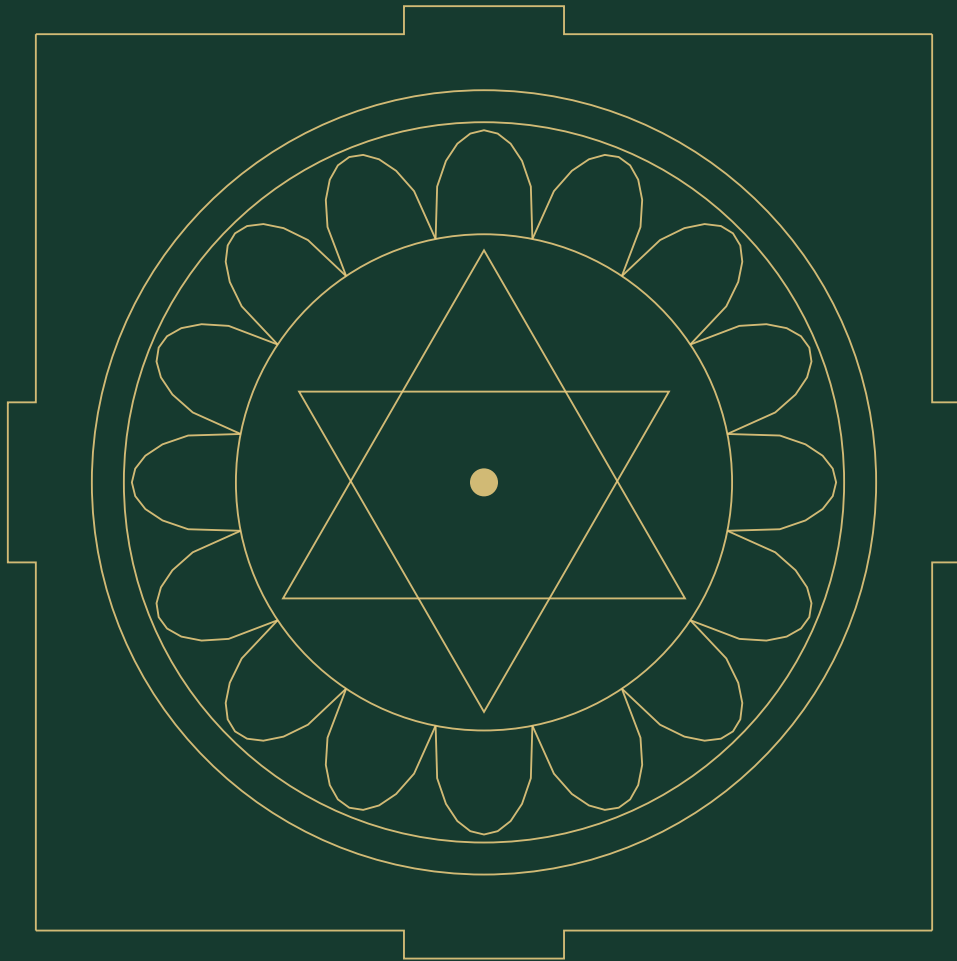


INDIA

# Kerala: The Yogi's Guide to Yoga and Ayurveda

*Legends, the Sivananda ashram at Neyyar Dam, Ayurveda without promises, temples,  
the two monsoons, e-Visa and itineraries, checked and dated*



यात्रा

*yātrā*

YOGIDE

Free sample

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teacher or medical advice. Questions; [administration@lacangel.fr](mailto:administration@lacangel.fr)

# Before you begin

Kerala is a narrow strip of land between the Western Ghats and the Arabian Sea, at the south-western tip of India. Many travellers come here for three things that matter to a yogi: a living tradition of Ayurveda, one of the best-known Sivananda ashrams in the world, and temples where daily worship has continued for centuries.

This guide is written for the person who comes to Kerala to practise, to rest in a disciplined way, or to understand Ayurveda as a tradition, and who wants to arrive with respect, clear expectations and no avoidable mistakes. It is not a list of "the best retreats". You will not find any ranking, review or recommendation of a particular ashram, school or Ayurveda centre in these pages, and that is deliberate. What this book gives you is the context, the practical facts and the questions that let you choose well for yourself.

It is built on three promises.

**First, practical facts are checked and dated.** Visa rules, ashram rules, festival dates, climate figures and health advice change. Every practical fact in this guide was checked online on **16 October 2026** against the most official source we could find, and the source is listed at the end. When we could only find unofficial or contradictory information, we say so plainly and tell you where to confirm. When we could not verify something at all, we left it out.

**Second, no invented experiences.** There are no testimonials, no "when I was in Kerala" anecdotes, no reviews of ashrams, teachers, doctors or beaches. Where a story is a legend, we call it a legend; where a date is historical, we give its source.

**Third, the sacred is treated as sacred, and health is treated with care.** Kerala's great temples are places of worship with strict rules, some of which apply to visitors who are not Hindu. Ayurveda is a medical tradition, not a spa menu. This book explains customs so you can take part without causing offence, and it makes **no health promise of any kind**. Sanskrit words are written in Devanagari with a scholarly transliteration (IAST); Malayalam words are given in a simple Latin transliteration only.

## **This guide informs; it does not replace official advice or a doctor.**

Before you travel, read your own government's travel advice for India, check the official Indian e-Visa website yourself, read the published rules of any ashram or centre on its own website, and see a travel health professional. Do not start or stop any treatment, Ayurvedic or otherwise, without a qualified doctor. In an emergency in India, dial **112** (UK FCDO travel advice, accessed 16 October 2026).

## How to read Sanskrit and Malayalam words in this book

Sanskrit words appear in Devanagari and in IAST: आयुर्वेद, āyurveda. A few keys are enough:

| IAST    | Sounds roughly like                 | Example        |
|---------|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| ā, ī, ū | long a, ee, oo                      | ā in āyurveda  |
| ṛ       | a short "ri"                        | ṛṣi            |
| ś, ṣ    | "sh" (two different "sh" sounds)    | Śaṅkara, Viṣṇu |
| c       | "ch" as in church                   | cakra          |
| ṭ, ḍ, ṇ | t, d, n with the tongue curled back | maṇḍala        |
| ṅ       | "ng"                                | Śaṅkara        |
| ṁ       | nasal hum                           | oṁ             |

Malayalam has its own script, which this book does not print: Malayalam words are given in an everyday Latin spelling, such as namaskaram or nanni.

## How to use this book

Deciding when to go: Chapters 2 and 8. Choosing an ashram or an Ayurveda centre: Chapters 3, 4 and 13, before you pay anything. Ticket booked: Chapters 9, 10 and 11. Itineraries: Chapter 15.

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# Chapter 1. Kerala in legend and history

## Parashurama and the axe: a founding legend

Ask in Kerala how the land was born, and you will often hear the legend of Paraśurāma (परशुराम), "Rāma with the axe" (परशु, paraśu, is an axe), one of the avatars of Viṣṇu in Hindu tradition. According to the Malayalam work Keralolpathi, usually dated to the 17th century, Paraśurāma threw his axe across the sea from Gokarna, and the waters receded as far as it reached; the land that rose between Gokarna and Kanyakumari became Kerala (Wikipedia, "Parashurama", accessed 16 October 2026). In some tellings, he commands Varuṇa (वरुण), the god of the waters, to withdraw. This is why Kerala is sometimes called Paraśurāma kṣetra, "the land of Paraśurāma".

Kerala Tourism adds that local tradition credits Paraśurāma with founding kalaripayattu (Chapter 7). These are legends, and we present them as such: they tell you how many people in Kerala understand their land, not what geology says about the coast.

## A land of many faiths

Kerala is home to large Hindu, Muslim and Christian communities. You may hear the call to prayer, see a church procession and a temple festival in the same week; respect for all of them is part of good conduct here. Malayalam is the language of daily life (Chapter 18).

## Ādi Śaṅkara and Kalady

For a student of yoga and Vedānta, one name stands above all others in Kerala's history: Ādi Śaṅkara (आदि शङ्कर), also called Śaṅkarācārya, the great teacher of Advaita Vedānta (अद्वैत वेदान्त), the philosophy of non-duality. According to the oldest hagiographies, he was born at **Kalady** (Kāladi), a village on the Periyar river in today's Ernakulam district. Reliable information about his life is scarce: his biographies were written centuries after his death and often contradict one another, and one later account names another birthplace; most recent scholarship places him in the first half of the 8th century CE, roughly 700 to 750, while the traditional monasteries give a much earlier date (Wikipedia, "Adi Shankara", accessed 16 October 2026).

What is widely accepted is his work. His commentary on the Brahma Sūtra (ब्रह्मसूत्र), his commentaries on several principal Upaniṣads and his commentary on the Bhagavad Gītā are generally held to be authentic. Their central teaching is that the individual self is in truth identical with Brahman (ब्रह्मन्), and that liberating knowledge of this identity is the goal (Wikipedia, "Adi Shankara").

Tradition also credits him with founding four monasteries at the four corners of India, including Śṛṅgeri (शृङ्गेरी) in the south. At Kalady today, a shrine to Śaṅkara and to the goddess Śāradā, managed by the Sringeri Mutt, stands on the bank of the Periyar, together with the memorial of his mother; a tall memorial tower built by the Kanchi Kamakoti Math, the Adi Sankara Keerthi Sthamba Mandapam, is described as

open to pilgrims of all religions (Wikipedia, "Kalady"). A well-known legend tells that a crocodile seized the boy Śaṅkara as he bathed, and that he obtained his mother's permission to renounce the world in exchange for his release; the bathing place is still shown.

The Sivananda lineage you will meet at Neyyar Dam (Chapter 4) counts Ādi Śaṅkara among its teachers, between Śiva as the first yogi and Swami Sivananda (sivananda.org.in, "The Lineage", accessed 16 October 2026).

## Sree Narayana Guru

A modern teacher shaped Kerala as deeply. **Sree Narayana Guru** (born 20 August 1856, died 20 September 1928) was a spiritual teacher and social reformer who challenged caste exclusion. In 1888 he consecrated a Śiva image at Aruvippuram, a gesture then reserved to Brahmins; in 1904 he settled at **Sivagiri**, near Varkala, where he opened a school and where he rests today. His teaching is often summarised as "one caste, one religion and one god for all human beings" (Wikipedia, "Narayana Guru", accessed 16 October 2026). If you stay in Varkala, the Sivagiri Mutt on the hill above the town is part of the place's spiritual landscape (Chapter 6).

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## End of the sample

Thank you for reading this far. We hope these first pages already help your practice, and that they show how the rest of the book is built: clear steps, texts quoted with their source, nothing invented.

**The full book has 44 pages.**

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