

A FINE FUSION

While exploring the cityscape of Kochi, indulge in a food fiesta. Dutch, British and Chinese influences have shaped the city's culinary landscape.

WORDS BY FAREEDA KANGA



SOME PLACES TO STAY



Koder House is a three-storey boutique hotel opposite the beach at Fort Kochi. Until recently, it belonged to the Koders — the most illustrious Jewish family in Kochi. Koder House encapsulates the concept of a heritage boutique hotel with six luxury suites. This is the only place in Kochi (and one of the few in India) where you can sample authentic Jewish cuisine at the Menorah Restaurant. Dishes such as koubba (an Indo-Jewish stuffed chicken cooked in Jewish gravy) and fish sadambar (fish cooked in coconut and mustard gravy) are worth a try. For the ultimate in luxury, fine dining and style look no further than The Malabar House on Parade Road, a charming boutique hotel, housed in a heritage building with 17 rooms and suites that blend contemporary and traditional design. It is a member of the prestigious Relais & Chateaux Group and its European owners have painstakingly ensured every detail is taken care of. From the freshly baked pastries at breakfast to organic toiletries in each room, nothing is left to chance.

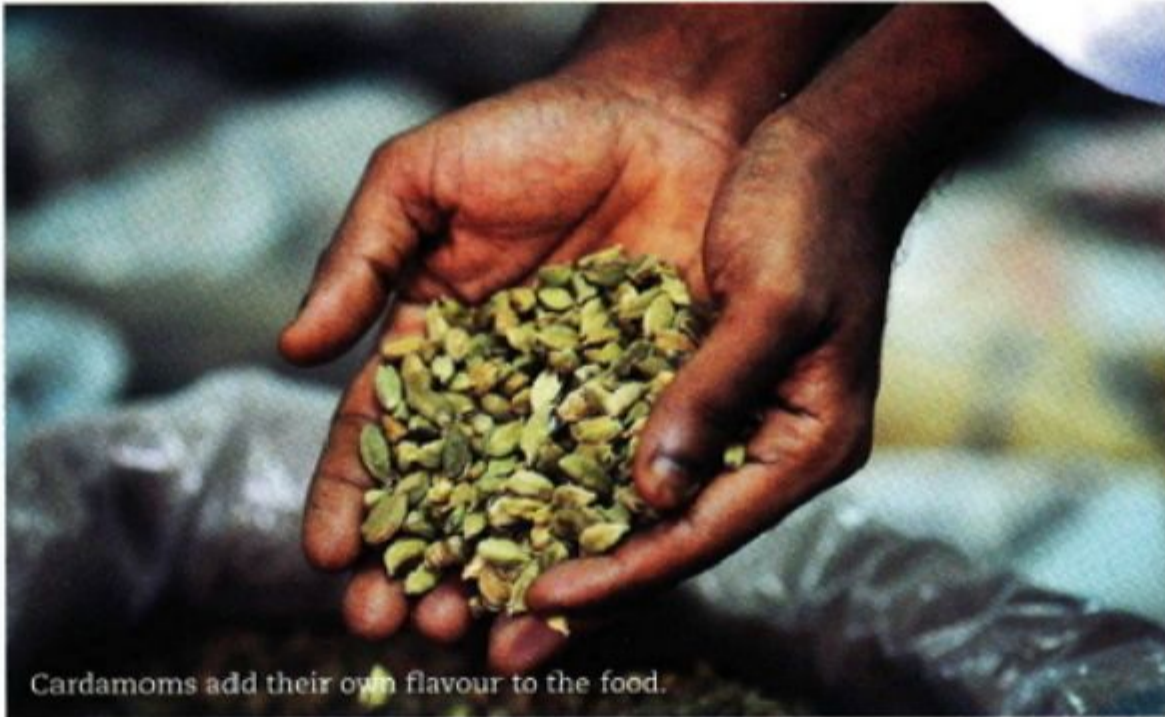


As an unabashed foodie, a culinary holiday to Kochi was on my 'buck-eat' list for a while. When a group of school friends decided to plan a reunion in this seaside city, I was delighted to join them and partake in the exotic and legendary coconut-flavoured cuisine of the Malayalis. Dishes like the appam and stew, moilees and avial were foremost on my mind (and palate) as we touched down on the tarmac.

On a foodie trail in this bustling city that has been a trading port for over 1,000 years we discover umpteen hidden gems. Malayali cuisine, as we experience it today, is a union of three different traditions — Hindu, Christian and Muslim. Thus you are exposed to a mouth-watering array of dishes, many pungent in taste, due to the geographical position of the state of Kerala — and the city of Kochi — on the Spice Coast.

Thanks to our guide we learn that most of the eating joints in Kochi are in the area popularly known as Fort Kochi. Our day begins with a delicious breakfast at Kashi Art Café on Burgher Street — a charming café that attracts both locals and foreign tourists with mouth-watering homemade cinnamon breakfast cake served with assorted

Tasty seafood.



Cardamoms add their own flavour to the food.

seasonal fruits, oatmeal with butter and a side of wild honey. At Kashi Art Café, the owners prefer to concentrate on important things like selecting the best, freshest produce daily and preparing everything with a serious amount of care. Thus the menu is limited, but every item is a treat worth sampling. An art gallery attached to the café features works of upcoming artists from around India.

Luckily, since most of the tourist spots are concentrated in one area (and as walking isn't high on our agenda) we manage to squeeze in some of the local sights after breakfast. We are struck by the majestic rain

trees all around Fort Kochi — another legacy from foreign rule (the British). These fern-like oak trees are a must-see and provide verdant relief from the burning sun during the summer months. In the monsoon, their green hues create a magical ambience.

Believed to be the finest natural harbour in the world, Kochi is often referred to as the 'Queen of the Arabian Sea' and the best way to experience its natural beauty is by taking a short cruise around the man-made islands, with lush green lawns sloping down to the water's edge creating a picture-postcard sight. The seaside view of Fort Kochi, Bolgatty Island, Willingdon

Island and the Kochi shipyard is exquisite too. The cruise offers a chance to swap old school stories and also take in another detailed view of the Chinese fishing nets, which are oddly outside of China, only found in Kochi and are a visual treat to say the least! Called *cheena vala* in local parlance, the huge cantilevered fishing nets are believed to have been brought by the Portuguese from Macau, once a Portuguese colony. Some historians attribute their origin to traders from the court of Kublai Khan between 1350 and 1450 AD, whilst another school of thought says the Chinese explorer Zhang introduced the nets

DESTINATION // KOCHI

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The Chinese fishing nets.

to Kochi shores.

Near the Chinese fishing nets opposite Delta Studio we accidentally discover Jude Allen Steven's stall, Little Maxims. This former Taj chef runs a seafood stall that fishes freshly caught fish literally a few metres away on a grill in any style of your choice. You can choose from prawns, lobsters, squid and more. Jude takes great pains in creating signature masalas and marinades that are bursting with fire and pungent aromas, which assail the taste buds. This was undoubtedly one of our best meals on the trip... that are bursting with fire and pungent aromas, which assail the taste buds. This was undoubtedly one of our best meals on the trip

an authentic Keralite lunch at the Grand Hotel on M.G. Road in Ernakulam. This hotel was one of the earliest to arrive on Kochi's (as it was known then) hospitality scene. Its restaurant, which resembles a clean and large dining hall, seats hundreds of diners and is always jam-packed. Popular with locals especially for its extensive seafood and other Keralite delights, this is a must-

offered are too many to consume even after repeated visits! This is the place to satiate your cravings for *meen pollichathum*, which is basically pearlfish, steamed in banana leaves. The Grand prepares this dish with subtle moilee gravy smeared on top, and the banana leaves tied with string are ceremoniously opened by the waiter with a scissor

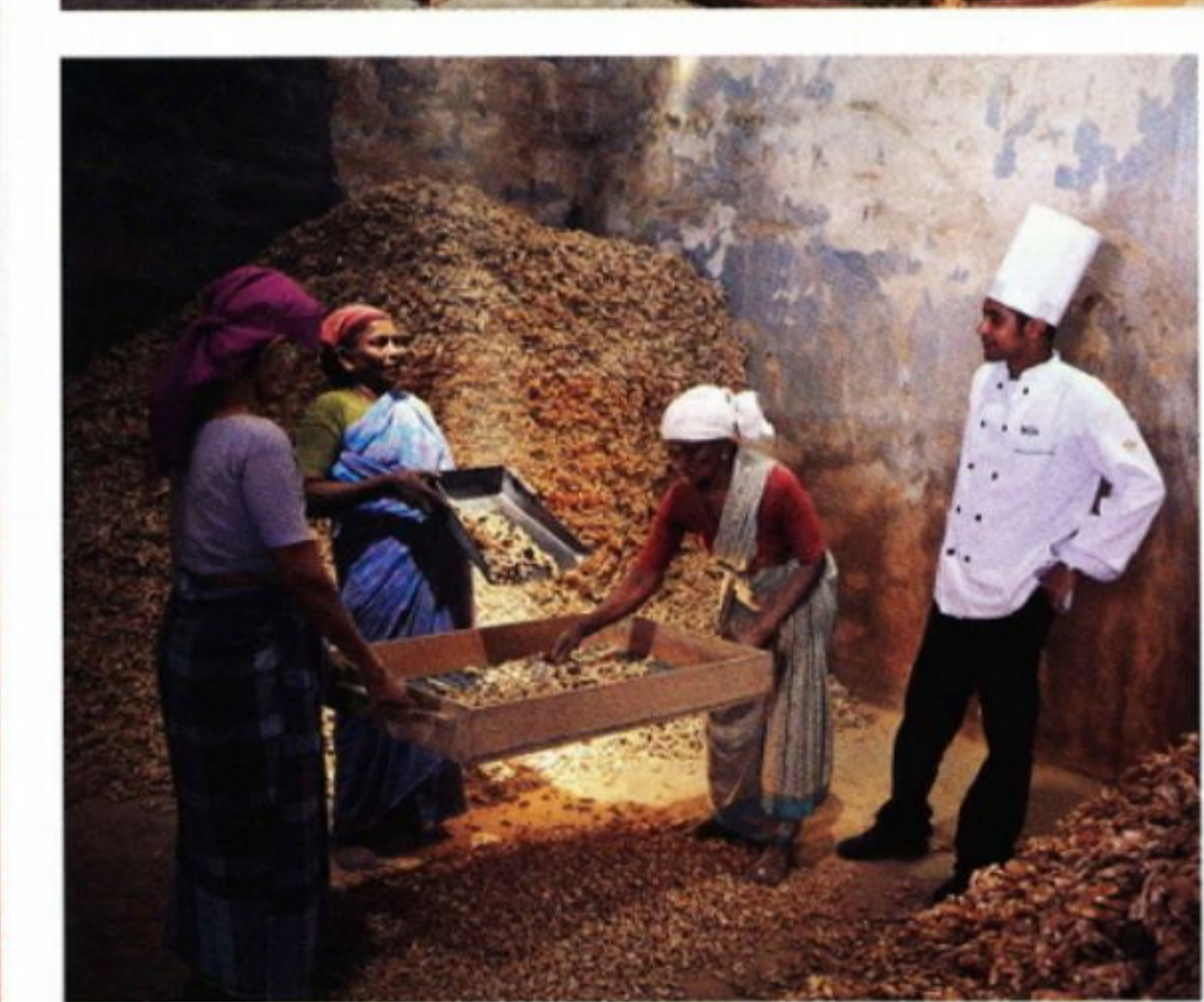
curry, which is a pungent red fish curry that is best mopped up with hot *appams*. Later in the afternoon (simply because we are spoilt for choices to snack on around Jew Town) we opt for Café Crafters — a restaurant that offers decent club sandwiches. Equally, if not more interesting, is its craft store, which boasts of the world's largest *varpu* or re-restaurant that offers decent club sandwiches. Equally, if not more interesting, is its craft store, which boasts of the world's largest *varpu* or



which pays homage to the humble teapot. Charming decorated with teapots of all shapes and sizes, this cafe offers food and beverages in an interior littered with vintage teapots, trinkets and relics from the old tea trade days of the Malabar Coast. The Death by Chocolate cake is a decadent treat too. Dinner is a stylish affair — a far cry from the street stalls and roadside eateries. We opt for an unforgettable setting that reeks of romance at The Rice Boat at The Vivanta by Taj Malabar



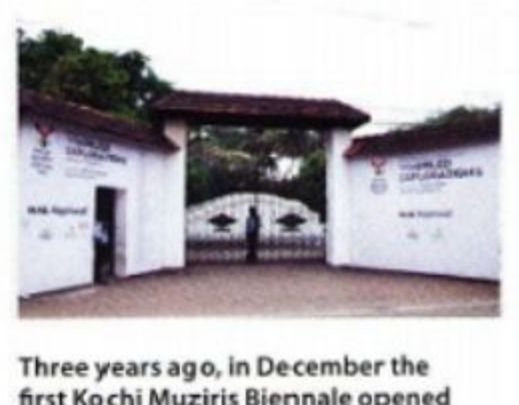
The Rice Boat Restaurant.



on Willingdon Island. The Rice Boat is a fresh take on accent on local Kerala cuisine. Diners enjoy their meal in the splendour of a typical *kettuvalam* rice boat and sample some of the signature dishes prepared in three distinctive styles: *ularthiyathu* — tossed with caramelised onion, coconut flakes and spices; *porichatu* — with sliced shallots, curry leaf, chillies and tamarind pulp and *peera pattachathu* — with crushed coconut and smoked local tamarind. With

a choice of local sweet water fish and seafood, exotic ocean catch including lobsters, scampi, mussels and more and internationally renowned seafood including Norwegian salmon, oysters and clams, our budgets go haywire at this pricey restaurant, but it's one of those celebratory meals you don't mind splurging on! Our final repast includes flavoured tiger prawns with onion salsa, a smooth crab and coconut soup with scallions, and finally grilled

THE SECOND KOCHI MUZIRIS BIENNALE



Three years ago, in December the first Kochi Muziris Biennale opened its doors to the public. Then it was relatively unknown, being India's first artist-led contemporary art biennale. The first edition was spearheaded by Bose Krishnamachari. This year, the second Kochi Muziris Biennale opened in December and is in its final month (March 2015). Its curator, Jitish Kallat, has taken the previous initiative ahead and put together a formidable line-up of artists. On making Kochi the new art destination in India, Kallat said, "The choice of Kochi as a venue for the biennale has activated a new site on the art landscape in South Asia at the southern tip of peninsular India. Kochi's rich history offers a unique orientation and a glossary of signs that inspire the making of art." Catch the works of the artists who hail from 26 different countries in Kochi before the second Kochi Muziris Biennale draws to a close on March 29, 2015.

tamarind and pepper sauce. The fare is tangy, tasty and full of flavour — just like the city of Kochi itself. **GETTING THERE AIRASIA INDIA FLIES DAILY TO KOCHI FROM BENGALURU.** www.airasia.com