Floating luxurious havens in Backwaters by Rama Shankar Diwakar

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Kerala, fondly called godâ€™s own country, is a land of magical beauty blessed with bounties of nature galore. Kerala is located in the Malabar Coast of south western India. This coastal territory rolls from Western Ghats in lush green vegetation to Arabian Sea. Pristine beaches, mist shrouded hill stations, placid backwaters, verdant landscape, exotic flora and fauna and suave art forms â€“ the attractions Kerala hands out to tourists are multiple.

Backwaters is an attraction unique to Kerala. It is an exclusive Kerala occurrence. Backwaters is a complex network of manmade and natural canals and inlets, estuaries of over forty rivers and five lakes. Before bridges, ferries and roads came backwaters was the means of transportation for local people. They also depended on backwaters for means of sustenance like fishing and agriculture. Backwaters is playing the economic role in continuance even today by earning millions through tourism.

Backwaters make for fascinating setting with shores marked by abodes, swaying coconut trees, emerald flora and lush green paddy fields, fishing nets and various activities of life; and backwaters lined by water flowers especially water lilies. Cruising through backwaters savoring this setting is a blissful affair.

Houseboats are now the buzzwords in backwater tourism. Houseboat in Kerala are modern day luxurious versions of â€œKettuvallamsâ€• of yester year. Kettuvallams were used to transport rice and household items through backwaters. They have thatched roof over wooden hulls to offer protection from elements of nature. Although the shape remains the same, Houseboats are two to three storied affairs including one to five bedrooms. Apart from sleeping space, Houseboats have dining space and a sit out open on all sides, from where guests can relish the exquisite charm of backwaters. They come adjoined with generators and provide for full time air conditioning. There is also western style toilet attached. A crew including a cook accompanies guests. The menu is mostly indigenous variety including local fish but the taste of guests prevails.

Houseboats are ninety five to one hundred and fifteen meters in length and thirteen to fifteen meters in width. The wood used to carve the houseboat is that of â€œAnjiliâ€•(Wild Jack). The accessories that go into the making of houseboats are local and eco friendly. It is to be noted that no nails are used instead the adjoining are tied by coir.

Although the houseboats are motorized, they are run in a meandering pace. Spending a night in Houseboat docked in backwaters is a heavenly affair. You can see boats and abodes as moving or static illumination respectively in the far distance. You have the choice of switching off electric lamps and spending time in the light of lanterns alone, to get a local feel. If the night is moonlit, the enjoyment increases manifold. If you are lucky, you can sight fireflies illuminating tree branches, blinking eternally.

Kerala Houseboat tours are mainly centered around Alleppey, Kochi, Kollam and Kumarakom.

Kumarakom deserves special mention in Kerala Houseboat Packages. Kumarakom is an idyllic village located near Kottayam. Kumarakom holds all the attractions of a backwater village. The backwaters there are mainly formed by Meenachil river and Vembanad lake. There is a bird sanctuary in Kumarakom which is frequented by migratory birds especially Siberian Cranes. The accommodation facilities available are also superlative.

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