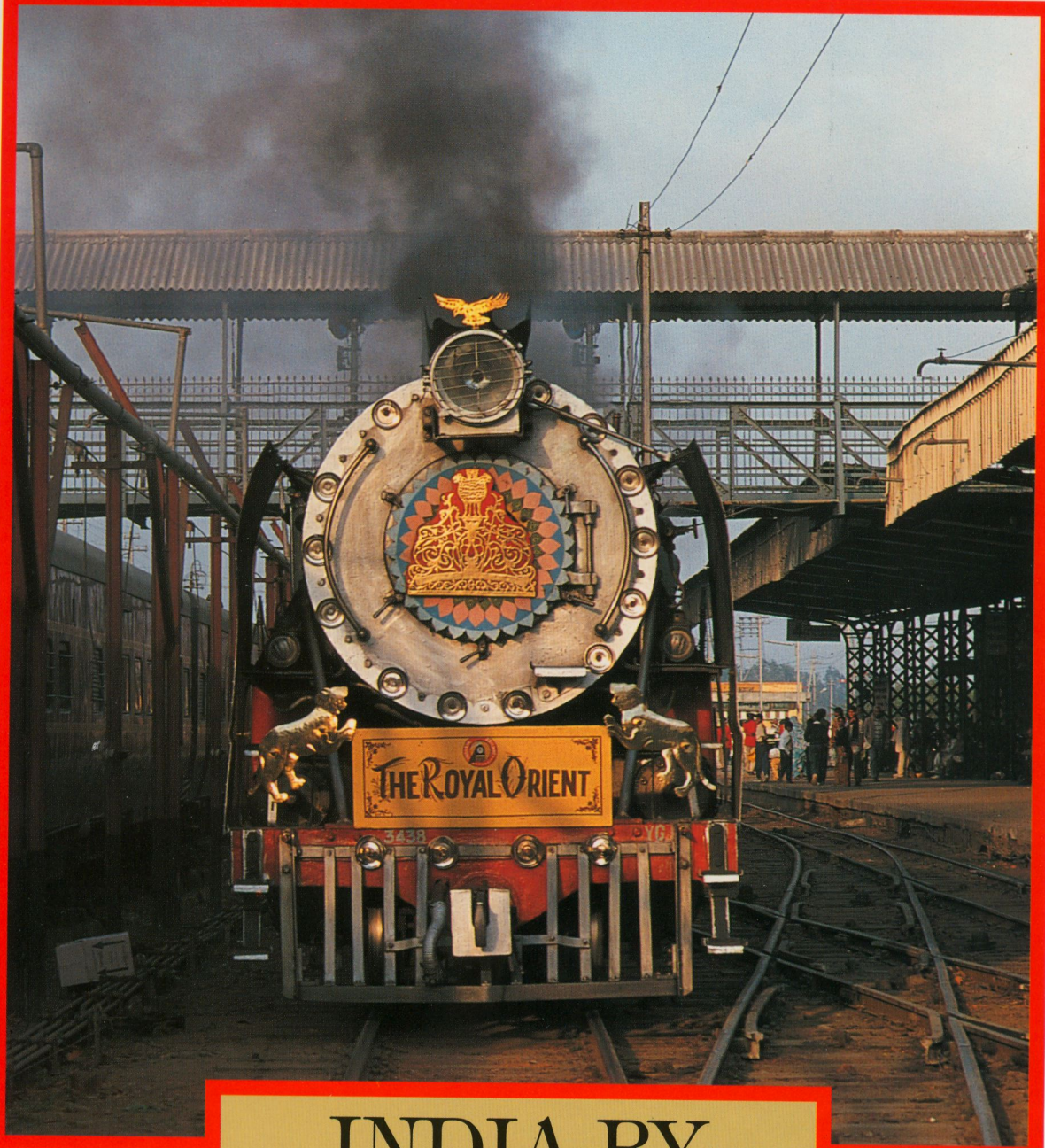


Discover India

June 1997

Rs. 50



INDIA BY
RAIL

UK £ 2.50 • France FF 35 • Germany DM 9 • USA US\$ 5 • UAE Dirhams 15 • Japan Yen 800

Discover India

CONTENTS

VOLUME 10, No.6 JUNE 1997

EDITOR
SHRITI NATH

REPORTER AND STAFF WRITER
MANISH PANT

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT
PRASAN KUMAR

DESIGNER
SUDHIR PETER

LAYOUT ARTISTS
BINDU THOMAS
RAM LAGAN

SUPERVISOR-IMAGESETTING
T. T. VERGHESE

VICE PRESIDENT
RAJU SARIN

VICE PRESIDENT (W. REGION)
RADHIKA MEHTA ARORA

VICE PRESIDENT (S. REGION)
L. ALI KHAN

ASSISTANT VICE PRESIDENT
AMITAVA GUHA

OPERATIONS DIRECTOR
XAVIER COLLACO

MANAGING DIRECTOR
SURESH BHAYANA

CHAIRMAN (Media Transasia Group)
J.S.UBEROI

Discover India is published and produced by Media Transasia Limited, Room 202-203, Hollywood Centre, 233, Hollywood Road, Central, Hong Kong. Tel: 2815 9111, Fax: (852) 2851 1933. Entire contents Copyright ©1997 Media Transasia Ltd. All rights reserved. Reproduction or translation in any language in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. Requests for permission should be directed to Media Transasia Ltd. Opinions carried in Discover India are the writers' and not necessarily endorsed by Media Transasia. The publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited material unless accompanied by sufficient return postage. Nor is he responsible for material lost or damaged in transit. All correspondence regarding advertising or editorial should be addressed to Media Transasia Thailand Ltd., 14th floor, Orakarn Building, 26, Chidlom Road, Ploenchit, Bangkok 10330, Thailand. Tel: 2519905-7, Telex: 84003 MEDTRAN TH or Media Transasia India Limited, K-35, Green Park, New Delhi 110016, India. Tel: 6868775, 6865482, 6862687. Telex: 031-73262 MTIL IN, Fax: 011-6867641

4 INDIAN RAILWAYS
India's Lifeline
TEXT: PRAN NATH LUTHRA

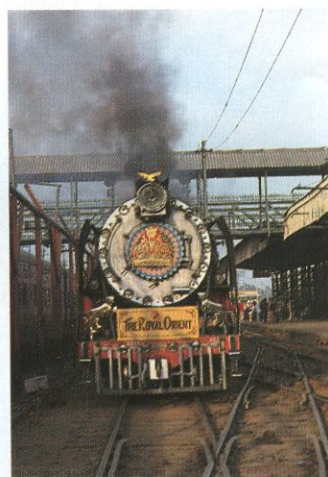
12 TOY TRAINS
TEXT: SANDEEP SILAS

20 LINES ON THE RULE
TEXT: M. CHOUDHURY

23 FULL STEAM AHEAD
TEXT: RUSKIN BOND

26 PHOTOESSAY
Sounds of Silent Whistles
PHOTOGRAPHS: AMLAN PALIWAL

32 A TRAVALOGUE ON CYBERDOM
TEXT: VARUN SONI



RAJIV RASTOGI



36 ROMANCE OF THE RAILWAYS
TEXT: GANESH SAILI

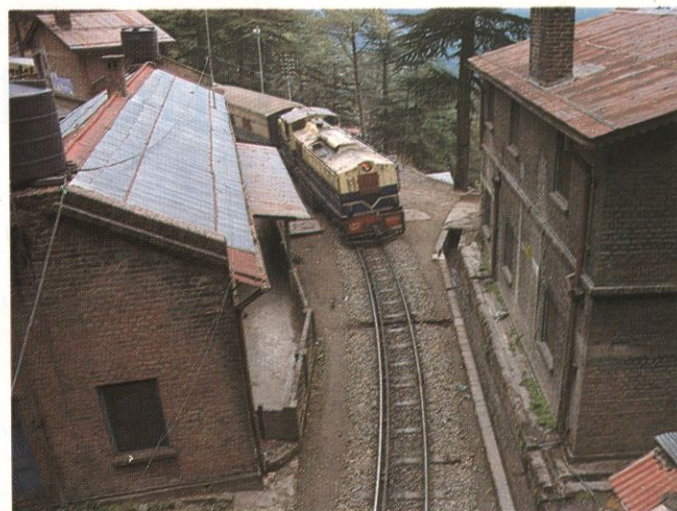
43 RAILWAY STAFF COLLEGE
VADODARA
TEXT: SANDEEP SILAS

45 INTERVIEW
India and the Railways
TEXT: MANISH PANT

47 BACKTRACKING INTO THE PAST
TEXT: GANESH SAILI

52 THE SAGA OF THE INDIAN RAIL
TEXT: OMESH SAIGAL

60 THE MALABAR EXPRESS
Coasting Across Kerala
TEXT: NIHAL MATHUR

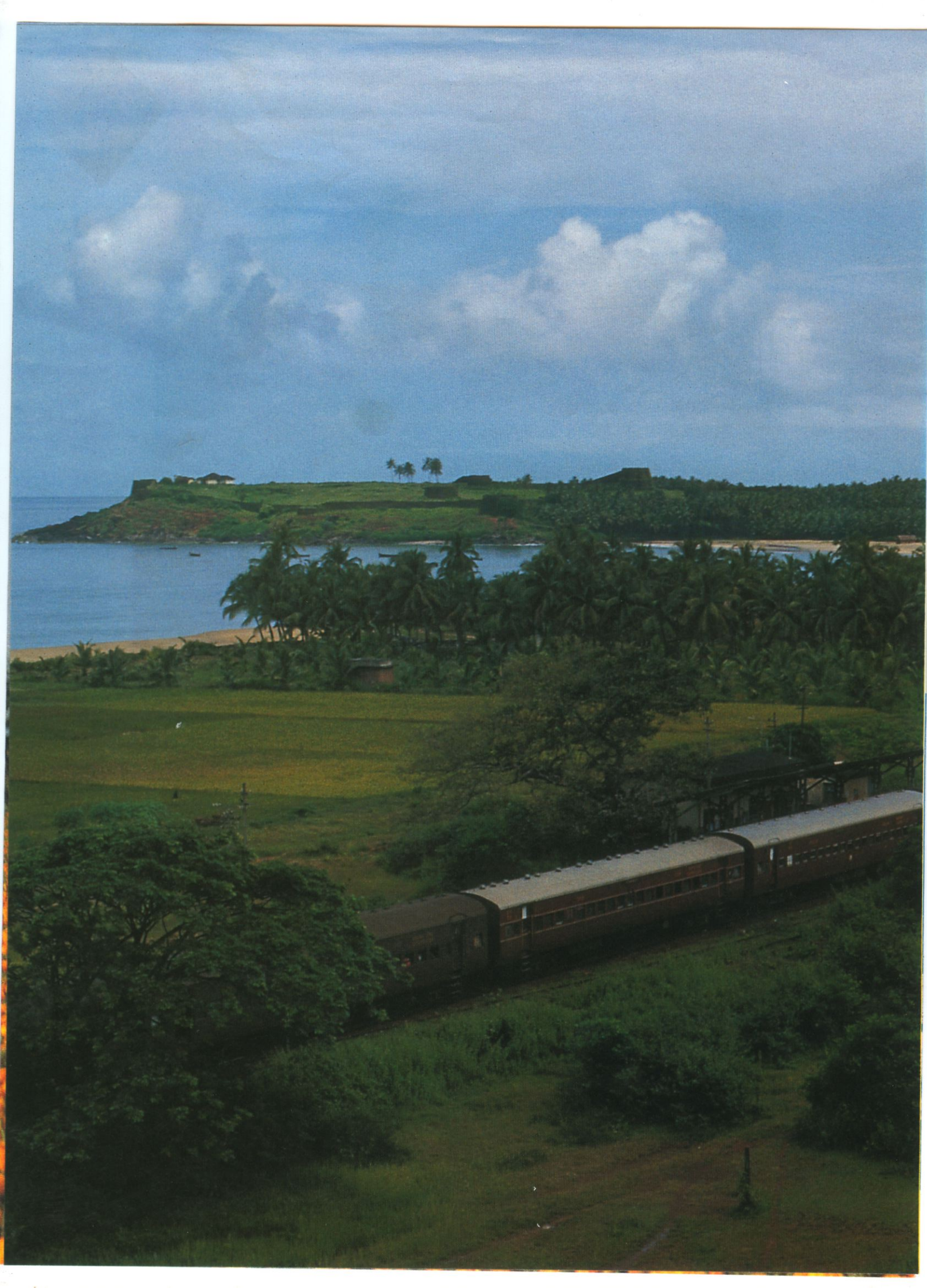


66 KONKAN RAILWAY
Our Railroad by the Coast
TEXT: S.K. MALIK

68 PALACE ON WHEELS
Royal India on the Roll
TEXT: PUSHPITA SINGH

72 THE ROYAL ORIENT EXPRESS
Seven Days in a Silver Spoon
TEXT: SANDEEP SILAS







THE MALABAR EXPRESS Coasting Across Kerala

Text and photographs:
Nihal Mathur

*The Arabian Sea will be your
constant companion as you travel
with the sea breeze, right across
the length of Kerala on the
Malabar Express — a symbol of
discovery of this beautiful South
Indian state.*

Modern day Kerala is synonymous to Malabar an ancient name for India's south western coast. Historically, this region has been known to the world as the land of spices that attracted the foreign traveller-trader from very early times. There were Babylonians and Egyptians, Arabs and Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans, even Chinese, and later, Portuguese, Dutch, French and of course, the English, who came not only to trade in spices but also to control it. Many port cities came up along this coast to cater to an ever increasing demand. While some cities perished with the fluctuating fortunes,

Train and sea at Bekal





others survived, often changing their names in time.

The train starts from Mangalore in Karnataka and runs its near parallel course along the sea with the exception of two detours inland. Connecting almost all the coastal cities, the train terminates nearly 600 kms away in Thiruvananthapuram.

I began my journey in Mangalore one clear day in the rainy month of August. Barely thirty kilometers after departure, the train entered Kerala speeding between the sea on the right and the mountain range of Western Ghats on the left. My first stop was Kannur, a fairly large town I identified with the Portuguese. Although Vasco Da Gama had first landed near Kozhikode in 1498, the Portuguese were not given any concessions by the ruling Zamorins. Instead they found their first foothold here in Kannur where they built a fort to establish their presence in the Malabar.

One afternoon I wandered in the derelict and abandoned Fort St. Angelo with its rusting cannons and empty spaces facing the open shimmering sea. Colourful boats gave a festive look to the bay and I could have never guessed that this place was once desperately caught in intense European rivalry for the spice trade.

One of the main players in this struggle for power were the British who made their military presence in the Malabar at Thallassery, my next destination from Kannur. The bread starved English introduced the baking tradition for the first time in India in Thallassery. One still finds a large number of bakeries here.

Although the Germans were not one of the contestants they did send their missionaries to the Malabar. Thallassery has the bungalow of Dr. Gundert (1814-1893) who compiled a Malayalam-English dictionary. Today the building is being used to impart technical training to the young.

South of Thallassery, the Mahe river meets the sea. It was here the French found their first foothold on the Malabar. A small pocket barely five sq. kms, Mahe remained a French protectorate till 1954 when the last of the French left. In 1962, the French gave nationalities to all those who had served France. Today, nearly a hundred families are French passport holders and members of what is called the "Union des Francais de Mahe".

Left: Pazham or banana — fruit market
Thiruvananthapuram



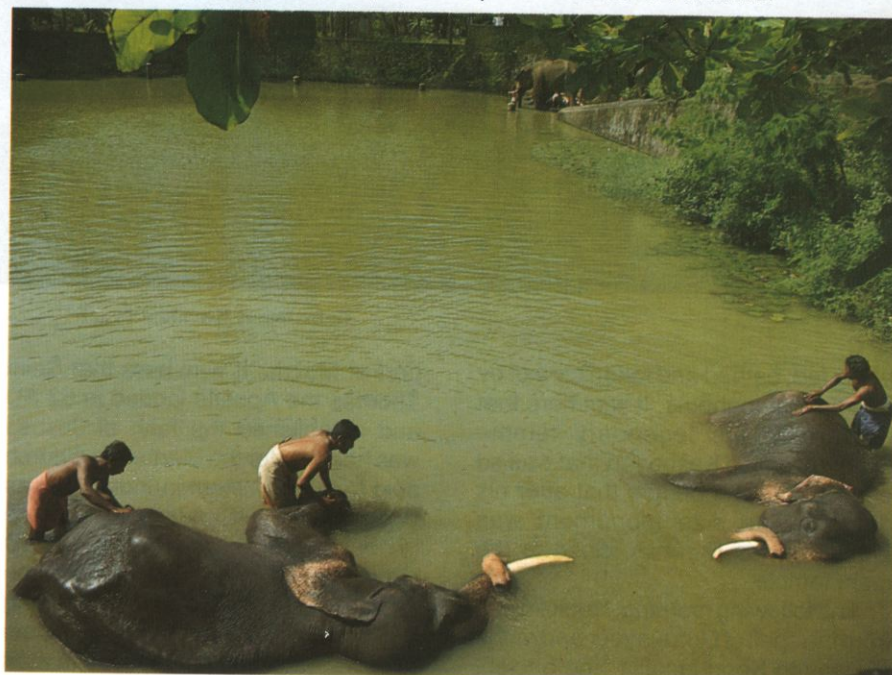
Train and sea en route to Kannur

I went to see the other symbols of the French in Mahe like the chateau of the French Administrator at the mouth of the river and the statue of Marianne installed in 1889 marking the centenary celebrations of the French Revolution. But one living legacy of the French in modern day Mahe is the French legionnaire's cap that is still worn by the policemen.

Kozhikode was my next stop on the Malabar Express. A city associated with the Arabs who long held a monopoly over the spice trade because they enjoyed the favour of the rulers of

Kozhikode. Besides spices, there was another lure for the sea-faring Arab finest teak wood for their dhows. Once upon a time Kallai, just south of Kozhikode used to be a huge timber yard while Beypore village on the Chliyar was famous for its boat building - a tradition that is still alive today. In Beypore, I met one Koya, a ship builder who showed me around his premises where three ships were in different stages of production. He said they were capable of making a large sailing ship of nearly 300 tonnage carrying capacity in roughly twelve to

Temple elephants being bathed by their mahouts at Punnathur





eighteen months.

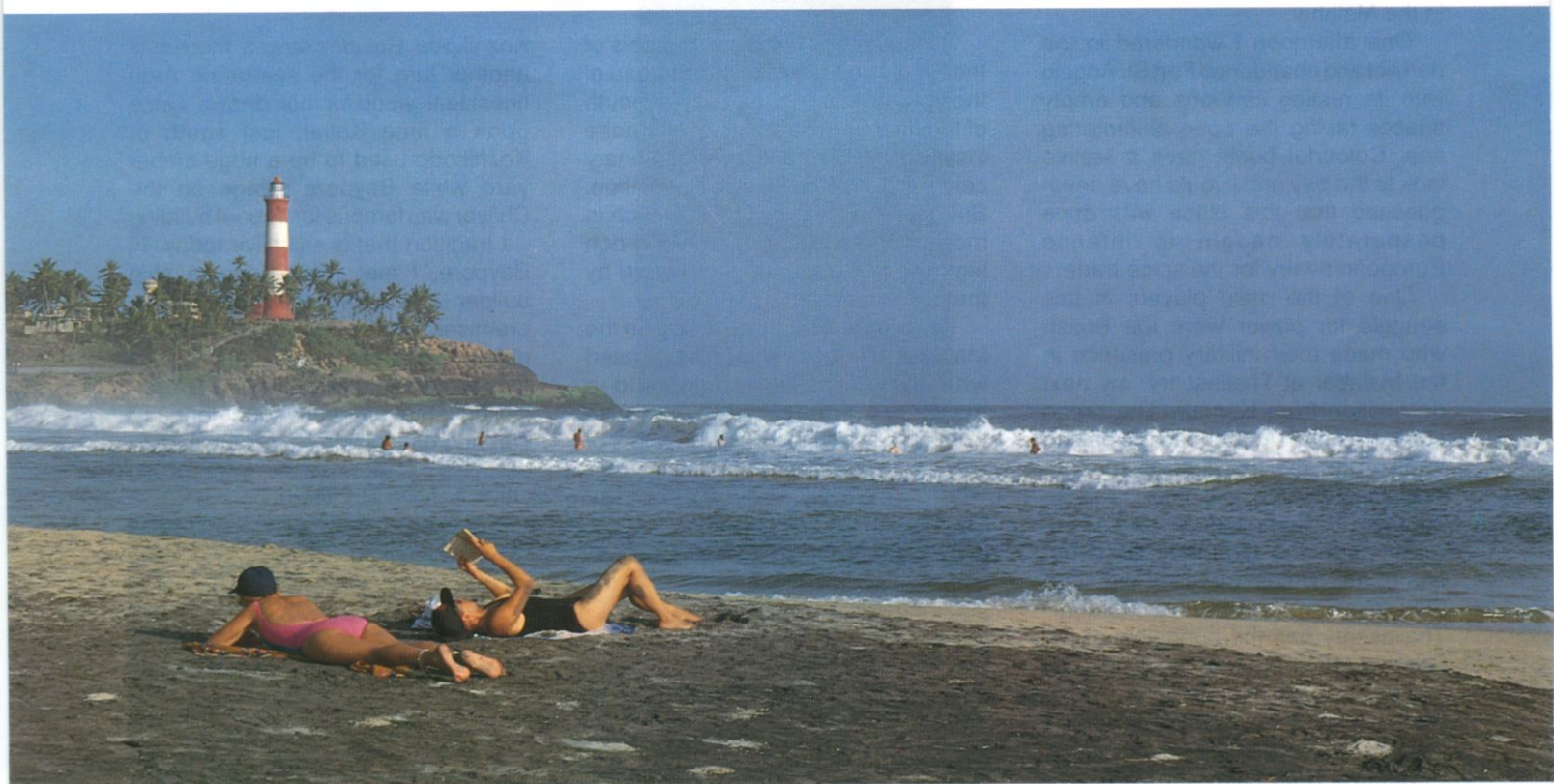
After Kozhikode the train leaves the proximity of the sea coast and

gradually gravitates towards Thrissur the cultural capital of Kerala famous for its festivals, classical art forms and temple elephants! Leaving the Malabar Express, I instead chose to go by bus to Guruvayoor a temple town very close to the coast that offered much the same charms as that of Thrissur.

The star attraction at the Guruvayoorappan's temple is the elephant which is employed in the stunning rituals. I went to have a closer look at the temple elephants at a place called Punnathur Kota where there are forty of them. I spent a long afternoon amidst the pachyderms



Coconut cutters of Kerala



Relaxing at Kovalam beach

being fed, bathed and taken care of by a battery of mahouts. It was here that I heard of the legendary temple elephant called Keshavan that was so endeared to the people that after his death, a life size monument was erected in his likeness, close to the main temple.

The following morning, I broke away from the spell of Guruvayoor and made my way to Kondungallur the ancient

port of Muzris. It was here that Saint Thomas the Apostle landed in 52 AD and established the faith of Jesus. I was heading for the Marthoma Church said to be the oldest in India. Just as Christianity first made its appearance in Kondungallur so did Islam in 629 AD when the first mosque, the Cheraman Juma Masjid was made here. The king of Kondungallur also granted asylum to Jews escaping persecution in their

hometown.

I pressed on further to Vypeen and took the ferry across the bay to Fort Kochi - which once had a thriving Jewish town. But after the formation of Israel, almost all the Jews left. The synagogue in Mattancherry, however, is still maintained in sparkling condition. Other places worth visiting in the vicinity are the Dutch Palace and the Portuguese Churches of Saint Francis



Chinese fishing nets at twilight in Kollam

and Saint Anthony.

Although Kochi was and still remains the most cosmopolitan city in Kerala I identified it with the Dutch who captured it from the Portuguese in 1663. They finally lost it to the British in 1795. During the thirty odd years they ruled, their most significant contribution was perhaps, the compilation of a monumental botanical work, Hortus Malabaricus, which details the medicinal properties of plants. A copy of the 12 volumes can be perused at the Public Library in Ernakulam.

Twin city to old Cochin, Ernakulam is the commercial capital of Kerala, replete with high rises, big business offices and extensive shopping areas. Besides being a busy seaport, it is also a naval base, headquarters of the Indian Navy's Southern Command. And of course, Ernakulam is also the city where the Malabar Express returns to the sea.

I was happy to be back on the train from Ernakulam to Alappuza, where I got off and made a beeline for a boat to

the backwaters an experience unique to Kerala. Soon after leaving Alappuza, the boat entered the wide water channel where annually the Nehru Trophy boat races are held in August. This is quite a colourful and spectacular festival where hundreds participate in different boat events, drawing thousands of spectators. As the boat left the lake and drifted into the labyrinth of interconnecting channels, we entered a sun dappled paradise of land and water. Some of the most memorable images of Kerala come from a trip on the backwaters. After an eight hours' journey that involves crossing the huge lakes of Kayamkulam and Ashtamudi, the boat reached Kollam where the Chinese trade in spices flourished around the 9th century AD.

Chinese fishing nets that one normally sees in and around Kollam is one ancient symbol of that association with China. But today, Mr. Frank Marshall, President of the Boat Owner's Association informed me that Kollam is the heart of modern fishing industry

in India. He took me to Needakara Shaktika lungars where the Norwegians

in 1950s gave the design of the mechanised trawler to do floor farming of the sea for shrimp. When I went to the landing area around mid-day, it was chock-a-block with trawlers unloading fresh catch of the day. I was tempted to take a trawler trip into the sea but I had to move on towards my last and final destination on the Malabar Express to Thiruvananthapuram.

Capital of Kerala, Thiruvananthapuram was the city of the Padmanabhaswamy whose temple dominated the city skyline. Although the city offered many charms of art galleries, art and craft emporia, museums and a zoo with endemic species like the Malabar Hornbill, I headed straight out for Kovalam.

The bus to the beach had a group of foreign back pack travellers and I got talking to Kristian, a young German student. He said that he came to Kerala for, "Sun, surf, tropical fresh fruit and palm trees". Stephanie from Leeds came to "Chill Out".

I knew what they really meant when I arrived at the beach. There on the sand, a whole lot of people lay spaced out like torpid lizards in the sun! Music of Pink Floyd came wafting on the winds with the smell of frying fish.

As I took a plunge into the crashing waves, an Air India Airbus came flying from the west, over the sea, bringing hordes of holiday makers from around the world. In the warm waters of the Arabian Sea my journey of discovery of Kerala on the Malabar Express was complete. I knew that Kerala will always attract the world traveller since it provided an extraordinary variety which is the real spice of life!



INFORMATION

It is quite a convenient way to discover Kerala by train since there are more than 20 superfast trains operating in the state. The Malabar Express leaves Mangalore in the evening and arrives at Thiruvananthapuram next day in the morning. Since it is a night journey, the train is best used by the native Keralans for inter-city travel. For the tourist

however, a day train like the Parashuram Express, which runs the same route as the Malabar Express, is recommended. There are yet other trains which the tourist can choose from to suit a chosen itinerary. Malabar Express is used in the story as merely symbolic.

Over the years names of cities in Kerala have kept changing. While new ones are officially announced, old ones still find

currency in popular usage. The new official names of the cities are.

Cannanore	Kannur
Tellichery	Thalassery
Mahe	Mahe
Calicut	Kozhikode
Trichur	Thrissur
Cragannore	Kodungallur
Alleppy	Alappuza
Quilon	Kollam
Trivendrum	Thiruvananthapuram