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PORT EXPLORER



COCHIN

INDIA

Cochin is a town and major port situated in the State of Kerala, the smallest of the southern Indian states. Kerala was well known to the Arabs, Greeks, Egyptians and Romans who traded for spices, silks, ivory and fragrant woods along the coast. It is said that King Solomon received teakwood, ivory and gold from the old ports of Kerala. It was also the first place where Christianity was brought to the Indian subcontinent when the Apostle Thomas arrived in 52 A.D. Cochin, on Kerala's exotic Malabar coast, has been a port since the 6th century B.C. and is sometimes called "Queen of the Arabian Sea," because of its beauty. Cochin is the name of a former princely state and is also sometimes used today to refer to a cluster of islands and towns including Ernakulam, Mattancheri, Fort Cochin, Willingdon Island and Gundu Island.

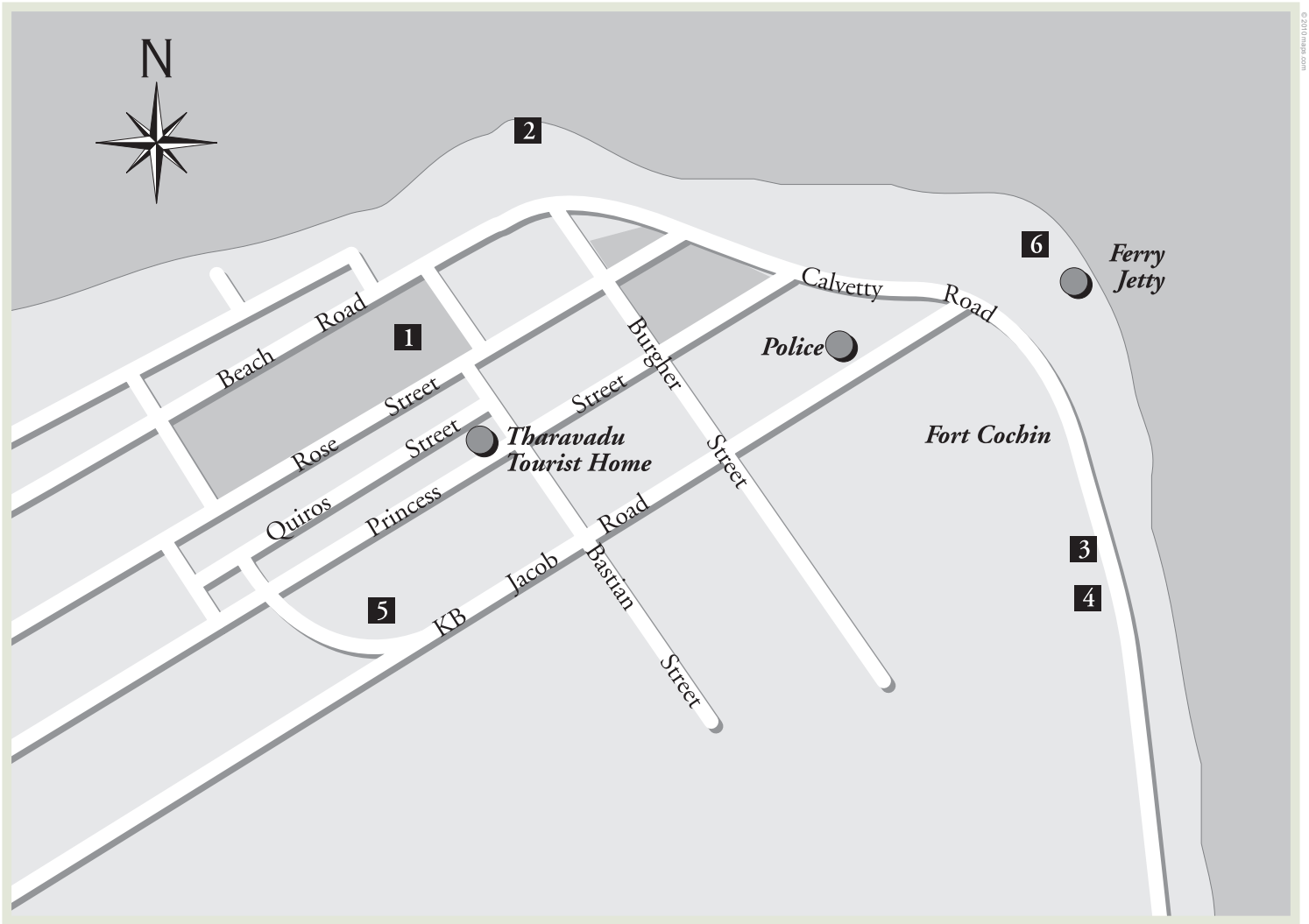
Cochin Harbor is one of the safest ports on India's west coast and is open all year, even in the monsoon season. After India's independence in 1947 Cochin became the major training center for the Indian Navy. A system of inland waterways parallel the coast and provide Cochin with cheap transportation, thus encouraging trade. For this reason it is sometimes referred to as "Venice of the East." Due to the fact that Cochin is situated among a cluster of islands and picturesque lagoons, it attracts a considerable amount of tourist trade. Every colonial influence in India is reflected in Cochin and you will find a wide variety of races and cultures. Its historical past ranges from Portuguese houses and churches to cantilevered Chinese fishing nets, Mosques, Hindu Temples and one of the oldest Jewish communities in the world.



HISTORY

Cochin began to develop when the backwaters of the Arabian Sea and the streams descending from the Ghats caused the separation of the village from the mainland. This turned the landlocked harbor into a safe port. In the 16th century the Portuguese navigator, Vasco da Gama, discoverer of the sea route to India, came to Cochin. He died here in 1524 and was buried locally for 14 years. Pedro Alvares Cabral helped establish the first European settlement on Indian soil at Cochin and in 1503 Alfonso de Albuquerque built the first European fort in India.

The Portuguese controlled the area until the Dutch conquest in 1663. From then until 1745 Cochin, under Dutch rule, prospered to the benefit of everyone who lived there. Pepper, cardamon, spices, coir, coconut and copra were brought through the harbor. British rule took over from 1795 to 1947 and at the start of the 20th century a modern port was constructed. Indian independence in 1947 brought a new era to the area and its people.



COCHIN PLACES OF INTEREST

1 Church of St. Francis is where Vasco da Gama was buried in 1524. Fourteen years later his remains were taken back to Portugal, but his tombstone marks the original location. It is the oldest European constructed church in all of India, built in 1503.

2 The Chinese Fishing Nets is a picturesque area of graceful nets draping into the waters of the bay.

3 Mattancheri Palace was originally built by the Portuguese as a gift for the Raja of Cochin and was later rebuilt by the Dutch. It is sometimes called the Dutch Palace. A portion of the building now houses a museum. The main feature is a series of murals painted on the wooden walls.

4 The Jewish Synagogue, located near the palace in “Jew Town” was built by the famous Ezekial Rahabi. The synagogue has two pulpits, one that may be used by women. The congregation is small as much of the younger generation has migrated to Israel.

5 The Basilica of Santa Cruz is another old church building.

6 Fort Cochin area contains a local ferry terminal, a bus stand and a small bazaar.

Beyond Cochin

Ernakulam is a busy city located across the water from Fort Cochin and Willingdon Island. It has a main business section as well as an archaeological museum, hotels and a Kerala State Center for handicrafts.

Varapuzho, one of the many small villages surrounding Cochin, can be reached by ferry in 2 hours. Ferries run throughout the day



SHORE EXCURSIONS

To make the most of your visit to Cochin we suggest you take one of the organized Shore Excursions. For information concerning tour content and pricing, consult azamarclubcruises.com or contact the onboard Shore Excursion Desk. When going ashore, guests are advised to take with them only the items they need and to secure any valuables.

LOCAL CUSTOMS

Bargaining: You can bargain in all but the fixed-price stores. Merchants in areas where most Westerners shop may be reluctant to bargain.

Tippling: Some hotels and restaurants add a service charge to your bill. If the service has been good small change should be left. At the airport you will buy a portage ticket, usually Rs 2 per bag and the porter does not get tipped on top of this fee.

Dress Code: Casual clothes will get you through most any occasion. Jeans or something similar are acceptable almost anywhere. Shorts are not worn in city streets, except by Westerners who are not considerate of the Indian sensitivities. Generally, women's shoulders are covered in India. Wear comfortable shoes that are easy to get in and out of if you plan to visit temples, shrines or mosques.

LOCAL CUISINE AND DRINK SPECIALTIES

Typical Indian and Chinese food abound in this city. Try the chicken tikka makhanwalla (boneless in butter), murg musallam with eggs, spices, cashews and raisins. Vegetarian dishes are especially good in India, prepared with unusual sauces. Rice is also excellent in India and is served many ways, with vegetables, nuts, fruits and spices. Keralites love ice cream, ice cream parlors and bakeries and you will find them everywhere.

Indian-grown tea is very good. Coffee, locally grown, is also good. Be sure to specify if you want your coffee black – the Indian way is to mix it with steaming milk before being served. Local beer is plentiful and goes well with Indian food. You will find a large selection of fruit drinks such as apple or lime. Bottled water is recommended.

SHOPPING

The main shopping area is found along M.G. Road and Broadway, a distance of about 6 miles (10 km) from the pier. Normal business hours are 10:00 am – 7:00 pm, Monday through Saturday. Most shops are closed on Sunday.

The most popular souvenir items are similar to other areas of India; antiques, jewelry, wooden items, white cotton, saris and leather. When buying antiques, be certain that the merchant supplies the forms you need to export them from the country. As for jewelry, if you buy gold with diamonds or other precious stones you must have a certificate to permit you to leave the country with your purchase. U.S. Dollars and British Pounds are accepted in many locations.

LOCAL CURRENCY

The official currency of India is called the rupee (Rs). There are 100 paise to each rupee. Notes can be found in the following denominations: 5, 10, 20, 50, 100, 500 and 1,000. Changing your money only at authorized places is advised. These are available at cashier's desks of hotels, most banks and in some shops as well. Stock up on plenty of small change as many merchants may not be able to supply the correct change. Check notes for holes and tears as most Indian's will not accept damaged currency.

POST OFFICE AND TELEPHONE FACILITIES

The Willingdon Island Post Office is open 10:00 am to 2:00 pm, Monday through Saturday and closed on Sunday.

Local and International telephone facilities are available at the pier. Within the city, long distance calls must be placed from hotels or telephone offices.

TRANSPORTATION

Taxis in Cochin don't always have meters, so drivers may try to charge what they think you will pay. Bargain to set a fair fare before beginning your journey. Willingdon is connected by ferry to the mainland of Ernakulam and runs throughout the day in either direction. Buses are available, but tend to be overcrowded.

TOURIST INFORMATION

The Government of India Tourist Office is located at the Malabar Hotel on Willingdon Island. The Tourist Reception Center is found on Shanmugham Road, Ernakulam.

