a rare finding in Kerala's archaeological history, emphasizing that while megalithic burials are widespread, associated settlement remains have been



exceptionally scarce, thus filling a crucial gap in the understanding of the region's early historic period. The excavation, led by Dr. Dineesh Krishnan and V. Selva Kumar, yielded diverse array of artefacts, including pottery fragments such as black and red ware, black ware, coarse red ware, and russet-coated painted ware, along with iron fragments, terracotta discs, stone and glass beads, iron slags, and notably, etched white carnelian beads. These findings offer valuable insights into the material culture of the ancient inhabitants. The finds will be subjected to scientific testing to accurately determine their age. The Aanappara site is geographically significant, featuring a large granite rock formation where the ancient settlement is located on its eastern, southeastern, and northeastern slopes, with habitation evidence extending westward. The discovery includes a cist burial found south of the settlement and a menhir identified nearby, indicating a potentially extensive ancient landscape. ■

കാഴ്ചയുടെ വർണ്ണ വസന്തം

വൈവിധ്യ സമൃദ്ധിയാൽ
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പക്ഷിലോകം.

ടി.എം. ജയിംസ്

ലോകമെങ്ങുമുള്ള സഞ്ചാരപ്രിയർ ഒരുവട്ടമെങ്കിലും കാണാനും അനുഭവിക്കാനും കൊതിക്കുന്ന ദേശമായി വികസിക്കുകയാണ് വയനാട്. പ്രകൃതി ഒരുക്കിയ വിസ്മയകാഴ്ചകളും അതിസമ്പന്നമായ ചരിത്ര പൈതൃകവും ഗോത്രജീവിതത്തിന്റെ നേർക്കാഴ്ചകളും മാത്രമല്ല സഞ്ചാരികളെ വയനാടൻ മണ്ണിലേക്ക് ആകർഷിക്കുന്നത്. വന്യജീവികളുടെയും അത്യുപരിവ ഇനങ്ങളിൽപ്പെട്ടതടക്കം സസ്യജാലങ്ങളുടെയും ആവാസവ്യവസ്ഥയുമാണ് ഈ ഭൂപ്രദേശം. കണ്ണൂർ, കോഴിക്കോട്, മലപ്പുറം, കർണാടകയിലെ മൈസൂരു, കുർഗ്, തമിഴ്നാട്ടിലെ നീലഗിരി ജില്ലകളുമായി അതിരൂപക്കിടുന്ന വയനാടിനെ ശ്രദ്ധേയമാക്കുന്നതാണ് വനത്തിനകത്തും പുറത്തുമായി വ്യാപിച്ചു കിടക്കുന്ന പക്ഷിലോകം. കാഷിയും കുരുമുളകും ഏലവും തേയിലയും നെല്ലും വിളയുന്ന വയനാടിന്റെ മാറ്റുകുടുകയാണ്

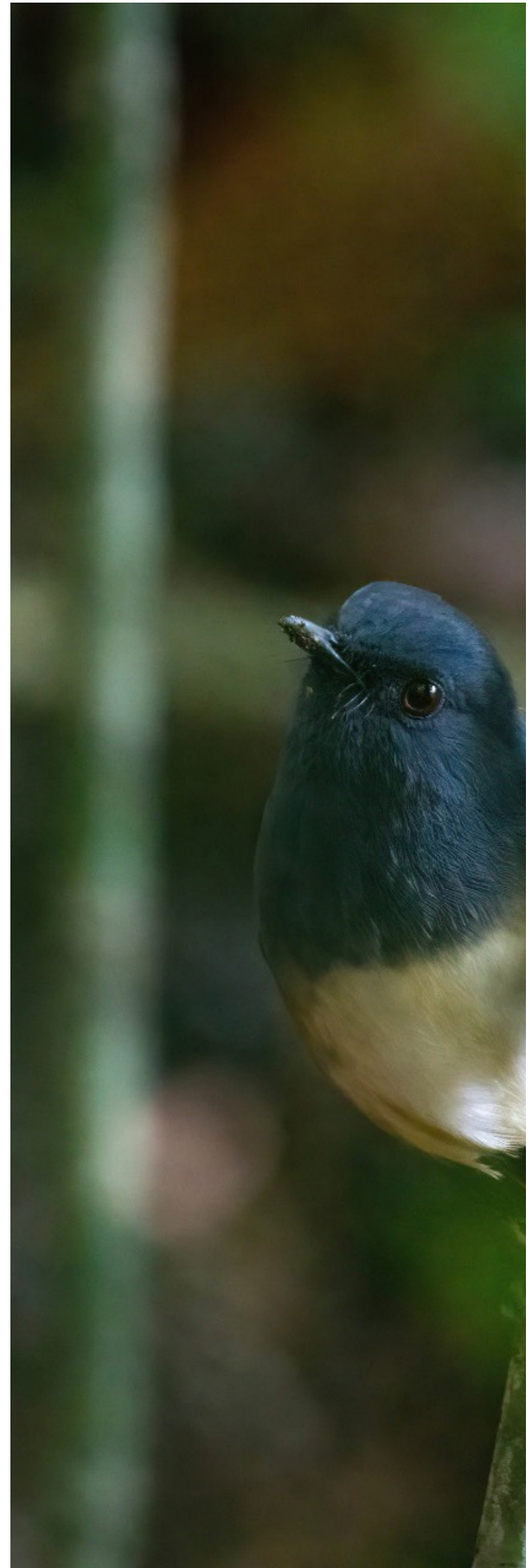
പക്ഷി വൈവിധ്യം. പ്രകൃതിയെ പ്രണയിക്കുന്ന സഞ്ചാരികളുടെ ഹൃദയത്തെ തൊട്ടുണർത്തുന്നതാണ് പക്ഷികളെ കണ്ടും കേട്ടും വയനാടൻ വഴികളിലൂടെയുള്ള യാത്ര.

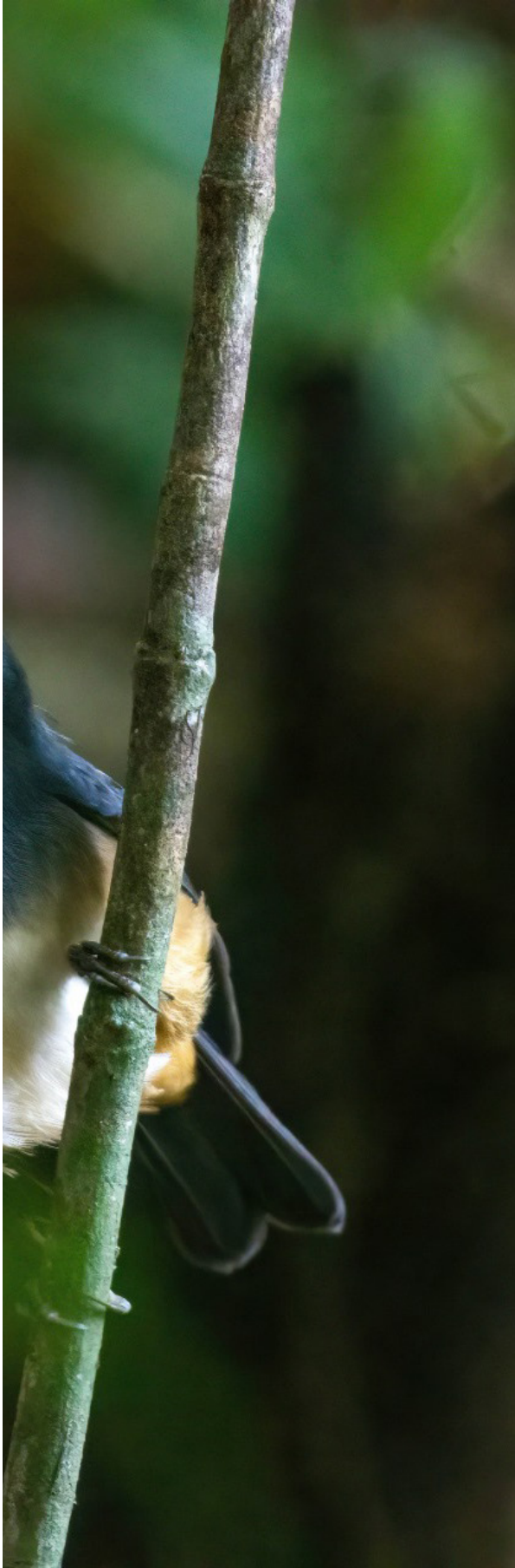
300ൽപരം ഇനം കിളികളുടെ വാസ ഭൂമിയാണ് വയനാട്. വനം-വന്യജീവി വകുപ്പിന്റെ നേതൃത്വത്തിൽ വനത്തിലും മലത്തലപ്പുകളിലും നീർത്തടങ്ങളിലും നടത്തിയ സർവ്വേകളിലാണ് ഇത്രയധികം ഇനം പക്ഷികളുടെ സാന്നിധ്യം സ്ഥിരീകരിച്ചത്. പക്ഷികളിൽ തദ്ദേശീയരും ദേശാടനം നടത്തുന്നവയും ഉണ്ട്.

ആകാശ ദ്വീപുകളെ ധന്യമാക്കി 120 കിളിയിനങ്ങൾ

ഏകദേശം 120 ഇനം കിളികളാണ് വയനാട്ടിൽ ആകാശ ദ്വീപുകളിൽ (മലത്തലപ്പുകൾ) വസിക്കുന്നത്.

പശ്ചിമഘട്ട മലനിരയിൽ വയനാടിന്റെ തെക്കേ അറ്റത്തിനും വടക്ക് കണ്ണൂർ ജില്ലയിലെ ആറളം വന്യജീവി സങ്കേതവുമായി





അതിർത്തി പങ്കിടുന്ന അമ്പലപ്പാറയ്ക്കും ഇടയിൽ നിരവധി ആകാശ ദ്വീപുകളുണ്ട്. സമുദ്രനിരപ്പിൽനിന്നു 1,500 മീറ്ററിനു മുകളിൽ സവിശേഷമായ ആവാസ വ്യവസ്ഥ നിലനിൽക്കുന്ന പർവത ശിഖരങ്ങളെയാണ് ആകാശ ദ്വീപുകളായി കണക്കാക്കുന്നത്. സമുദ്രനിരപ്പിൽ നിന്ന് 2,100 മീറ്റർ വരെ ഉയരത്തിലുള്ള കുറിച്ചുർമല, ബാണാസുരമല, സുര്യമുടി, ബ്രഹ്മഗിരി, ചെമ്പ്ര, വെള്ളരിമല, മണ്ടമല, അമ്പമല, വണ്ണാത്തിമല എന്നിവ ആകാശദ്വീപുകളുടെ പട്ടികയിൽപ്പെടും. ചോല-പുൽ വനസമൃദ്ധ്യം ഈ പ്രദേശങ്ങളുടെ സവിശേഷതയാണ്. തദ്ദേശീയവും വംശനാശ ഭീഷണി നേരിടുന്നതുമായ നിരവധി ജീവജാലങ്ങളുടെ ആവാസ വ്യവസ്ഥയാണ് ഈ മലനിരകൾ. ആകാശ ദ്വീപുകളിലെ വിശേഷ പക്ഷികളാണ് ബാണാസുര ചിലപ്പൻ, കരിംചെമ്പൻ പാറ്റപിടിയൻ, നീലഗിരി ഷോലകിളി, നീലഗിരി ത്രഷ്, ഹുഗ്സൺ വാർബ്ബർ, നീലഗിരി ത്രഷ്, യുറേഷ്യൻ മാർട്ടിൻ, ഒലിവ് പിപിറ്റ് തുടങ്ങിയവ.

ബാണാസുര ചിലപ്പൻ

പശ്ചിമഘട്ടമലനിരകളിൽ പുൽമേടുകൾക്കും പാറക്കെട്ടുകൾക്കുമിടയിലെ മലന്തലപ്പുകളിൽ മാത്രം കാണുന്ന പക്ഷിയിനമാണ് ബാണാസുര ചിലപ്പൻ. ജില്ലയിൽ ചെമ്പ്രമല, വെള്ളരിമല, ബാണാസുരമല എന്നിവിടങ്ങളിൽ ഈ ഇനം പക്ഷികളെ കാണാം. സമുദ്രനിരപ്പിൽനിന്നു 1,400-2,400

മീറ്റർ ഉയരത്തിലാണ് ബാണാസുര ചിലപ്പന്റെ വാസം. ആഗോളതലത്തിൽ വംശനാശ ഭീഷണി നേരിടുന്ന പക്ഷികളുടെ ഗണത്തിലാണ് ഈ കിളിയിനത്തിനു സ്ഥാനം. പ്രത്യേക പരിരക്ഷയും പഠനവും അർഹിക്കുന്ന കിളിയിനമാണിതെന്നു പക്ഷിഗവേഷകർ പറയുന്നു. ലോകത്ത് ഏകദേശം 2,500 ബാണാസുര ചിലപ്പനാണുള്ളത്. ഐയുസിഎൻ റെഡ് ലിസ്റ്റിൽ ഉൾപ്പെട്ട പക്ഷിയിനമാണിത്. തണുപ്പുള്ള പ്രദേശങ്ങളിലെ കുറ്റിക്കാടുകൾക്കും ചെടികൾക്കുമിടയിലാണ് വാസം. മൂന്നും നാലും പക്ഷികളടങ്ങുന്ന കുടുംബമാണ് ഇര തേടുന്നത്. പഴങ്ങളും പ്രാണികളുമാണ് ഭക്ഷണം. വെളുത്ത കൺപുരികം ബാണാസുര ചിലപ്പന്റെ പ്രത്യേകതയാണ്. ഒലിവ് ഗ്രീൻ ആണ് ശരീരത്തിന്റെ മുകൾ ഭാഗം. നല്ല കറുപ്പുനിറമാണ് താടി ഭാഗത്ത്. അധികദൂരം പറക്കാൻ കഴിയില്ല.

കരിംചെമ്പൻ പാറ്റപിടിയൻ

കറുത്ത തലയും ഓറഞ്ച് ശരീരവുമുള്ള ചെറിയ പക്ഷിയാണ് കരിംചെമ്പൻ പാറ്റപിടിയൻ. സമുദ്രനിരപ്പിൽനിന്നു 1,400 മീറ്ററിലധികം ഉയരത്തിലാണ് സാന്നിധ്യം. നിലത്തുനിന്നു ഒന്നര മീറ്റർ വരെ ഉയരത്തിൽ ലഭിക്കുന്ന പ്രാണികളാണ് പ്രധാന ഭക്ഷണം. ചോലക്കാടിനോടു ചേർന്നു പുൽമേടുകളിൽ പൂല്ലിന്റെ കുണ്ടുകൾക്കുള്ളിലാണ് കുട് വയ്ക്കുന്നത്.

നീലഗിരി ഷോലകിളി

നീലനിറമുള്ള പക്ഷിയാണ് നീലഗിരി ഷോലകിളി. സമുദ്രനിരപ്പിൽനിന്നു 1,200 മീറ്ററിൽ കൂടുതൽ ഉയരത്തിലുള്ള ഷോലക്കാടുകളിലാണ് ഇവയെ കാണുന്നത്. അടിവശത്ത് നേരിയ ഓറഞ്ച്, വെള്ള നിറം കാണാം. അടിക്കാടുകളിലാണ് ഇരതേടുന്നത്. മണ്ണിനും ചപ്പിനും ഇടയിൽ കാണുന്ന ചെറിയ പ്രാണികൾ, പുഴുക്കൾ എന്നിവയാണ് മുഖ്യഭക്ഷണം. പരമാവധി ഒരു മീറ്റർ ഉയരത്തിൽ കുറഞ്ഞ ദൂരമാണ് പറക്കുക. മിക്കവാറും നീലത്തു തുള്ളിത്തുള്ളിയാണ് സഞ്ചാരം. ലോകത്ത് നീലഗിരിയിലും വയനാട്ടിലും മാത്രമാണ് ഈ പക്ഷി ഇന്ന് ഉള്ളത്.

നീലഗിരി ത്രഷ്

പശ്ചിമഘട്ടത്തിൽ ഉയരംകൂടിയ മലനിരകളിൽ കാണുന്ന തദ്ദേശീയ ഇനം പക്ഷിയാണ് നീലഗിരി ത്രഷ്. നീലത്തു തുള്ളിത്തുള്ളി പോകുന്ന ഈ ഇനം പക്ഷികൾക്ക് നല്ല വലിപ്പമുണ്ട്. മണ്ണിലുള്ള ജീവികളെയാണ് ഭക്ഷിക്കുന്നത്. ഒലിവ് ഗ്രീനും കറുപ്പും വെള്ളയും കലർന്നതാണ് നിറം.

ഹുടുംസ് വാർബ്ബർ

ദേശാടനം ചെയ്ത് ശൈത്യകാലത്ത് ജില്ലയിൽ എത്തുന്ന പച്ചപ്പൊടിക്കുരുവിയാണ് ഹുടുംസ് വാർബ്ബർ. അത്യപൂർവമായാണ് വയനാട്ടിൽ ഇവയെ കാണുന്നത്. സമുദ്രനിരപ്പിൽനിന്നു 1,500 മീറ്റർ ഉയരത്തിൽ ഷോലക്കാടുകളിൽ പാർക്കുന്ന ഇവയ്ക്ക് മഞ്ഞകലർന്ന ഇളം പച്ചനിറമാണ്. വലിപ്പത്തിൽ അങ്ങാടി കുരുവികളേക്കാൾ ചെറുതാണ്. മെലിഞ്ഞതാണ് ശരീരപ്രകൃതി. ചിറകിനടുത്ത് വെള്ള വര കാണാം. ഈ

വർഷം ജനുവരിയിൽ നടന്ന സർവ്വേയിലാണ് ഹുടുംസ് വാർബ്ബർ സാന്നിധ്യം ജില്ലയിൽ ആദ്യമായി സ്ഥിരീകരിച്ചത്.

നീലഗിരി ഫ്ലൈ കാച്ചർ

പശ്ചിമഘട്ടത്തിൽ കാണുന്ന തദ്ദേശീയ ഇനം പക്ഷിയാണ് നീലഗിരി ഷോലകിളിയോട് സാദൃശ്യമുള്ള നീലഗിരി ഫ്ലൈ കാച്ചർ. മരങ്ങളിൽ രണ്ടര മുതൽ ആറുവരെ മീറ്റർ ഉയരമുള്ള ഭാഗങ്ങളിലാണ് ഇര തേടുന്നത്. വയനാട്ടിലെ ആകാശ ദ്വീപുകൾ വിവിധയിനം വരമ്പുകിളികൾ, പുൽക്കുരുവികൾ, പുളളുകൾ, വെള്ളിയറിയൻ എന്നിവയാൽ സമ്പന്നമാണ്. അവയുടെ പ്രജനന കേന്ദ്രങ്ങളായ പുൽമേടുകളുടെ സംരക്ഷണത്തിനു പ്രത്യേക പരിഗണന നൽകേണ്ടതുണ്ടെന്നു പ്രശസ്ത പക്ഷി നിരീക്ഷകനും ഹുടും സെന്റർ ഫോർ ഇക്കോളജി ആൻഡ് വൈൽഡ് ലൈഫ് ബയോളജി ഡയറക്ടറുമായ സി.കെ. വിഷ്ണുദാസ് പറയുന്നു.

നീർത്തടങ്ങളിൽ വർണ വിന്യാസം

ഏഷ്യൻ വാട്ടർ ബേർഡ് കാണ്ടിന്റെ ഭാഗമായി വയനാട് സോഷ്യൽ ഫോറസ്റ്റി ഡിവിഷനും ഹുടും സെന്റർ ഫോർ ഇക്കോളജി ആൻഡ് വൈൽഡ് ലൈഫ് ബയോളജിയും സംയുക്തമായി വയനാട്ടിലെ പ്രധാന തണ്ണീർത്തടങ്ങളിൽ പോയവർഷം സർവ്വേ നടത്തിയിരുന്നു. 48 ഇനം നീർപ്പക്ഷികളാണ് സർവ്വേ സംഘത്തിന്റെ കണ്ണിലൂടെക്കിയത്. പനമരം കൊറ്റില്ലം, വള്ളിയൂർക്കാവ്, ആറാട്ടുതറ, കാരാപ്പുഴ, നെല്ലാച്ചാൽ, ചേക്കാടി, കുറുവ, ബാണാസുര ഡാം

പക്ഷികളുടെ ശ്വസനഭൂമിയായ വയനാട്

വിസ്തൃതക്കാഴ്ചകളും സമ്പന്നമായ പൈതൃകവൈഭവവുമൊക്കെമൂലം ലോകമെങ്ങുമുള്ള സഞ്ചാരികളെ ആകർഷിക്കുന്ന ദേശമാകുകയാണ് വയനാട്. പ്രകൃതിയുടെ അഹോർണിശ സൃഷ്ടിയായ വയനാട്, സസ്യജാലവും വന്യജീവികളും മാത്രമല്ല, അത്യപൂർവമായ പക്ഷിവൈവിധ്യത്തിലും ശ്രദ്ധേയമാണ്.





മലപ്പുറം, കോഴിക്കോട്, കണ്ണൂർ, കർണാടക, തമിഴ് നാട് ജില്ലകളുമായി അതിർത്തി പങ്കിടുന്ന വയനാട് 300ൽപരം കിളിനിനങ്ങളുടെ വാസസ്ഥലമാണ്. പുൽമേടുകളും മലകളുമുള്ള ആകാശദീപുകളിൽ മാത്രം 120യോളം ഇനങ്ങൾ. ഇതിൽ ബാണാസുര ചിലപ്പൻ, നീലഗിരി ഷോലക്കിളി, നീലഗിരി ത്രഷ്, ഹ്യൂംസ് വാർബ്ബർ തുടങ്ങി ലോകത്തേക്ക് പോലും അപൂർവമായവയും ഉണ്ട്.

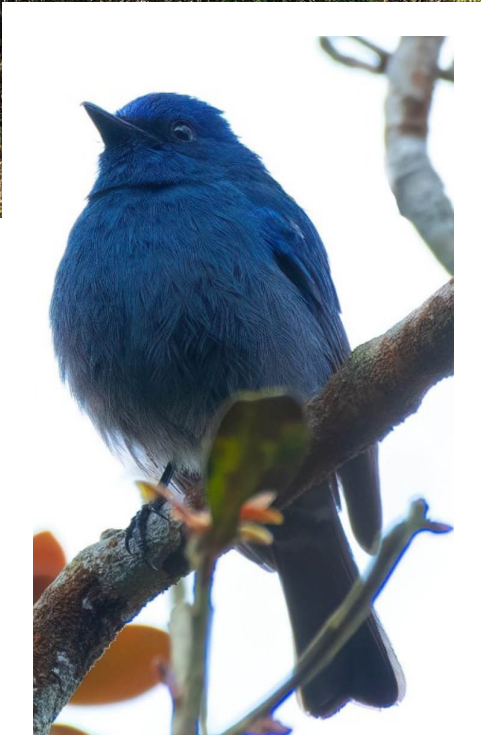
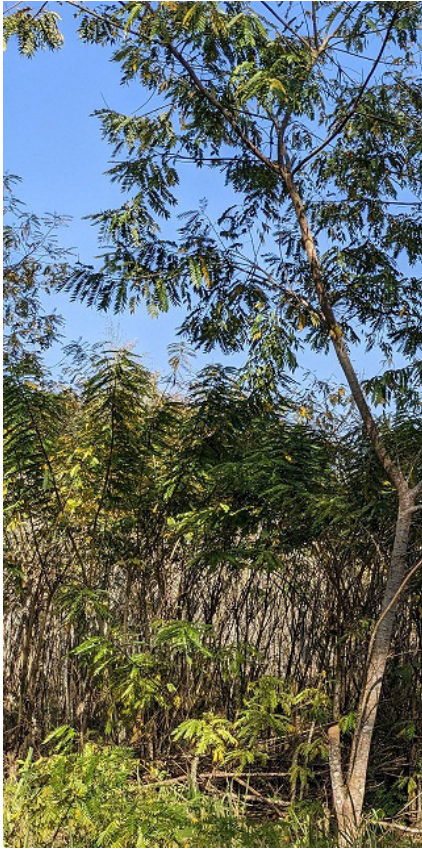
റിസർവയർ, അമ്മവയൽ, ഗോളൂർ എന്നിവ ജില്ലയിലെ പ്രധാന നിർത്തടങ്ങളാണ്. ചേരക്കോഴി, അരിവാൾകൊക്ക്, ചുളൻ എന്നെ, പുളുളിച്ചുണ്ടൻ താറാവ്, കന്യാസ്ത്രീ കൊക്ക്, പച്ച എന്നെ, ചാരത്തലയൻ തിത്തിരി, കയൽപരുന്ത്, പാമ്പ് പരുന്ത്, വെള്ളക്കൊക്കൻ കുളക്കോഴി, പട്ടക്കോഴി, ചാരമുണ്ടി, ചെന്തലയൻ അരിവാൾകൊക്കൻ, കൊമ്പൻ കുയിൽ, വാലൻ താമരക്കോഴി, ചെറിയ നീർകാക്ക, താമരക്കോഴി ഇങ്ങനെ നീളുന്നതാണ് ജലപക്ഷികളുടെ നിര.

ചേരക്കോഴി

നിർത്തടങ്ങളിൽ കാണുന്നതിൽ വംശനാശ ഭീഷണി നേരിടുന്ന പക്ഷിയിനമാണ് ചേരക്കോഴി. കാഴ്ചയിൽ പാമ്പിനെ പോലെയുള്ള ഈ പക്ഷികൾ ബാണാസുര-കാരാപ്പുഴ റിസർവോയറുകളിലാണുള്ളത്. എണ്ണത്തിൽ കുറവാണിവ. മീനാണ് പ്രധാന ഭക്ഷണം. നീണ്ട കഴുത്തും കറുപ്പുനിറവുമാണ് ചേരക്കോഴിക്ക്. പ്രജനകാലത്ത് പുറത്ത് സ്വർണനിറം പ്രത്യക്ഷമാകും.

അരിവാൾ കൊക്കൻ

വയനാട്ടിൽ പ്രധാനമായും പനമരം കൊറ്റില്ലത്തിൽ കാണുന്ന ജലപക്ഷിയാണ് അരിവാൾ കൊക്കൻ. മറ്റു ചില ഇനങ്ങളെ അപേക്ഷിച്ച് എണ്ണത്തിൽ കുടുതൽ ഉണ്ടെങ്കിലും സംരക്ഷണ പ്രാധാന്യം അർഹിക്കുന്ന പക്ഷിയാണിത്. കേരളത്തിൽ അരിവാൾ കൊക്കൻ ഏറ്റവും കൂടുതൽ കൂടുകൂടുന്ന ഇടമാണ് പനമരം കൊറ്റില്ലം. അരിവാൾ കൊക്കനെ ദേശാടനകിളിയായി ആളുകൾ തെറ്റിദ്ധരിക്കാറുണ്ട്. വയനാടിനു പുറത്ത് തമിഴ്നാട്ടിലേക്കും കർണാടകയിലേക്കും ഇവ സഞ്ചരിക്കാറുണ്ട്. എന്നാൽ പ്രജനനം സ്വദേശങ്ങളിലാണ്. വയലുകളിലും പുഴകളിലും തോടുകളിലും മറ്റും ധാരാളം വെള്ളവും ഭക്ഷണ ലഭ്യമായുള്ള മഴക്കാലമാണ് അരിവാൾ കൊക്കന്റെ പ്രജനന കാലം. ഞണ്ട്, ഞവിയെത്തി തുടങ്ങിയവയാണ് പ്രധാന ഭക്ഷണം. വെളുത്ത ശരീരവും കറുത്ത തലയുമാണ് ഈ ഇനം പക്ഷിക്ക്. വളരെ ഉയരത്തിൽ ഒരുപാട് ദൂരം പറക്കാൻ ശേഷിയുണ്ട്.



താമരക്കോഴി

അധികം ആഴമില്ലാത്തതും ആമ്പലും താമരയും വളരുന്നതുമായ ജലാശയങ്ങളിലാണ് താമരക്കോഴികളുള്ളത്. ആമ്പലുകളുടെയും താമരകളുടെയും ഇലകളിലൂടെ നടന്നുപോകാൻ പര്യാപ്തമായ നീണ്ടുമെലിഞ്ഞ കാൽവിരലുകളാണ് ഇവയ്ക്കുള്ളത്. വെള്ളയും പച്ചയും കലർന്ന നിറമാണ്. കോഴിയുടേതുപോലെ നീണ്ടതാണ് വാൽ. മീൻ, പ്രാണി, തവള തുടങ്ങിയവയെയാണ് ആഹരിക്കുന്നത്. പറക്കുന്നതിനു പുറമേ നീന്തുന്നതിനും ശേഷിയുണ്ട്. വയനാട്ടിൽ കാരാപ്പുഴ റിസർവോയറിന്റെ ഭാഗങ്ങളിൽ താമരക്കോഴികളെ കാണാം.

നീലക്കോഴി

കാഴ്ചയിൽ ഭംഗിയും സാധാരണ കോഴിയുടെ വലിപ്പമുള്ളതുമായ പക്ഷിയാണ് നീലക്കോഴി. തലയിൽ മകുടം പോലെ ചുവന്ന ഭാഗമുണ്ട്. കോഴിയുടേതുപോലുള്ള കൊക്കാണ്. ജലാശയത്തിന്റെ അരികുകളിലുള്ള പുല്ലിലാണ് മുട്ടയിടുന്നത്.

പുള്ളിച്ചുണ്ടൻ താറാവ്

ജില്ലയിൽ പൊതുവെ കാണുന്ന നീർപക്ഷിയിനമാണ് പുള്ളിച്ചുണ്ടൻ താറാവ്. വലിപ്പമുള്ള പക്ഷിയാണിത്. മത്സ്യമാണ് പ്രധാന ഭക്ഷണം. കൊക്കിന്റെ അഗ്രഭാഗത്തെ ചുമപ്പുനിറം പ്രത്യേകതയാണ്. നീലയും വെ

വംശനാശ ഭീഷണി നേരിടുന്ന കഴുകൻമാർക്ക് വയനാട് പ്രധാന ആവാസവ്യവസ്ഥയാണ്. ചുട്ടിക്കുഴുകൻ, കാതിലകുഴുകൻ, തവിട്ടുകുഴുകൻ എന്നിവയെ കാടുകളിൽ കാണാം. ഇവയ്ക്ക് പുറമേ നിരവധി തവണ ഇടവേളകളിൽ ഹിമാലയൻ കഴുകൻ പോലെയുള്ള ദേശാടനവരും എത്താറുണ്ട്.

ഇളയും തവിട്ടും നിറങ്ങൾ കലർന്നതാണ് ശരീരം. എണ്ണത്തിൽ കുറവാണ്. ബാണാസുര, കാരാപ്പുഴ റിസർവോയറുകളിലും ഇടയ്ക്ക് നെൽപാടങ്ങളിലും ഇവയെ കാണാം. ദീർഘദൂരം പറക്കാൻ പ്രാപ്തിയുണ്ട്.

പച്ച എരണ്ട

താമരയും ആമ്പലുമുള്ള ചെറിയ ജലാശയങ്ങളിൽ കാണുന്ന ചെറിയ ഇനം പക്ഷിയാണ് പച്ച എരണ്ട. വെള്ളവും പച്ചയും കലർന്ന നിറമാണ് ആൺ പക്ഷികൾക്ക്. പറക്കുമ്പോൾ ചിറകിൽ പച്ചനിറം കാണാം.

ചുളൻ എരണ്ട

പനമരം, കാരാപ്പുഴ ഭാഗങ്ങളിൽ കാണുന്ന പക്ഷിയിനമാണ് ചുളൻ എരണ്ട. നല്ല തവിട്ടുനിറത്തിലുള്ള പക്ഷിയാണിത്. മരത്തിനുമുകളിലാണ് കുടൊരുക്കുന്നത്. അഞ്ചും പത്തും മുട്ടയിട്ട് കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങളെ വിരിയിക്കും. മുട്ടവിരിഞ്ഞുണ്ടാകുന്ന കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങൾ മരത്തിനുമുകളിൽനിന്നു താഴേക്കു വീഴും. കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങളെ തൊട്ടടുത്ത ജലാശയത്തിലേക്ക് തള്ളപക്ഷി നടത്തിയാണ് കൊണ്ടുപോകുന്നത്. രാത്രി ജലാശയങ്ങളിൽ വിശ്രമിക്കുന്ന ചുളൻ എരണ്ടുകൾ രാത്രിയാണ് ഇര പിടിക്കുന്നത്. മീൻ ഉൾപ്പെടെ ജലാശയത്തിൽ ലഭ്യമായ വിഭവങ്ങളാണ് ഭക്ഷണം. ചുളൻവിളി പോലെ പ്രത്യേക ശബ്ദം

മുണ്ടാക്കിയാണ് രാത്രി പറക്കുന്നത്.

കന്യാസ്ത്രീ കൊക്ക്

ദേശാടന പക്ഷിയാണ് കന്യാസ്ത്രീ കൊക്ക്. വലിയ ഇനം കൊക്കാണ്. ഓഗസ്റ്റ്, സെപ്റ്റംബർ, ഒക്ടോബർ മാസങ്ങളിലാണ് ജില്ലയിൽ ഇവയെ കാണുന്നത്. കഴുത്തിന് വെള്ളനിറവും പുറത്ത് തവിട്ടുകലർന്ന കറുപ്പുനിറവുമാണ്. ശരീരപ്രകൃതിയാണ് ഇവ കന്യാസ്ത്രീ കൊക്കെന്നു അറിയപ്പെടാൻ കാരണം. വലിപ്പമുള്ള കൊക്കാണ് ഇവയുടേത്. ഞണ്ട്, ഞവുണിക, മണ്ണിലുള്ള ചെറിയ തവളകൾ, പാമ്പ് എന്നിവയാണ് ആഹാരം. വളരെ ഉയരത്തിൽ പറക്കുന്ന കന്യാസ്ത്രീ കൊക്കിന് മറ്റു കൊക്കിനങ്ങൾക്കൊപ്പം കാണാറുണ്ട്.

കുഴുകൻമാരുടെ ദേശം

ദക്ഷിണേന്ത്യയിൽ അവശേഷിക്കുന്ന കുഴുകൻമാരുടെ മുഖ്യ ആവാസവ്യവസ്ഥയാണ് വയനാടൻ കാടുകൾ. രോഗങ്ങൾ പടർന്നുപിടിക്കാതെ സമൂഹത്തെ സംരക്ഷിക്കുന്നതിൽ വലിയ പങ്ക് വഹിക്കുന്ന ജീവി വർഗമാണ് കുഴുകൻ. വംശനാശ ഭീഷണി നേരിടുന്ന പക്ഷിയിനമാണിത്. ചുട്ടി, കാതില, തവിട്ട് എന്നിവയാണ് ജില്ലയിലെ പ്രധാന കുഴുകൻ ഇനങ്ങൾ. വന്യജീവി സങ്കേതത്തിലെ കാക്കപ്പാടം, അയ്യപ്പൻപാറ, പുഞ്ചവയൽ, കല്ലുമുക്ക്, ഒട്ടിപ്പാറ, നല്ലതണ്ണി, ദോഡ്ഡക്കുളസി, ദൊഡ്ഡാടി, മരഗു, എടകൊമ്പം വനങ്ങൾ കുഴുകൻമാരുടെ ആവാസകേന്ദ്രങ്ങളാണ്.

ചെന്തലയൻ കുഴുകൻ (കാതിലക്കുഴുകൻ)

ചുട്ടിക്കുഴുകനേക്കാൾ വലിപ്പം കുറഞ്ഞതും നല്ല കറുപ്പുനിറവുമുള്ള പക്ഷിയാണ് ചെന്തലയൻ കുഴുകൻ. കാലിനും കൊക്കിനും തലയ്ക്കും പിങ്ക് കലർന്ന ചുവപ്പുനിറമാണ്. പറക്കുമ്പോൾ അടിയിൽ വെള്ള നിറം കാണാം. എളുപ്പം തിരിച്ചറിയാൻ കഴിയുന്ന കുഴുകൻ ഇനമാണിത്. വയനാട്ടിലെ മുത്തങ്ങ വനത്തിനു പുറമേ ബന്ദിപ്പുര, നാഗരഹോള, മുതുമല കാടുകളിലും ഇവയെ കാണാം. 25 ഓളം ചെന്തലയൻ കുഴുകനെയാണ് ഇതിനകം സർവ്വേകളിൽ കാണാനായത്. കാതുകൾ തുങ്ങിയാണുള്ളത്.

ചുട്ടിക്കുഴുകൻ

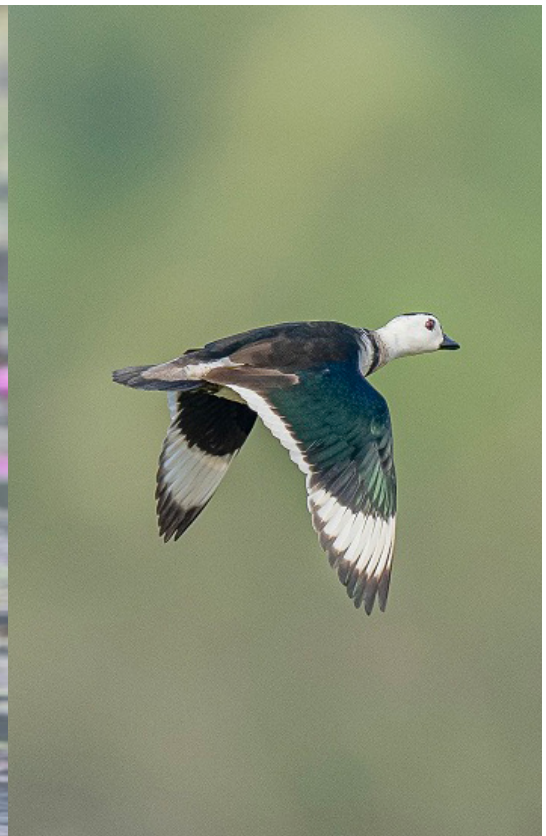
വംശനാശ ഭീഷണി നേരിടുന്ന പക്ഷിയിനമാണ് ചുട്ടിക്കുഴുകൻ. ഇവയുടെ തലയ്ക്ക് ചാരനിറമാണ്. തവിട്ടു നിറമാണ് പുറം ഭാഗത്ത്. പറക്കുമ്പോൾ അടിവശത്ത് വെള്ള നിറം പ്രകടമാണ്. ഒരു കുട്ടത്തിൽ നാൽപതും അൻപതും കുഴുകൻമാരെ കാണാം. ചുട്ടിക്കുഴുകന്റെ ശരീരപ്രകൃതമുള്ളതാണ് തവിട്ടു കുഴുകൻ. തുവലുകൾ പുറമേ നല്ല തവിട്ടുനിറമാണ്. നീളമുള്ളതാണ് കൊക്ക്. ഹിമാലയൻ കുഴുകനെയും ജില്ലയിൽ കണ്ടിട്ടുണ്ട്. നല്ല വലിപ്പമുള്ളതാണ് ഹിമാലയൻ കുഴുകൻ. ഇളം പ്രായത്തിൽ കൂടുംവിട്ട് ഒറ്റയ്ക്കു പറന്നെത്തുന്നതാണ് ഹിമാലയൻ കുഴുകൻ.

പരുന്തുകൾ, മുത്തുകൾ

വയനാട്ടിൽ വന്യജീവി സങ്കേതത്തിലും നോർത്ത്, സൗത്ത് വനം ഡിവിഷനുകളിലുമായി 27 പരുന്തുവർ

പശ്ചിമഘട്ടത്തിന്റെ പാർപ്പിട സമ്പത്തു

ജില്ലയിൽ 27 പരുന്തിനിനങ്ങളും ഒമ്പത് മുത്തുകളും രേഖപ്പെടുത്തിയിട്ടുണ്ട്. ജൈഡൻ ബാസ്, ലെഗ്രീസ് ഹോക്ക് ഊഗിൾ പോലുള്ള അപൂർവ ഇനങ്ങൾ ഇവിടത്തെ വനങ്ങളിലും ആകാശദീപുകളിലുമായി ഉള്ള ആവാസവ്യവസ്ഥയിൽ കാണാം.



ഗങ്ങളുടെയും ഒമ്പതിനും മൂങ്ങകളുടെയും സാന്നിധ്യം ഇതിനകം സ്ഥിരീകരിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്.

ജർഡൻസ് ബാസ, യുറേഷ്യൻ സ്പാരോഹോക്ക്, ലെഗ്ഗിസ് ഹോക്ക് ഈഗിൾ...ഇങ്ങനെ നീളുന്നതാണ് പരുന്തുവർഗ്ഗിനര. പശ്ചിമഘട്ടത്തിൽ മാത്രം കാണുന്ന ചെറിയ ഇനം പരുന്താണ് ജെർഡൻ ബാസ. ഇന്ത്യയിൽത്തന്നെ അപൂർവമാണിവ. വയനാട് അമ്പയുടെ പ്രധാന ആവാസ കേന്ദ്രമാണ്. തലയിൽ ഉയർന്നുനിൽക്കുന്ന കിന്നരികൾ ഈയിനം പരുന്തിന്റെ സവിശേഷതയാണ്. മഞ്ഞുകലർന്ന തവിട്ടുനിറമാണ് മേൽ ഭാഗത്ത്. അടിവശത്ത് ഓറഞ്ച്, വെള്ള വരകൾ കാണാം. ഓന്ത്, അരണ, പച്ചത്തവള, ചീവീട് എന്നിവ പ്രധാന ഭക്ഷണമാണ്. ജില്ലയിൽ മുത്തങ്ങയ്ക്കടുത്ത് വനത്തിൽ കാണുന്നതാണ് ലെഗ്ഗിസ് ഹോക്ക് ഈഗിൾ. പശ്ചിമഘട്ടത്തിൽ മാത്രം കാണുന്ന വലിയ പരുന്തിനമാണിത്. കാടുകളിൽ വസിക്കുന്നതിൽ ഏറ്റവും ശക്തനായ പക്ഷിയുമാണിത്. ജെർഡൻ ബാസയെപ്പോലെയാണ് ഏറെക്കുറെ ശരീരലക്ഷണങ്ങൾ. തലയിൽ തുവലുകൾ പൊന്തിനിൽക്കും. കാലുകളും നഖങ്ങളും ദൃഢമാണ്. കരിക്കുരങ്ങ്, കുരമാൻ എന്നിവയെ അനായാസം റാഞ്ചും. മൂയൽ, മലയണ്ണാൻ, കാട്ടുകോഴി, നാട്ടുകോഴി തുടങ്ങിയവയെയും ആഹരിക്കാറുണ്ട്. ഒമ്പതിനും മൂങ്ങകളെയാണ് വയനാട്ടിൽ

കണ്ടുവരുന്നത്. ബ്രാൻ ഓൾ (വെള്ളിമൂങ്ങ), ഹോറസ്സ് ഈഗിൾ ഓൾ, ജംഗിൾ ഓലെറ്റ് (ചെമ്പൻ നത്ത്), ബ്രൗൺ ഫിഷ് ഓൾ (മീൻ കുമൻ), ഓറയിൻ്റൽ സ്കോപ്പ് ഓൾ (സൈരന്ധി നത്ത്), ഇന്ത്യൻ സ്കോപ്പ് ഓൾ (ചെവിയൻ നത്ത്), മോട്ടൽഡ് വുഡ് ഓൾ (കാലൻ കോഴി), ബ്രൗൺ വുഡ് ഓൾ (കൊല്ലിക്കുറവൻ) തുടങ്ങിയവ ജില്ലയിലെ മൂങ്ങ ഇനങ്ങളാണ്.

അയൽവനത്തിൽ 290ൽപരം ഇനം പക്ഷികൾ

വയനാട് വന്യജീവി സങ്കേതത്തിലെ തോൽ ഷെട്ടി റോഞ്ചുമായി അതിരൂപപ്പെടുന്ന കർണാടകയിലെ നാഗരഹോള ദേശീയോദ്യാനവും പക്ഷി സമ്പത്തിനു പ്രശസ്തമാണ്. 290ൽപരം ഇനം പക്ഷികളുടെ സാന്നിധ്യം

വായനാടിന്റെ ആകാശവീപുകളും നീർത്തടങ്ങളും വിസ്മയകരമായ പക്ഷിജാലങ്ങളെ ആവാസവ്യവസ്ഥയാക്കി മാറ്റുമ്പോൾ, പ്രകൃതിയുടെയും ജീവജാലങ്ങളുടെയും ഭംഗിയെ അടുത്തറിയാനുള്ള അതുല്യമായ അവസരമാണ് ഇനിയും നമ്മെ കാത്തിരിക്കുന്നത്.

വിഖ്യാത കടുവാസങ്കേതവുമായ നാഗരഹോള വനത്തിൽ സ്ഥിരീകരിച്ചിട്ടുണ്ട്. ഡിബി കുപ്പ, മേടിക്കുപ്പ, കല്ലഹല്ല്, അനെയാ കുർ, നാഗരഹോള, ഹുൻസൂർ, വീരനഹൊ സഹള്ളി വൈൽഡ് ലൈഫ് റോഞ്ചുകൾ അടങ്ങുന്നതാണ് നാഗരഹോള ദേശീയോദ്യാനം. കുറ്റിത്തലയൻ വാത്ത്, മലബാർ അസുര കാടൻ, കാതിലക്കുഴുകൻ, ചുട്ടിക്കുഴുകൻ, മുഴയൻ താറാവ്, കിന്നരി പ്രാപ്പറുന്റ്, കരിമ്പറുന്റ്, അൾട്രാ മഹൈൻ ഷീളെ കാച്ചർ എന്നിവ നാഗരഹോളയിലെ അപൂർവ്വയിനം കിളികളാണ്. നീലത്തത്ത, കോഴി വേഴാമ്പൽ, കാട്ടുനീലി, ചെറുതേൻകിളി തുടങ്ങിയ തദ്ദേശ ഇനം പക്ഷികളും ഈ കാടുകളിലുണ്ട്.

വെല്ലുവിളികൾ നിരവധി

വയനാട്ടിലെ പക്ഷിസമ്പത്ത്, മറ്റിടങ്ങളിലെ നപോലെ നേരിടുന്ന വെല്ലുവിളികൾ പലതാണ്. അതിൽ പ്രധാനപ്പെട്ടതാണ് കാലാവസ്ഥാവ്യതിയാനം, പശ്ചിമഘട്ട മലനിരകളിലെ അനിയന്ത്രിത ടൂറിസം, ഭൂവിനിയോഗത്തിലെ മാറ്റം, വന നശീകരണം, അധിനിവേശ സസ്യങ്ങളുടെ വ്യാപനം, കാട്ടുതീ എന്നിവ. യുവജനങ്ങൾ ഉന്നത വിദ്യാഭ്യാസത്തിനും തൊഴിലിനും വിദേശരാജ്യങ്ങളിലേക്കു പോകുന്നതുപോലും ജില്ലയിലെ പക്ഷി സമ്പത്തിനെ പരോക്ഷമായി ബാധിക്കും.





ന്നുണ്ടെന്ന് യുവ പക്ഷി ഗവേഷകൻ എ.വി. അഭിജിത്ത് പറയുന്നു. കർഷക കുടുംബാംഗങ്ങളിൽ പലരും കൃഷിഭൂമിയുടെ ഭാഗം മരങ്ങൾ മറിച്ചുമാറ്റിയശേഷം തുണ്ടങ്ങളാക്കി വിറ്റാണ് വിദേശ വിദൂഷാസത്തിനും തൊഴിലിനുള്ള പണം കണ്ടെത്തുന്നത്. കൃഷിയിടങ്ങൾ വ്യക്തരഹിതമായ തരിശുഭൂമിയാകുമ്പോൾ ഇല്ലാതാകുന്നത് വിവിധയിനം പക്ഷികളുടെ ആവാസ ഇടങ്ങളാണ്. കർഷകർ ബഹുവിധ കൃഷിയിൽനിന്നു മാറി ഏകവിധ കൃഷിയിലേക്ക് തിരിയുന്നതും നെൽകൃഷിയുള്ള വയലിന്റെ അളവ് കുറയുന്നതും പക്ഷി സമ്പത്തിനെ ബാധിക്കുന്നുണ്ട്.

കാലാവസ്ഥാവ്യതിയാനം ആവാസവ്യവസ്ഥകളിലെ താപനിലകളിൽ വരുത്തുന്ന മാറ്റം പക്ഷികളുടെ ജീവിതക്രമത്തെ ബാധിക്കുകയാണ്. മലകളുടെ പല ഉയരങ്ങളിൽ കാറ്റ്, മഴയളവ്, തണുപ്പ് എന്നിവയിലെ മാറ്റത്തിന് കാലാവസ്ഥാവ്യതിയാനം കാരണമാകുകയാണ്. ഓരോ ഉയരത്തിലും കാണുന്ന പക്ഷികളും മറ്റു ജൈവജാലങ്ങളും മാറിമാറി വരും. മലത്തലപ്പുകളിൽ കൂടിയ അളവിൽ മഴയും തണുപ്പും ആവശ്യമുള്ള

വംശനാശ ഭീഷണിയിലും അത്യുപർവതയിലും നൃത്തം ചെയ്യുന്ന കിളികളോടൊപ്പം, വയനാട് സഞ്ചാരികളെ പ്രകൃതിയുടെ ഹൃദയത്തിലേക്ക് ക്ഷണിക്കുന്നു ഒരു ചിറകുകൾ തൊട്ടുയരുന്ന അനുഭവത്തിലേക്ക്.

ജീവികൾ ഉണ്ടാകും. ഏറ്റവും ഉയരത്തിൽ വസിക്കുന്ന ജീവികൾക്കു വീണ്ടും തേടാനുള്ള ഉയരം ഇല്ലാതാകും. ഇത് അവയുടെ വംശം തന്നെ കുറ്റിയറ്റുപോകുന്ന അവസ്ഥയ്ക്ക് കാരണമാകും. പശ്ചിമഘട്ട മലനിരകളിൽ സമുദ്രനിരപ്പിൽനിന്നു 1,600 മീറ്റർ വരെ ഉയരത്തിൽ ടൂറിസം സംരംഭങ്ങളുണ്ട്. ഇത് മലത്തലപ്പുകളിൽ വസിക്കുന്ന തദ്ദേശീയവും അത്യുപർവതവുമായ പക്ഷി ഇനങ്ങളുടെ നിലനിൽപ്പുതന്നെ അപകടത്തിലാക്കുകയാണെന്ന് അഭിപ്രായപ്പെടുന്നവർ പക്ഷി ഗവേഷകർക്കിടയിലുണ്ട്. നിർമ്മിതികൾ മാത്രമല്ല, മനുഷ്യരുടെ സാന്നിധ്യംപോലും പക്ഷികളിൽ വർധിച്ചു

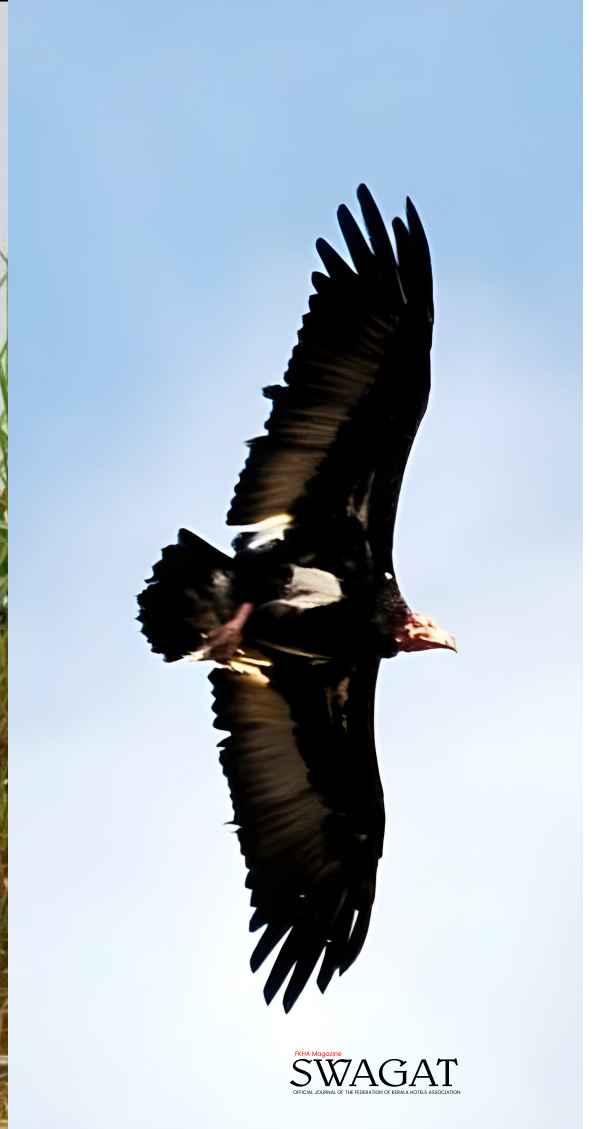
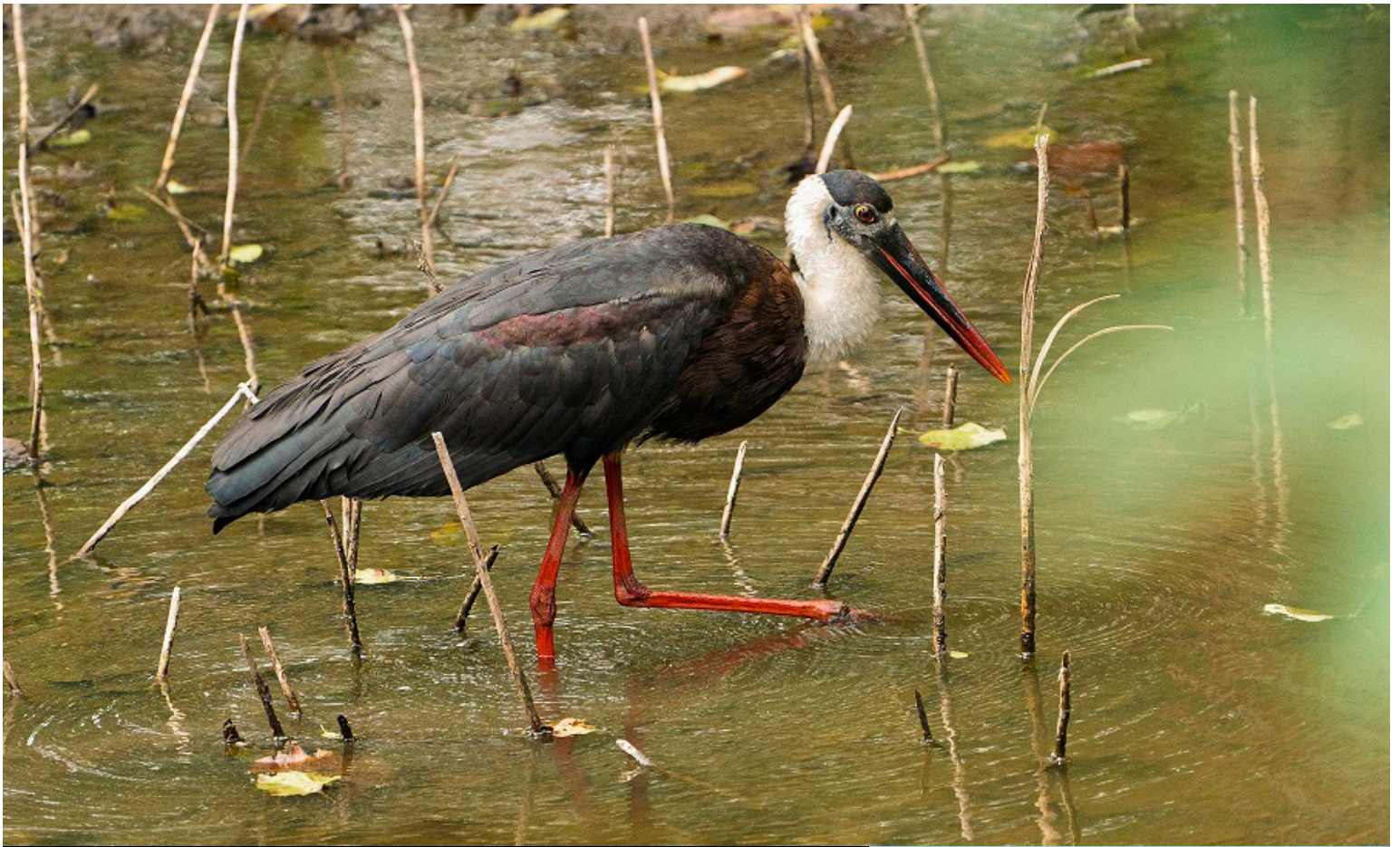
അലോസരത്തിനു കാരണമാകുന്നുവെന്ന് അവർ ചൂണ്ടിക്കാട്ടുന്നു.

അധിനിവേശ സസ്യവ്യാപനം

അധിനിവേശ സസ്യങ്ങളുടെ വ്യാപനം മൂലം വനത്തിലെ ആവാസ വ്യവസ്ഥയിലുണ്ടാകുന്ന അപചയം വയനാട്ടിൽ പക്ഷി-മൃഗ-സസ്യ സമ്പത്ത് നേരിടുന്ന മുഖ്യ വെല്ലുവിളിയാണെന്ന് വയനാട് പ്രകൃതി സംരക്ഷണ സമിതി പ്രസിഡന്റ് എൻ. ബാദുഷ, സെക്രട്ടറി തോമസ് അമ്പലവയൽ എന്നിവർ പറയുന്നു.

അധിനിവേശ സസ്യങ്ങൾ കീഴടക്കിയിരിക്കുകയാണ് വയനാടൻ വനത്തിന്റെ പല ഭാഗങ്ങളെയും. ഗതകാലത്ത് നൂറുകണക്കിനു ഹെക്ടർ സ്വാഭാവിക വനം ഏകവിധ തേന്താട്ടുമാക്കിയതും കാടിന്റെ നാശത്തിനു കാരണമായി.

23 ഇനം അധിനിവേശ സസ്യങ്ങളാണ് വയനാട് വന്യജീവി സങ്കേതത്തിൽ തഴച്ചു വളരുന്നത്. നീലഗിരി ജൈവ മണ്ഡലത്തിൽ അധിനിവേശസസ്യങ്ങളിൽ അധികവും 344.4 ചതുരശ്ര കിലോമീറ്റർ മാത്രം വിസ്തൃതിയുള്ള വയനാട് വന്യജീവി സങ്കേതത്തിൽ





ഭീഷണിയായി കാട്ടുതീ

വേനൽക്കാലങ്ങളിൽ വനത്തിലും മലകളിലും ഉണ്ടാകുന്ന തീപിടിത്തം പക്ഷി സമ്പത്തിന് വലിയ ഭീഷണിയാണ്. വനസേനാംഗങ്ങൾ ഉണർന്നു പ്രവർത്തിക്കുന്നതിനിടയിലും കാട്ടുതീ വിഴുകയാണ്. ചെമ്പ്രമല, ബാണാസുരമല, കുറിച്ചൂർമല എന്നിവിടങ്ങളിലും ബ്രഹ്മഗിരി കുന്നുകളിലും വേനലിൽ കാട്ടുതീ അപൂർവതയല്ല. കത്തിയമരുന്ന ചോലക്കാടുകളും പുൽമേടുകളും നിരവധിയിനം ഖരപക്ഷികളുടെയും ശവപ്പറമ്പാകുകയാണ്. തീപിടിക്കുന്ന മരങ്ങളിലെ കിളിക്കൂടുകളും കുഞ്ഞുങ്ങളും വെണ്ണിറായി മാറുകയാണ്. ഉയരത്തിൽ പറന്ന് അകലാൻ കഴിയാത്ത പക്ഷികളെയും തീ വിഴുങ്ങും. മിക്ക വേനലിലും ഹെക്ടർ കണക്കിന് അടിക്കാടാണ് വയനാടൻ വനത്തിൽ നശിക്കുന്നത്. മനുഷ്യനിർമ്മിതമാണ് വനത്തിലെ തീപിടിത്തങ്ങളിൽ പലതുമെന്നതാണ് യാഥാർഥ്യം. കാട്ടുതീ പ്രതിരോധ പ്രവർത്തനങ്ങളുടെ ഭാഗമായി വനം-വന്യജീവി വകുപ്പിന്റെ നേതൃത്വത്തിൽ ബോധവൽക്കരണം, ഫയർ ലൈൻ നിർമ്മാണം തുടങ്ങിയവ നടത്താറുണ്ട്.

Pix. By Special Arrangement

ലാണ്. മഞ്ഞക്കൊന്ന, അരിപ്പു (കൊങ്ങിണി), കമ്മ്യൂണിസ്റ്റുപച്ച, ആനത്തൊട്ടാവാടി, ധൂതരാഷ്ട്രപ്പച്ച, പാർത്തിനിയം, കമ്മൽപ്പു... ഇങ്ങനെ നീളുകയാണ് വനത്തിലും പുറത്തുമുള്ള അധിനിവേശ സസ്യ ഇനങ്ങളുടെ നിര. മുത്തങ്ങ, ബത്തേരി, തോൽപ്പെട്ടി, കുറിച്ചൂട് എന്നീ നാല് റേഞ്ചുകൾ ഉൾപ്പെടുന്നതാണ് വയനാട് വന്യജീവി സങ്കേതം. ഇതിൽ കുറിച്ചൂട് ഒഴികെ റേഞ്ചുകളിൽ മഞ്ഞക്കൊന്ന വൻതോതിലാണ് വളരുന്നത്. മുത്തങ്ങ റേഞ്ചിലെ കാക്കപ്പാടം, തകപ്പാടി പ്രദേശങ്ങളിൽ അനേകം ഹെക്ടർ നൈസർഗിക അടിക്കാടാണ് മഞ്ഞക്കൊന്നയുടെ വ്യാപനം മൂലം നശിച്ചത്. വന്യജീവി സങ്കേതത്തിന്റെ ആകെ വിസ്തൃതിയിൽ ഏകദേശം 10 ശതമാനവും മഞ്ഞക്കൊന്ന കീഴടക്കിയതായി പരിസ്ഥിതി പ്രവർത്തകർ പറയുന്നു. വന്യജീവി സങ്കേതം പരിധിയിൽ വരുന്നതടക്കം വയനാടൻ വനത്തെ അധിനിവേശ സസ്യങ്ങളുടെ പിടിയിൽനിന്നു മോചിപ്പിക്കുന്നതിനു നടപ്പാക്കുന്ന അപ്റോട്ടിംഗ്, ബാർക്കിംഗ് തുടങ്ങിയവ ഫലപ്രദമാകുന്നില്ല. വയനാടിനോടു ചേർന്ന് കർണാടകയിലെ

ബന്ദിപ്പുര, നാഗർഹോള, കാവേരി, ബിആർ ടി, നുഗു, തമിഴ്നാട്ടിലെ മുത്തുമല വനങ്ങളും അധിനിവേശ സസ്യങ്ങളുടെ പിടിയിലാണ്. സ്വാഭാവിക സസ്യലതാദികളെ നശിപ്പിക്കുന്ന അധിനിവേശ സസ്യങ്ങൾ കാടിന്റെ സമ്പുലനം തകർക്കുകയാണ്. പക്ഷിമൃഗാദികൾക്ക് ജീവിക്കാൻ ഉതകുന്നതല്ല അധിനിവേശ സസ്യങ്ങൾ വളരുന്ന വനപ്രദേശങ്ങൾ. വനത്തിലെ നീരുറവകളെയും അവ ഇല്ലായ്മ ചെയ്യുകയാണ്. ജില്ലയിൽ സാത്ത് വയനാട്, നോർത്ത് വയനാട്, വൈൽഡ് ലൈഫ് ഡിവിഷനുകളിലായി ഏകദേശം 200 ചതുരശ്ര കിലോമീറ്റർ തേക്ക്, യുക്കാലിപ്റ്റീസ്, കാറ്റാടി തോട്ടങ്ങളുണ്ട്. വ്യാവസായിക വികസത്തിനു 1950 മുതൽ 1980കളുടെ തുടക്കം വരെ സ്വാഭാവിക വനങ്ങൾ വെട്ടിത്തെളിച്ച് ഉണ്ടാക്കിയതാണ് ഏകവിളത്തോട്ടങ്ങൾ. വന്യജീവി സങ്കേതത്തിൽ 10148 ചതുരശ്ര കിലോമീറ്റർ ഏകവിളത്തോട്ടമാണ്. നൈസർഗിക വനത്തിന്റെ വീണ്ടെടുപ്പ് ജൈവജാതികളെ സംബന്ധിച്ചിടത്തോളം സുപ്രധാനമാണെന്ന് പ്രകൃതി സംരക്ഷണ രംഗത്തുള്ളവർ പറയുന്നു.

DIRIYAH

City of Earth

Diriyah, the “City of Earth” on the outskirts of Riyadh in Saudi Arabia, is undergoing a remarkable transformation into a global tourism and cultural hub. With its rich heritage rooted in Najdi architecture and the UNESCO-listed At-Turaif District, this \$63 billion project seamlessly blends history with modern innovation, writes **Umasankar**

For centuries, the ancient mud brick walls of Diriyah, crafted in the distinctive Najdi architectural style, have weathered the relentless desert winds. Though time has eroded much of these historic structures, decades of meticulous preservation have safeguarded their charm and authenticity. Now, a monumental \$63 billion initiative is transforming this storied site into a vibrant fusion of heritage,

architecture, and modern innovation.

Upon completion, Diriyah promises to become a gateway for travellers seeking an immersive journey through history and culture. At the heart of Diriyah lies the UNESCO World Heritage Site of At-Turaif District, a destination that feels like stepping into an open-air museum. Welcome to the “City of Earth,” where tradition and progress converge in stunning



From ancient mud brick structures to luxury hotels, museums, and world-class dining at Bujairi Terrace, Diriyah promises an unforgettable journey through time while redefining urban development in line with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030.



SAUDI HERITAGE TO THE FORE

The history of the Al Saud royal family will come alive at Diriyah, which will showcase the remarkable craftsmanship of Najdi culture and the visionary spirit of the kingdom's founders.

Diriyah is the ancestral home of the Al Saud royal family and the birthplace of the First Saudi State. This gives it immense historical and cultural importance. The At-Turaif District, a UNESCO World Heritage site within Diriyah, underscores this historical significance.

The project focuses on meticulously restoring historical sites, preserving traditional Najdi architectural styles, and showcasing Saudi Arabia's rich cultural heritage. Diriyah aims to seamlessly integrate traditional Najdi architecture with modern urban planning and infrastructure.

As a "giga-project" under Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, Diriyah represents a massive construction effort which offers opportunities for global construction companies and architectural firms. When

completed, it will be a showcase of modern construction technology. Diriyah is being developed into a world-class cultural and tourism destination, aiming to attract millions of visitors annually. It will offer a diverse range of attractions, including museums, cultural institutions, luxury hotels, fine dining, and entertainment venues.

The project is a key component of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, which seeks to diversify the economy away from oil dependence. Tourism is a central pillar of this diversification strategy.

The Diriyah project presents significant investment opportunities for international businesses in various sectors, including hospitality, retail, and entertainment. The project is expected to create numerous jobs and contribute significantly to Saudi Arabia's GDP.

Diriyah is a vehicle for Saudi Arabia

to present its culture and open up to the world, creating new business and cultural relationships, honour Saudi Arabia's historical roots, promote cultural tourism, drive economic growth, and position Saudi Arabia as a leading global destination.

At-Turaif

Celebrated as a UNESCO World Heritage Site and a cherished emblem of national pride, At-Turaif showcases the remarkable craftsmanship of Najdi culture and the visionary spirit of Saudi Arabia's founders.

At-Turaif rises gracefully over Wadi Hanifah and the verdant Diriyah oasis. Crafted from mudbrick in the traditional Najdi style, this regal citadel once thrived as the heart of the Emirate of Diriyah, the First Saudi State (1727-1818), setting the stage for the birth of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The Royal Diriyah Opera House

Diriyah Company and the Royal Commission for Riyadh City have announced plans for Saudi Arabia's first opera house, the Royal Diriyah Opera House.

Located in the heart of Diriyah, the project will stand as a cultural icon in the Saudi capital city's 300-year-old heritage quarters and the birthplace of the Kingdom.





Boosting Indo-Saudi Ties

Diriyah aims to deepen trade ties, add \$18.6B to GDP, and create 178,000 jobs—drawing strong interest from Indian CEOs.

harmony.

Founded in the 15th century BCE and later becoming the capital of the first Saudi dynasty in the mid-1700s, At-Turaif is a testament to Saudi Arabia's rich history. Its mud brick structures, decorated with intricate Najdi designs, are not just architectural marvels—they are storytellers of a bygone era.

The crown jewel of At-Turaif is Salwa Palace, the royal residence of Imam Mohammed bin Saud, founder of the first Saudi State. Spanning 10,000 square metres across three floors, this palace was once the administrative hub where leaders deliberated over politics, business, and social affairs. Today, visitors can explore its seven sections, including a mosque, a museum,

and a public gathering space—a window into 18th-century Arabian life.

Architectural Legacy

Diriyah's architecture is a celebration of Najdi craftsmanship. The sturdy mud brick structures have stood resilient for centuries, embodying both functionality and beauty. Privacy-focused designs reflect cultural values while welcoming traders and scholars from diverse backgrounds—a hallmark of inclusivity.

The restoration of At-Turaif under UNESCO guidelines has been meticulous. Developers have seamlessly blended traditional Najdi styles with modern sustainability practices. Local materials like mud and palm wood have been used to preserve

authenticity while introducing contemporary comforts. This harmonious fusion allows visitors to experience Diriyah's historical essence alongside urban sophistication.

Diriyah has always been more than a city—it's been a cultural beacon. By the 18th century, it boasted over 30 schools where students excelled in calligraphy and cultural preservation. Storytellers known as "Al-Rawi" kept history alive through captivating narratives, while music and poetry filled its streets with vibrancy. This legacy continues today with plans for eight museums dedicated to Saudi history and culture. From curated exhibitions to performances at the Royal Diriyah Opera House, visitors can immerse themselves in both traditional art forms and contemporary innovations. Diriyah is reclaiming its role as an educational and cultural hub—one that celebrates its past while inspiring future generations.

A Culinary Journey

For food lovers, Diriyah offers an unparalleled dining experience at Bujairi Terrace. Overlooking Wadi Hanifa—a serene valley integral to Diriyah's history—this destination combines luxury with authenticity. Savour traditional Saudi dishes or indulge in international flavors while enjoying breathtaking views of restored heritage sites. The terrace is more than a place to eat; it's an invitation to connect with Diriyah's soul. Whether you're dining under starlit skies or sipping coffee amidst palm trees, every moment feels like poetry in motion—a sensory delight that

lingers long after your visit.

Diriyah is poised to become one of Saudi Arabia's premier tourist destinations as part of Vision 2030—a national initiative to diversify the economy beyond oil dependence. Attractions like At-Turaif and Bujairi Terrace have already drawn millions of visitors annually, setting the stage for even greater tourism growth.

With plans for over 40 luxury hotels, more than 1,000 shops, 150 restaurants and cafes, museums, an opera house, and even an international equestrian centre, Diriyah is redefining what it means to be a global tourism hub. Scenic walk-

With plans for over 40 luxury hotels, more than 1,000 shops, 150 restaurants and cafes, museums, an opera house, and even an international equestrian center, Diriyah is redefining what it means to be a global tourism hub.





ing paths encourage exploration on foot while historical landmarks provide endless opportunities for photography enthusiasts.

India-Saudi Collaboration

India has emerged as one of Saudi Arabia's most significant trading partners with bilateral trade reaching \$52.8 billion in 2022-23. Indian businesses are playing an active role in shaping Diriyah's future across sectors like construction, IT, energy, and hospitality. Several

Indian firms have shown a keen interest in investing in Diriyah. "At Diriyah, we are keen to enhance the impact of India as one of Saudi Arabia's biggest trading partners, ranking among the top in bilateral trade, with a trade volume of approximately \$52.8 billion in 2022-23," Inzerillo told news agency PTI.

Attending the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2025 at Davos, Inzerillo said over 3,000 Indian companies are already operating

in the Kingdom, contributing to sectors such as construction, IT, energy, and telecommunications, strengthening the economic partnership between the two nations. "Diriyah is very keen to work with firms that are here already and those based in India. This is a \$63.2 billion project backed by the Public Investment Fund and it means the investment opportunities in Diriyah are countless and cover multiple asset classes," he said. "The scope for the Indian in-

There is already a lot of interest from Indian companies - especially the hotel sector. The Taj Hotel Group is set to open its 250th property in Diriyah—a luxurious hotel with 202 rooms—while Oberoi Hotels is developing another property near the equestrian centre.



vestment community and partners is enormous. Diriyah already has multiple partners on board from around the world, but there remains an amazing array of opportunities for Indian companies and organizations across the full spectrum of urban development to partner with Diriyah,” Inzerillo said. There is already a lot of interest from Indian companies - especially the hotel sector. The Taj Hotel Group is set to open its 250th property in Diriyah—a luxurious hotel with 202 rooms—while Oberoi Hotels

is developing another property near the equestrian centre. These collaborations highlight India’s contribution to enhancing Diriyah’s global appeal. Beyond hospitality ventures, Indian firms have opportunities across mixed-use developments including residential complexes, office spaces, educational institutions, healthcare facilities, and retail outlets. Over 200 Indian professionals are already working on various aspects of the project—from engineering design to financial planning—underscoring their ex-



expertise in shaping this ambitious vision.

Diriyah is expected to contribute \$18.6 billion annually to Saudi GDP upon completion while creating approximately 178,000 jobs across various sectors. Its development aligns with broader efforts to position Riyadh as one of the world's top cities by population growth and economic output. As "The City of Earth," Diriyah symbolizes not just Saudi Arabia's

past but also its aspirations for the future—a place where heritage meets progress seamlessly. Diriyah offers travellers an experience unlike any other—where ancient ruins whisper stories of resilience and modern luxuries redefine comfort. Whether you're exploring Salwa Palace or dining at Bujairi Terrace; whether you're marveling at mudbrick palaces or attending performances at the opera house—Diriyah promises an unfor-

gettable journey through time. For those seeking authenticity coupled with luxury or investors looking for unparalleled opportunities in urban development—Diriyah has something extraordinary for everyone. As it transforms into one of the world's most iconic destinations by blending history with innovation—it truly earns its title as "The City of Earth." (With PTI inputs) ■

EXERCISES TO IMPROVE YOUR CORE STRENGTH



The rewards of exercise are for everyone, no matter what the age, sex or physical ability of a person, writes
Giji K. Raman



Starting a fitness program may be one of the best things for health. Physical activity can lower the risk of diseases, such as heart disease and cancer. Exercise can improve balance and the ability to move smoothly, called coordination. It can help with weight loss and boost self-esteem. The rewards of exercise are for everyone, no matter the age, sex or physical ability.

Aerobic activity

Get at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity a week. Or get at least 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity a week. You also can get an equal combination of moderate and vigorous activity. Aim to spread out this exercise over a few days or more in a week. For even greater health benefits the guidelines suggest getting 300 minutes a week or more of moderate aerobic activity. Exercising this much may help with weight loss or keeping off lost weight. But even small amounts of physical activity can be helpful. Being active for short periods of time during the day can add up and have health benefits.

Strength training: Do strength training exercises for all major muscle groups at least two times a week. One set of each exercise is enough for health and fitness benefits. Use a weight or resistance level heavy enough to tire your muscles after about 12 to 15 repetitions.

Regular exercise can help you control your

Why Exercise?

Starting a fitness program is one of the best things you can do for your health. It lowers disease risk, improves coordination, helps manage weight, and boosts confidence. No matter your age or ability, the benefits are for everyone.

weight. It can lower your risk of heart disease and some cancers. And it can make your bones and muscles stronger. If you haven't exercised for a while and you have health concerns, you might want to talk to your health care professional before starting a new fitness routine. When making your exercise plan, keep your fitness goals in mind. Think about what you like and don't like. Think about what keeps you from exercising. Then find ways to keep your fitness program on track. Starting a fitness program doesn't have to overwhelm you. Start slowly and build up over time. By planning and pacing yourself, you can make fitness a healthy habit that lasts a lifetime.

Core-strength Exercises

Core-strength exercises strengthen the core muscles. Core muscles include the abdominal muscles, back muscles and the muscles around the pelvis. Strong core muscles make it easier to do many physical activities. You can do core-strength exercises on a carpeted floor or mat. Breathe freely and deeply during each core-strength exercise. Focus on tightening the deepest abdominal muscle and the one you feel contracting when you cough, also called the transversus abdominis. Aim to do one set of each exercise for 12 to 15 repetitions. If you have back problems, osteoporosis or other health concerns, talk to your health care professional before doing these core-strength exercises.

Abdominal crunch

Abdominal crunches are a classic core-strength exercise. To do an abdominal crunch:

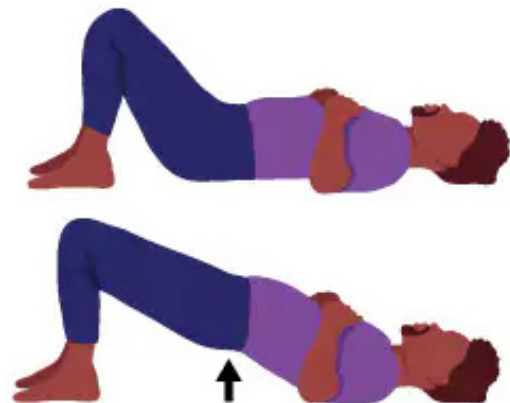
Lie on your back and place your feet on a wall so that your knees and hips are bent at 90-degree angles. Tighten the abdomi-



nal muscles. Raise your head and shoulders off the floor. To avoid straining your neck, cross your arms on your chest rather than locking them behind your head. Hold for three deep breaths. Return to the start position and repeat.

Bridge

To improve core strength of many muscles at one time, try a bridge, sometimes called a back bridge or a glute bridge: Lie on your back with your knees bent (top photo). Keep your back in a neutral position, not arched and not pressed into the floor. Try not to tilt your hips. Tighten the abdominal muscles. Raise your hips off the floor until your hips line up with your knees and shoulders (bottom photo). Hold for three deep breaths. Return to the start position and repeat.



Single-leg abdominal press

The single-leg abdominal press is another popular core-strength exercise. To do this exercise:

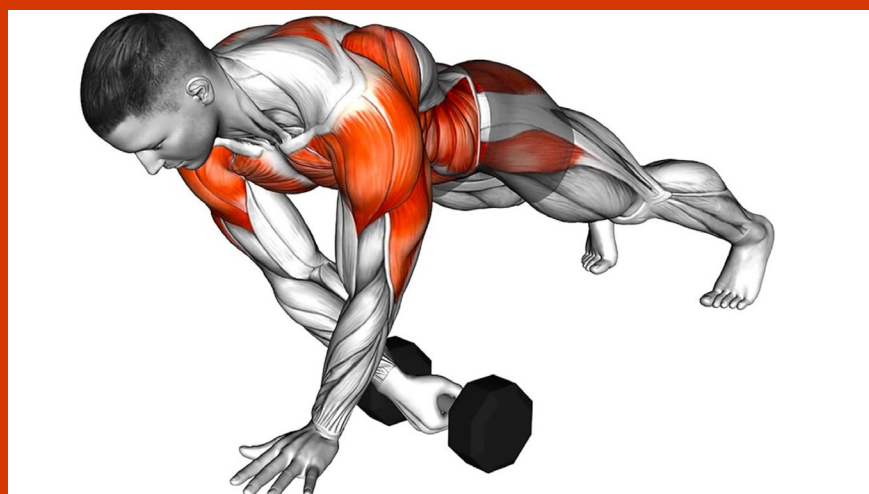
Lie on your back with your knees bent (top illustration). Keep your back in a neutral position, not arched and not pressed into the floor. Avoid tilting your hips. Tighten the abdominal muscles. Raise your right leg off the floor so that your knee and hip are bent at 90-degree angles. Rest your right hand on top of your right knee (bottom illustration). Push your hand against your knee while using the abdominal muscles to push your knee toward your hand. Keep your arm straight. Hold for three deep breaths. Return to the start position and repeat using your left hand and left knee.

Want a stronger core? Skip the sit-ups

Sit-ups once ruled as the way to tighter abs and a slimmer waistline. Now plank exercises, in which you assume a position and hold it, are the gold standard for working your core, while classic sit-ups and crunches have fallen out of favor.

One reason is that sit-ups are hard on your back. They push your curved spine against the floor and work your hip flexors, the muscles that run from the thighs to the lumbar vertebrae in the lower back. When the hip flexors are too strong or too tight, they tug on the lower spine, which can create lower back discomfort.

In addition, plank exercises recruit a better balance of muscles on

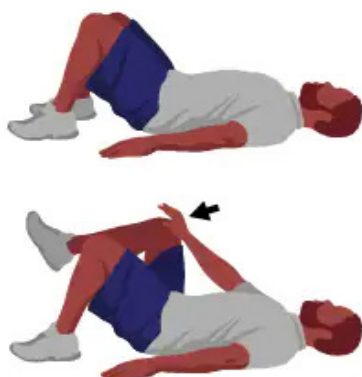


the front, sides, and back of the body than sit-ups, which target just a few muscles.

Finally, activities of daily living such as bathing, getting out of bed, or walking, as well as sports and recreational activities, call on your muscles to work together, not in isolation, while sit-ups or

crunches strengthen just a few muscle groups.

Through dynamic patterns of movement, a good core workout like plank exercises helps strengthen the entire set of core muscles you use every day, leaving you with a stronger and more balanced body.



Single-leg abdominal press variations

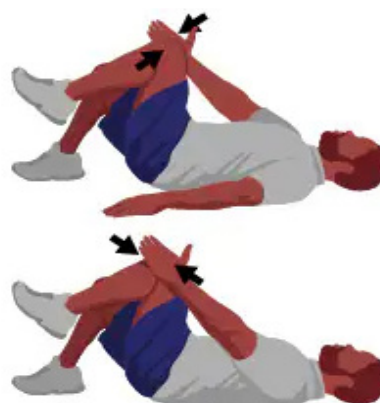
To improve your core strength more completely, try variations of the single-leg abdominal press:

Opposite hand on opposite knee: Push your right hand against your left knee while pulling your knee toward your hand (top illustration). You'll be pushing and pulling across the center of your body.

Hold for three deep breaths. Then do the exercise using your other hand and leg.

Hand on outside of knee: Place

your left hand along the side of your left knee (bottom illustration). Use your hand to push your leg inward. At the same time, create resistance by pushing your knee away from the center. Hold for three deep breaths. Then do the exercise using your other hand and leg.



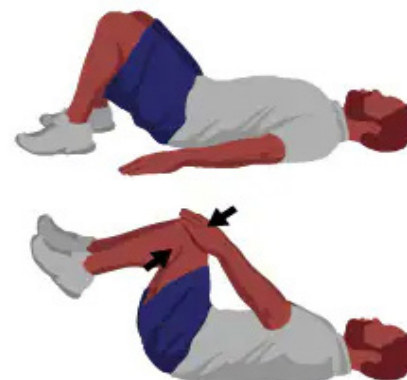
Double-leg abdominal press

When you're comfortable with the single-leg abdominal press, try the double-leg abdominal press for

more core strength:

Lie on your back with your knees bent (top illustration). Keep your back in a neutral position, not arched and not pressed into the floor. Avoid tilting your hips. Tighten the abdominal muscles. Raise your legs off the floor, one at a time, so that your knees and hips are bent at 90-degree angles. Rest your hands on top of your knees (bottom illustration).

Push your hands against your knees while using the abdominal muscles to pull your knees

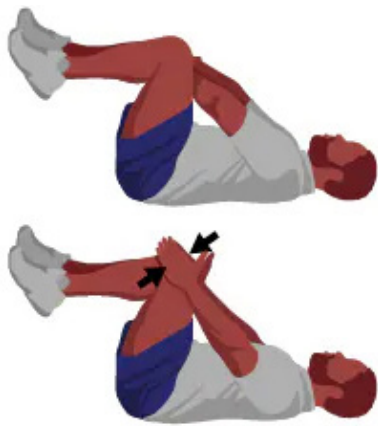


toward your hands. Keep your arms straight. Hold for three deep breaths. Return to the start position and repeat.

Double-leg abdominal press variations

These variations of the double-leg abdominal press also build your core strength:

Opposite hands on opposite knees. Place each hand on your opposite knee, toward the inside of your knee (top illustration). Your arms will cross over each other. Push your hands against your



knees while pulling your knees toward your hands. Hold for three deep breaths. Repeat. Hands on outside of knees. Place your hands along the sides of your knees (bottom illustration). Use your hands to push your knees inward. At the same time, create resistance by pushing your knees away from the center. Hold for three deep breaths. Repeat.

Quadruped

This core-strength exercise is called the quadruped and sometimes called the bird dog: Start on your hands and knees. Place your hands directly below your shoulders, and line up your head and neck with your back. Tighten the abdominal muscles. Raise your right arm off the floor and reach ahead. Hold for three deep breaths. Lower your right arm and repeat with your left arm. Raise your right leg off the floor. Tighten the trunk muscles for balance. Hold for three deep breaths. Lower your right leg and repeat with your left leg. For added challenge, raise your left

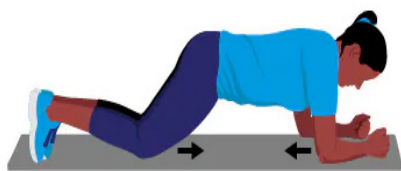


arm and your right leg at the same time. Repeat with your right arm and left leg.

Modified plank

Another good core-strength exercise is called the modified plank. In a plank, you raise yourself up on your forearms and feet while keeping your body lined up with your hips. To do a modified plank: Lie on your stomach. Raise yourself up so that you're resting on your forearms and knees. Line up your head and neck with your back. Place your shoulders directly above your elbows. Tighten the abdominal muscles. Create resistance by pressing your elbows and knees toward one an-





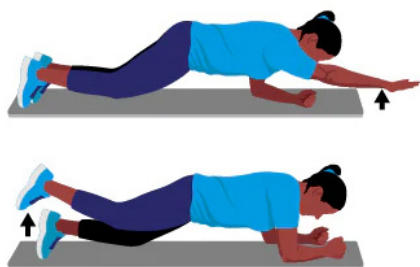
other. Neither should move from their positions on the floor. Hold for three deep breaths. Return to the start position and repeat.

Modified plank variations

For more core-strength exercises, try these variations on the modified plank:

Lie on your stomach. Raise yourself up so that you're resting on your forearms and knees. Line up your head and neck with your back, and place your shoulders directly above your elbows. Tighten the abdominal muscles.

Raise your right arm off the floor (top illustration). Hold for three



deep breaths. Repeat with your left arm.

Raise your right leg off the floor (bottom illustration). Hold for three deep breaths. Repeat with your left leg.

For added challenge, raise your left arm and right leg at the same time. Repeat with your right arm and left leg.

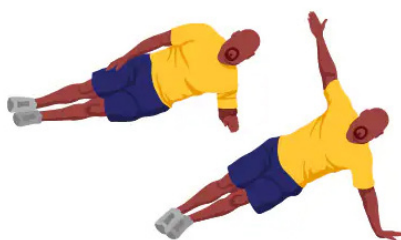
Side plank

The side plank challenges your stability and improves core strength by working the muscles along the side of your body:

Lie on your left side, raising yourself onto your left forearm (top illustration). Place your left shoulder directly above your left elbow, keeping your shoulders, hips and knees in a straight line. Rest your right arm along the side of your body.

Tighten the abdominal muscles. Hold for three deep breaths. Repeat on your right side.

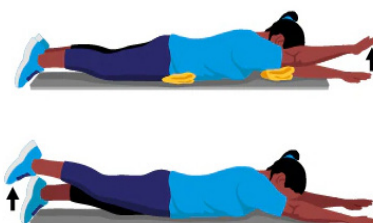
For added challenge, balance on



your left hand. Raise your hips off the floor and extend your right hand toward the ceiling (bottom illustration). Hold for three deep breaths. Repeat on your right side.

Superman

The superman is another core-strength exercise that can help strengthen your lower back: Lie on your stomach with a rolled towel or a small pillow under your hips to support your back. You



also might use a folded towel to support your head. Tighten the abdominal muscles.

Raise your right arm off the floor (top illustration). Hold for three deep breaths. Lower your right arm and repeat with your left arm. Raise your right leg off the floor (bottom illustration). Hold for three deep breaths. Lower your right leg and repeat with your left leg.

This article is based on Health Advisory issued by Mayo Clinic, USA.

AJANTA AND ELLORA

TIMELESS WONDER CARVED IN STONE

Rajeev G Pereira





Ajanta and Ellora, timeless marvels of ancient Indian architecture, are awe-inspiring artistic creations that blend culture, faith and masterly artistry.



Aurangabad. The very name hums with echoes of empires, of princely ambition and the relentless march of time. Here, amidst the Deccan plains, the memories of ancient India still linger, etched into the very fabric of the landscape.

Legends paint a vivid tapestry: of bustling trade routes threading through dense forests, carrying not just precious goods but also the vibrant exchange of cultures and beliefs; of cities like Ujjayini and Pataliputra, their voices mingling with those of distant Alexandria and Babylon; and of seekers of enlightenment who carved their spiritual journeys into the heart of the mountains. These are the mountains that cradle Ajanta and Ellora, timeless marvels of ancient Indian architecture, where stones breathe stories and time itself bends to the artistry of generations past. The 29 caves of Ajanta, located within a horseshoe-shaped mountain range, unfold like an epic poem carved in stone. Buddhist chaitya-grihas, prayer halls, libraries, monastic residences, and even spaces for music resonate with the devotion and artistry of their creators.

A gentle river, once cascading down a seven-tiered waterfall known as the 'sapt-kund', flows serenely before the caves, as if carrying the echoes of ancient chants and the murmur of flowing robes.

Stepping into Ajanta is akin to stepping back in time. The walls, adorned with vibrant murals and intricate sculptures, engage you in a silent dialogue. You become a participant in the scenes depicted – laughing,

THE BUDDHIST LEGACY

India's Buddhist legacy, rooted in sacred sites like Bodh Gaya and Sarnath, holds immense spiritual and cultural significance. Showcasing revered Buddha relics, India is now working to reclaim its position as the cradle of Buddhism and foster sustainable tourism and local economic growth around the Buddhist legacy writes Jyothish R.

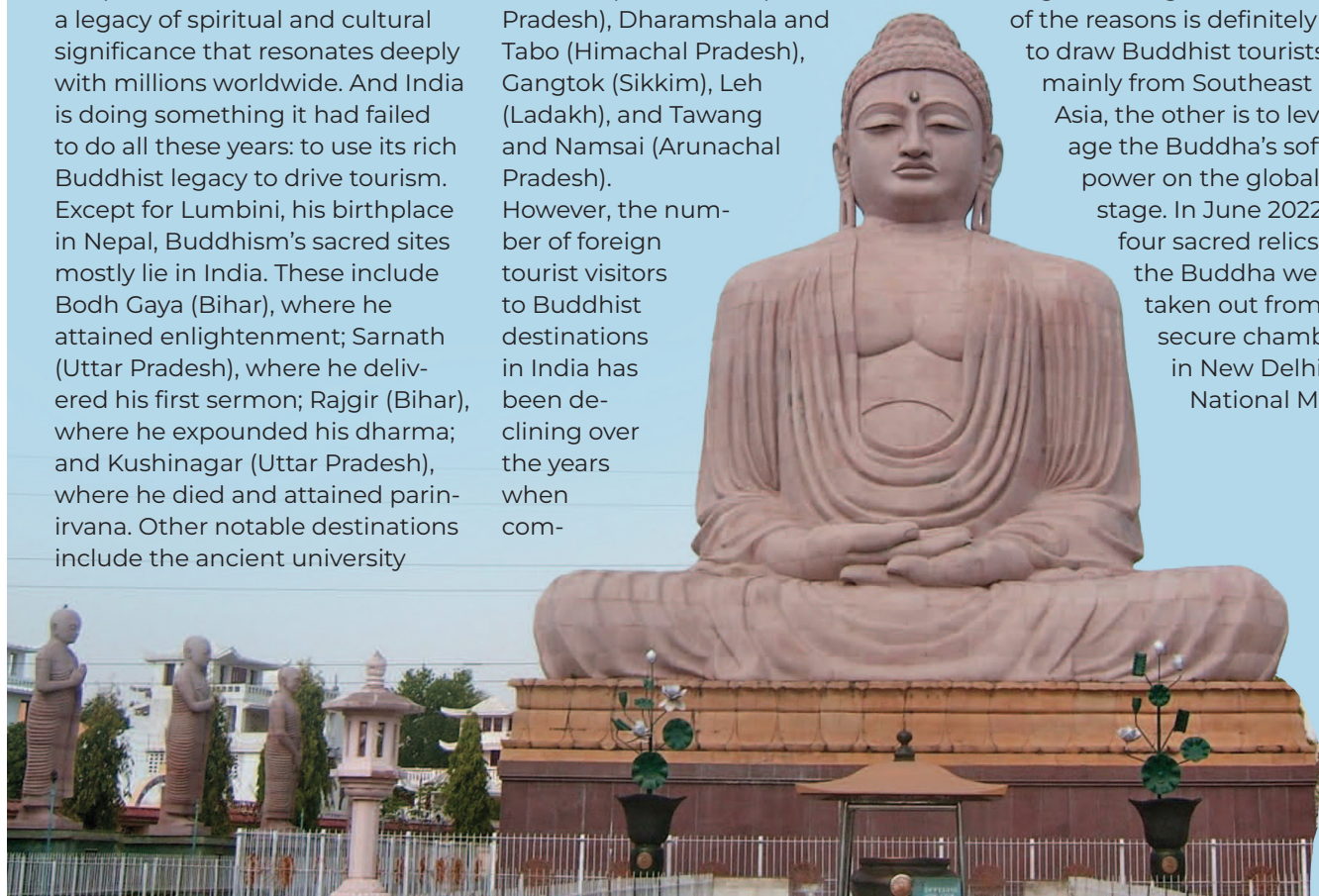
India's sprawling Buddhist circuit, from Bodh Gaya to Nagarjunakonda, reveals a powerful truth: India holds a legacy of spiritual and cultural significance that resonates deeply with millions worldwide. And India is doing something it had failed to do all these years: to use its rich Buddhist legacy to drive tourism. Except for Lumbini, his birthplace in Nepal, Buddhism's sacred sites mostly lie in India. These include Bodh Gaya (Bihar), where he attained enlightenment; Sarnath (Uttar Pradesh), where he delivered his first sermon; Rajgir (Bihar), where he expounded his dharma; and Kushinagar (Uttar Pradesh), where he died and attained parinirvana. Other notable destinations include the ancient university

town of Nalanda (Bihar), Sravasti (Uttar Pradesh), Sankisa (Uttar Pradesh), the Ajanta Caves (Maharashtra), Amaravati (Andhra Pradesh), Dharamshala and Tabo (Himachal Pradesh), Gangtok (Sikkim), Leh (Ladakh), and Tawang and Namsai (Arunachal Pradesh). However, the number of foreign tourist visitors to Buddhist destinations in India has been declining over the years when com-

pared to other Buddhist countries like Sri Lanka and the ASEAN. According to a 2022 NITI Ayog document focused on the need to promote Buddhist tourist circuits, in China, there are 200 million Buddhists but only 30,000 or 40,000 visit India. Arrivals to India from Buddhist dominated countries comprises a mere 0.005 per cent of all Buddhist adherents across the globe.

The nation is now poised to transform this profound heritage into a potent force for tourism and global influence. India is embarking on a strategic journey to reclaim its Buddhist heritage, leveraging infrastructure improvements and soft power initiatives to reassert its position as the cradle of Buddhism and challenge competing narratives.

But the government's push extends beyond global tourists and foreign exchange. While one of the reasons is definitely to draw Buddhist tourists, mainly from Southeast Asia, the other is to leverage the Buddha's soft power on the global stage. In June 2022, four sacred relics of the Buddha were taken out from a secure chamber in New Delhi's National Mu-

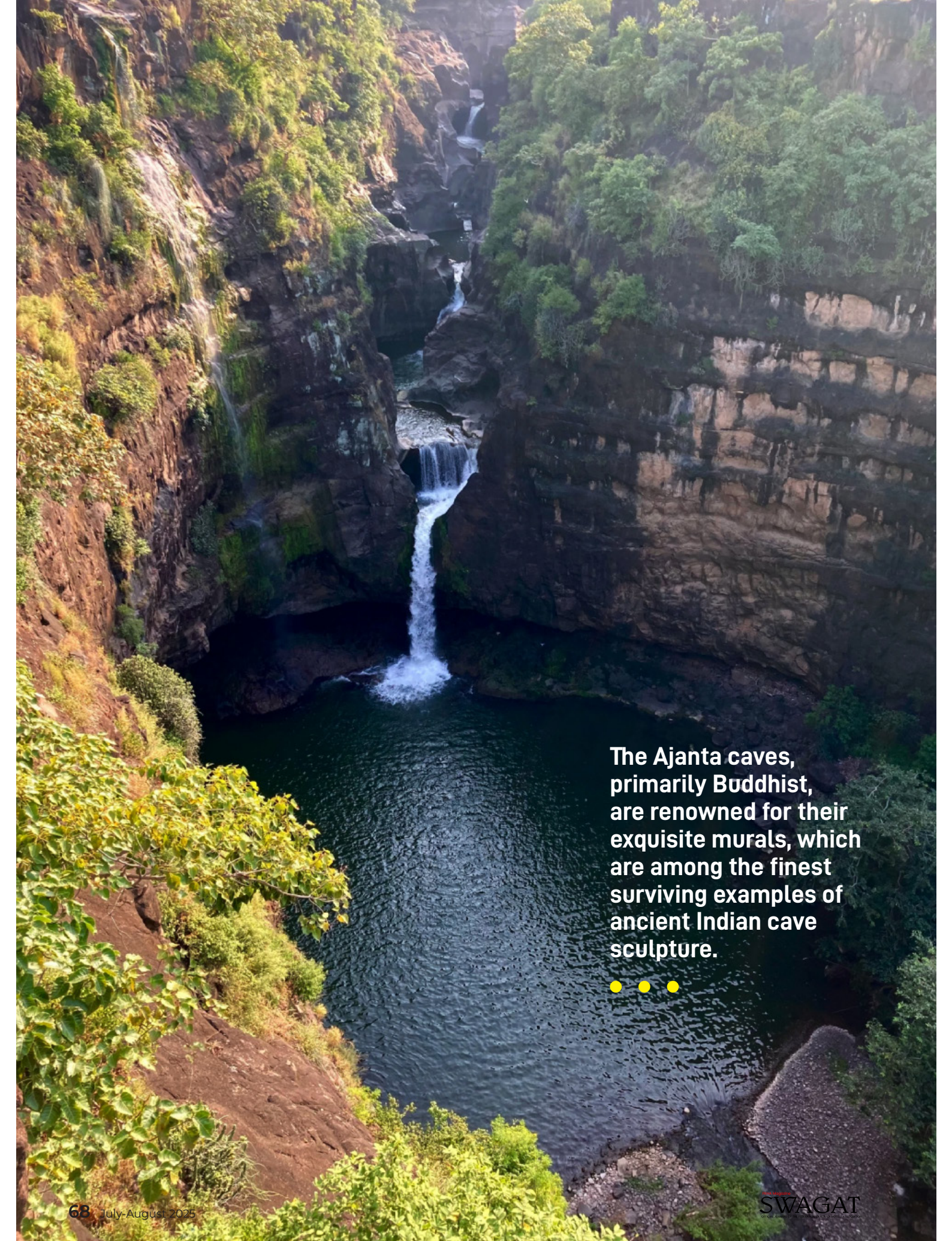




seum and flown to Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, aboard a special IAF aircraft for an exposition. Accompanied by a high-level Indian delegation, led by Union Minister Kiren Rijiju, a Buddhist himself, the relics drew thousands of Mongolians, who lined up outside the Gandan Monastery to see them. Later, in February 2024, another set of revered Buddhist relics travelled to Thailand, receiving the honour of a State Guest. Across four cities — Bangkok, Chiang Mai, Ubon Ratchathani and Krabi — thousands of devotees and enthusiasts gathered to pay homage, in a powerful demonstration of India's soft power and its enduring spiritual ties with the region. During the last few years, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh have been making significant strides in the promotion of Buddhist tourism sites. In Namsai, a 108-foot Buddha statue is set to be erected soon, with donations from Thai citizens supporting the effort. The govern-

ment is also investing in improved connectivity, including enhanced air, rail, and road links, to make these historically significant locations more accessible. The emphasis on infrastructure is coupled with a nuanced approach to cultural preservation and presentation. At sites like Nalanda, where the ruins of the ancient university stand as a testament to India's intellectual heritage, efforts are underway to enhance visitor interpretation and provide a deeper understanding of the site's historical significance. Guided tours, multilingual signage, and interactive exhibits are being introduced to create a more immersive and educational experience. Simultaneously, the government is working to promote sustainable tourism practices, ensuring that the influx of visitors does not compromise the delicate ecological balance of these sacred sites. Indian Railways operate the Mahaparinirvan Express—a luxury

AC train that periodically goes on an eight-day tour of the Buddhist circuit. This luxury train offers visitors to the Buddhist circuit a comfortable and immersive travel experience. Connectivity has also improved with airports like Kushinagar becoming operational, making it easier for international tourists to reach these sacred sites. Indian Hotels (IHCL), known for the Taj and Ginger brands, has signed a 160-room Gateway-branded hotel in Sarnath, and are exploring opportunities to extend their presence in Buddhist destinations like Nalanda and Bodh Gaya. The IHCL already has a presence in Patna, a gateway city to the circuit, with 300 rooms spread across one Taj and two Ginger properties. The development of quality accommodations, ranging from luxury hotels to mid-market options, is essential to cater to the diverse needs of international and domestic tourists. The availability of comfortable and reliable lodging not only enhances the overall visitor experience but also encourages longer stays, boosting local economies. The need for improved infrastructure, including better roads, high-speed rail connections, and enhanced amenities, is paramount. Addressing these challenges will require sustained investment and a coordinated effort from both the public and private sectors. Currently, India draws only 7.5% of its FTAs from Buddhist-majority nations, while Thailand attracts over 35%. A surge in international arrivals to the Buddhist circuit could bring a windfall for small entrepreneurs, including homestay owners. Local artisans, craftspeople, and tour operators also stand to benefit significantly from increased tourist traffic. The development of souvenir shops, cultural performances, and guided tours can create employment opportunities and stimulate local economies. ■



**The Ajanta caves,
primarily Buddhist,
are renowned for their
exquisite murals, which
are among the finest
surviving examples of
ancient Indian cave
sculpture.**





weeping, experiencing the full spectrum of human emotions, yet these emotions are not your own, but rather those of the artists who breathed life into these stones. You are both the observer and the observed, caught in a timeless dance of creation and experience. The Ajanta caves, primarily Buddhist, are renowned for their exquisite murals, which are among the finest surviving examples of ancient Indian cave sculpture. These vibrant frescoes, executed in the tempera technique, bring to life the Jataka tales, stories of the Buddha's previous lives, and

scenes from the life of Gautama Buddha. The colors, though muted by time, still retain a remarkable luminosity, and the figures, rendered with grace and fluidity, seem to step out of the walls. Imagine witnessing the compassionate gaze of the Bodhisattva Padmapani, his gentle expression radiating tranquility, or following the narrative thread of a Jataka story, with its intricate details and dramatic compositions. Ajanta is not just a collection of images; it is a visual chronicle of Buddhist philosophy, a testament to the power of art to convey spiritual truths and

inspire devotion. The caves, carved out of the hillside, become a stage for these ancient narratives, inviting the viewer to immerse themselves in the world of ancient India and experience the beauty and wisdom of Buddhist teachings.

Ellora: Where Faiths Converge in Stone

Ellora, in contrast to the predominantly Buddhist Ajanta, is a confluence of three major faiths: Buddhism, Hinduism, and Jainism. This harmonious coexistence is reflected in the diverse styles and iconography of the caves. Here,

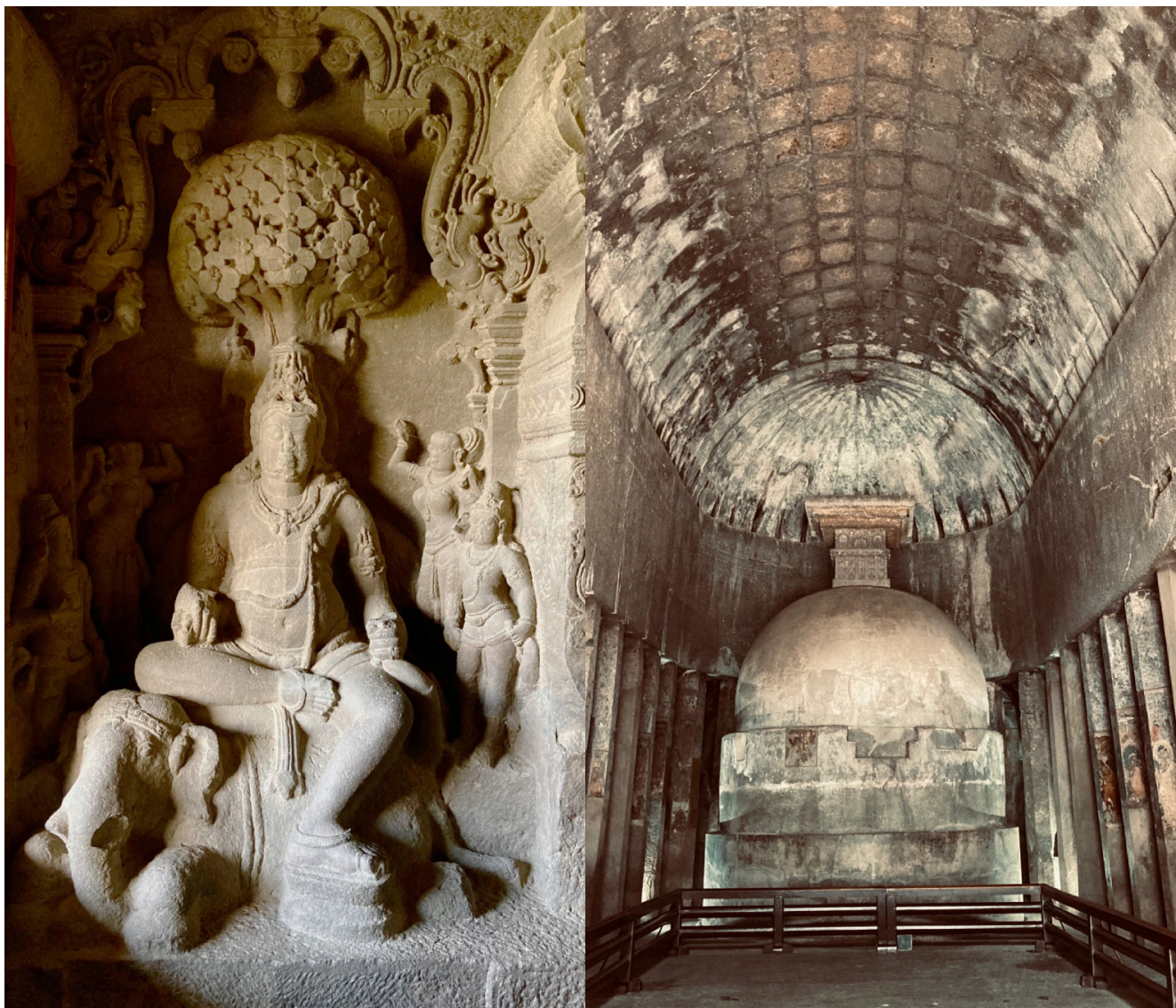
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you can witness the colossal grandeur of the Kailasa Temple (Cave 16), a monolithic marvel dedicated to Lord Shiva, which is not just a cave but an entire temple complex carved from a single rock. Its towering structure, intricate carvings, and sheer scale are awe-inspiring, a testament to the ambition and artistry of its creators. Nearby, you'll find Buddhist caves with serene images of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas, and Jain caves adorned with intricate sculptures of Tirthankaras. Ellora is a microcosm of India's rich religious and cultural heritage, a place where different faiths found expression in the language of stone. The caves, carved side by side, symbolize the spirit of tolerance and coexistence that has long been a hallmark of Indian civilization. Ellora is a reminder that even in the face of diverse beliefs, art can transcend boundaries and celebrate the shared human experience. Entering the Ellora is to encounter an ancient presence, a sense of time stretching

back beyond human comprehension. The air seems thick with unspoken wisdom. One feels the presence of beings older than humanity, their thoughts, though indistinct, resonating within the very stones. They are like ancient trees, their consciousness rooted deep within the earth, their wisdom accumulated over centuries of silent observation. What mysteries have they unravelled? What truths have they gleaned from the meditations of the monks who once sought solace within these caves? Their language remains elusive, their secrets locked in the silent embrace of stone.

Within the chaitya-grihas, a profound sense of peace descends. The urge to renounce the world, to transcend the limitations of the physical realm, becomes almost overwhelming. Bliss is within reach, yet the tethers of earthly passions hold you grounded. It is in this delicate balance, between worldly attachment and spiritual yearning, that the true essence of





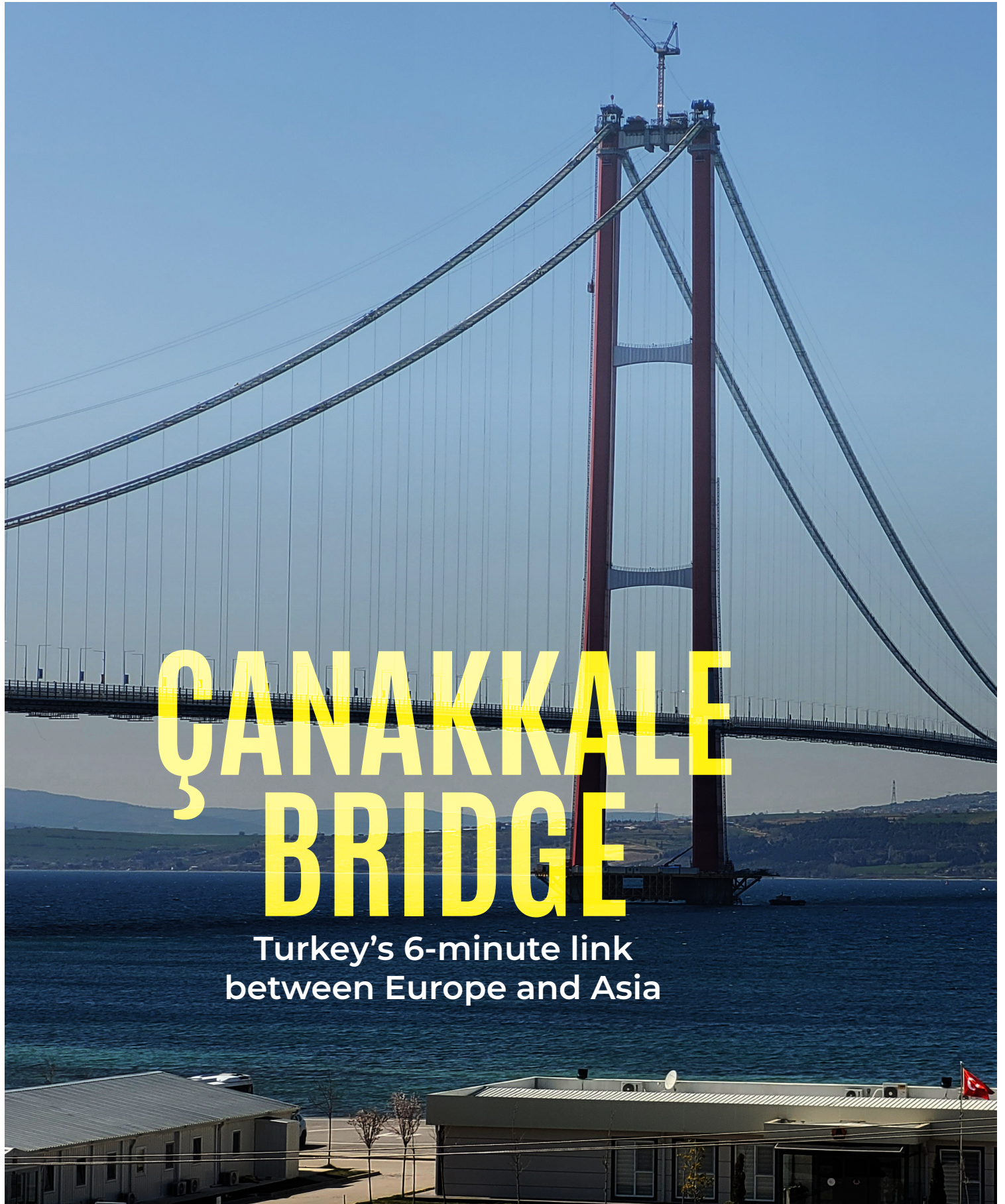
the art reveals itself. Cave 16, the Kailasa Temple is a breathtaking testament to human ingenuity and devotion. Stand there and imagine how the sculptors of this wonderful inheritance would have, like a master chess player envisioning countless moves ahead, worked from the summit of the colossal rock downwards--hewing, chipping, chiselling, carving and polishing the massive rock with meticulous precision to create this artistic wonder, every inch of which is alive with carvings of deities, humans, and beings from realms both known and imagined. It is a masterpiece of artistry, a testament to

the power of human creativity to shape the very fabric of reality.

Afterword


Travel is a transformative experience, a journey not just to a place, but also into oneself. The traveler is not a singular entity, but a composite of all the encounters along the way. You are the ever-patient receptionist, the resourceful auto-rickshaw driver, the itinerant vendor with a bag full of treasures and tales. You are the chameleon, morphing into a guide, a historian, an art connoisseur, as the situation demands. For you, truth and falsehood blur, and the legends etched in stone become mere anecdotes.

You are the traveler for whom home is not a fixed point on a map, but a feeling, a state of being. On the road to Ellora, the imposing fortress of Daulatabad, once deemed impregnable, stands as a monument to the ironies of history. Built to defy conquest, it ultimately fell, a poignant reminder that even the mightiest structures are vulnerable to the relentless tide of time. And so, the journey continues, through landscapes dotted with the relics of bygone eras, each stone narrating tales of empires risen and fallen, of gods and mortals, and of the enduring power of art to transcend the boundaries of time and space. ■



ÇANAKKALE & BRIDGE

Turkey's 6-minute link
between Europe and Asia



Canakkale Bridge in Turkey, the world's longest suspension bridge, has unlocked immense travel and tourism potential at the intersection between the two continents. The inter-continental journey that took 90 minutes earlier can now be completed in just 6 minutes. writes **Harishankar**

The '1915 Çanakkale Bridge', a monumental engineering feat in Turkey (now officially known as Türkiye), has not only revolutionized transportation between Asia and Europe but also unlocked immense travel and tourism potential. Stretching 2,023 meters across the Dardanelles Strait, this suspension bridge—the longest in the world—connects Gelibolu on the European side to Lapseki on the Asian side. Its completion in 2022 marked a transformative moment in Turkey's infrastructure development, reshaping regional dynamics and offering travelers a unique gateway between continents. It is designed to carry up to 45,000 vehicles across its six lanes each day and support both tourism and commercial activity in the region. The main design work was carried out by COWI A/S, an international consulting group, specializing in engineering, environmental science and economics, with headquarters located in Lyngby, Denmark, and its execution involved several companies such as Daelim, Limak, SK and Yapi Merkezi. According to COWI, the position of the bridge posed many design challenges, including high winds and high seismic activity. It achieves its aerodynamic stability partly through a twin-box girder.



The clearance between the water and the deck was engineered to accommodate high-stacked container ships and cruise ships that need to pass under it. Before the bridge's construction, crossing the Dardanelles Strait required a ferry journey lasting approximately 90 minutes. Today, travelers can traverse this vital waterway in just six minutes—a remarkable reduction of 93% in travel time.

This newfound efficiency has enhanced connectivity between Europe and Asia, making it easier for tourists to explore both sides of Turkey's cultural and historical treasures. The bridge serves as a critical link in Turkey's motorway network, integrating the Marmara region with international corridors and boosting accessibility to attractions across Thrace, Western Anatolia, and the Aegean.

Symbolism and History

The bridge is not merely a marvel of

engineering; it is steeped in symbolism. Its name honours the Ottoman naval victory during the Gallipoli Campaign of 1915, while its dimensions commemorate significant milestones in Turkish history. The 2,023-metre main span celebrates the centenary of the Turkish Republic (1923–2023), and its 318-metre height symbolizes March 18, a key date in Gallipoli remembrance. These design elements make the bridge an iconic landmark that resonates with Turkey's rich heritage. For travelers, crossing the bridge is more than a journey—it is an opportunity to experience history intertwined with modernity. The structure stands as a testament to Turkey's ambition to bridge East and West, both literally and figuratively. The bridge's strategic location has opened up unparalleled tourism prospects. On the European side lies Gelibolu (Gallipoli), home to battlefields and memorials from

The bridge's strategic location has opened up unparalleled tourism prospects.

World War I that attract history enthusiasts from around the globe. On the Asian side, Lapseki offers access to scenic coastal towns along the Aegean Sea. The reduced travel time encourages day trips and multi-destination itineraries, allowing visitors to explore Turkey's diverse landscapes with greater ease.

Its record-breaking status as the longest suspension bridge in the world draws infrastructure enthusiasts and photographers eager to capture its grandeur against the backdrop of the Dardanelles Strait. Travelers driving across can enjoy breathtaking views of this historic waterway, making it an unforgettable experience.

Economic Boost for Tourism

The economic impact of the 1915 Çanakkale Bridge extends beyond transportation. By improving logistics and accessibility, it has stimulated growth in local tourism industries on both sides of the strait. Hotels, restaurants, and tour operators are benefiting from increased visitor traffic, while cultural interactions between

global trends toward eco-friendly travel solutions.

Gateway to Eurasia

The 1915 Çanakkale Bridge is more than a regional connector; it is part of a broader initiative to enhance global connectivity. As a critical component of Turkey's contribution to China's One Belt, One Road project, it facilitates seamless trade routes stretching from Beijing to London. For travelers embarking on cross-continental journeys, this infrastructure offers an efficient entry point into Eurasia.

Its role in strengthening ties between Europe and Asia also mirrors broader geopolitical shifts. By fostering international cooperation through improved infrastructure, Turkey positions itself as a hub for intercontinental travel and commerce.

Information for Travelers

Accessible year-round without seasonal closures, the bridge offers convenience for travelers navigating Turkey's western regions. Visitors can reach it via major motorways on either side: O-3 from Europe





or O-5 from Asia. Whether arriving by car or joining guided tours that highlight its significance, crossing the bridge is both practical and enriching.

For those seeking adventure beyond traditional sightseeing, driving across this engineering marvel provides an opportunity to witness first-hand how innovation transforms landscapes. The panoramic views from its span are particularly striking during sunrise or sunset-a must-see for photography enthusiasts.



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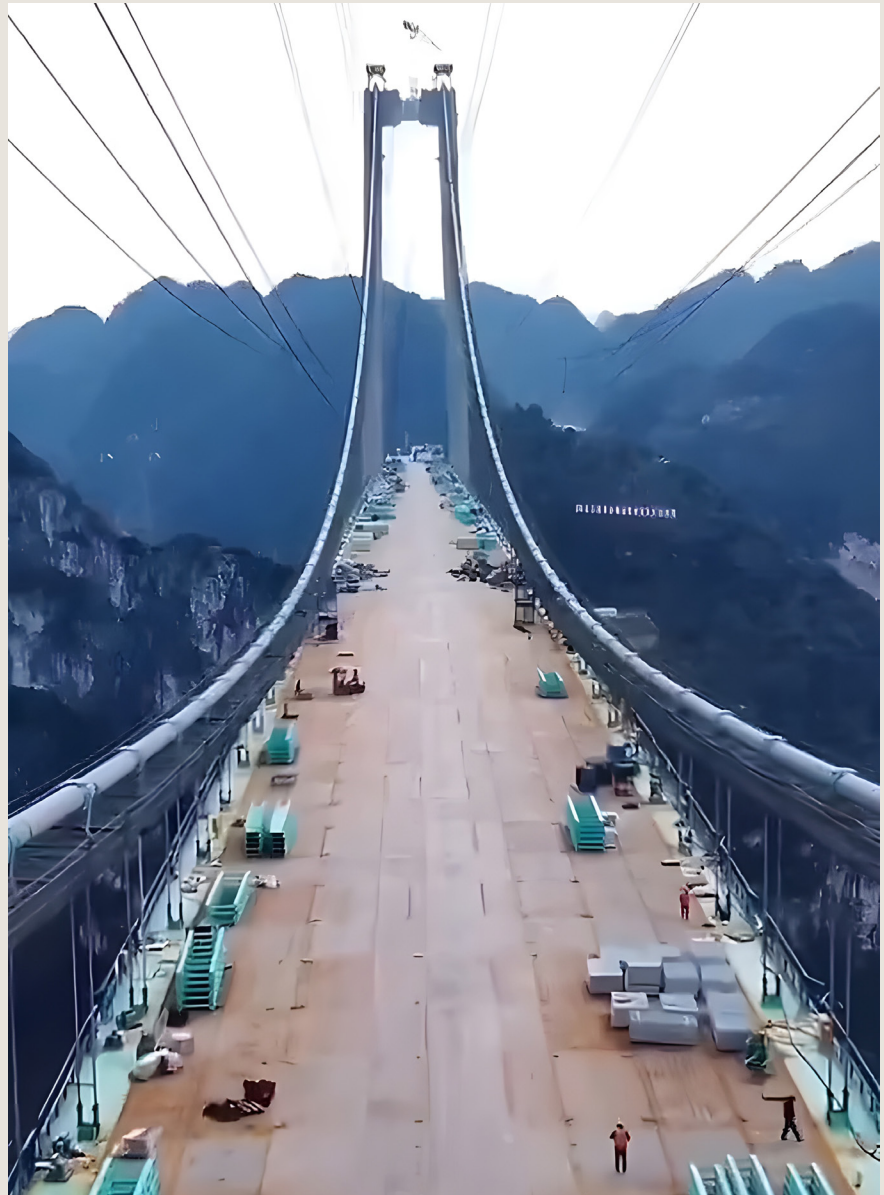
The 1915 Çanakkale Bridge exemplifies how infrastructure can redefine travel experiences while fostering economic growth and cultural exchange. As travelers journey across its record-breaking span, they are not only crossing continents but also engaging with history, innovation, and symbolism. Whether exploring Gallipoli's battlefields or enjoying coastal retreats along the Aegean Sea, this bridge offers unparalleled opportunities for discovery.

For tourists seeking unique experiences that blend heritage with modernity, the 1915 Çanakkale Bridge stands as an inspiring gateway between Asia and Europe-a marvel that connects people while celebrating progress.



HUAJIANG GRAND CANYON BRIDGE

World's highest bridge is set for opening in June



China is set to open the 2-mile-long Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge, which stands over 200 metre taller than the Eiffel Tower and weighs three times more, showcasing Chinese engineering prowess, in June.

The Huajiang Grand Canyon Bridge, located in the South Western Chinese province of Guizhou, is being built across the Beipan River as it passes through the deep Huajiang Canyon. Upon completion, it will be the world's highest bridge, measuring 625 metres from the bridge deck

to the bottom of the gorge. It will surpass the current highest bridge, the Duge Bridge, which crosses the same river 200 km upstream.

Work started on the ambitious project in 2022 to create a motorway connecting the Liuzhi and Anlong areas in the Guizhou Province. The bridge, costing £216 million (Rs 2,200 crore), will not only improve transportation in a rural area of China but also become a significant tourist draw, attracting visitors with its impressive engineering and stunning location. The bridge would have living

areas, a glass walkway and the 'highest bungee jump' in the world. Its steel trusses, weighing about 22,000 metric tonnes – the equivalent of three Eiffel Towers – were installed in just two months. Besides becoming the world's tallest, it will also be the world's largest span bridge to be built in a mountainous area, at 1,420 metres, or 4,650 ft. With 92.5 percent of its land covered by mountains and hills, the region has built nearly 30,000 bridges since the late 1970s and is now home to nearly half of the world's 100 tallest bridges.

TAKES CHARGE



SUMAN BILLA **DIRECTOR GENERAL, TOURISM**

In a significant bureaucratic reshuffle at the Additional Secretary level, the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet has approved the appointment of senior IAS officer Suman Billa (IAS: 1996: KL) as the new Director General (Tourism) in the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India.

Billa, who is currently serving as Additional Secretary in the Ministry of Tourism, brings a wealth of experience to the role. Notably, he had earlier served as Joint Secretary in the same ministry from 2014 to 2019, where he played a pivotal role in shaping India's tourism policies and campaigns.

Following his tenure in the ministry, Billa was appointed as Director, Technical Cooperation and Silk Road Development at the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), enhancing India's global presence in the tourism sector and contributing to sustainable tourism development worldwide. ■

MUGDHA SINHA **MANAGING DIRECTOR, ITDC**

Mugdha Sinha, a 1999-batch IAS officer from the Rajasthan cadre, has been appointed the Managing Director of India Tourism Development Corporation Limited (ITDC). She assumes the role at the rank and pay scale of an Additional Secretary.

Prior to this, Sinha served as the Director General of Tourism in the Ministry of Tourism, a position also equivalent to the Additional Secretary rank. She was empanelled for the Additional Secretary position in May last year. In October 2022, she held the position of Joint Secretary in the Ministry of Culture, further strengthening her extensive experience in cultural and tourism affairs. ■





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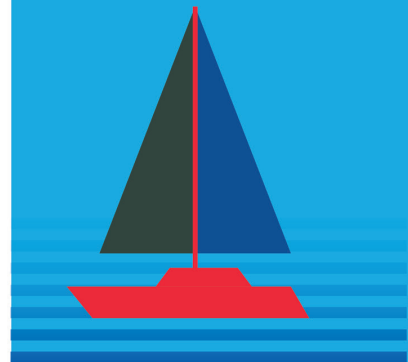
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