Meandering in luxurious havens through Backwaters by Anoop TU

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Everyone who visited Kerala will nod in agreement when comparison is made to a mural painted by God, diverse in its hues, shades and texture. This verdant piece of land is situated in the Malabar Coast of south western India. Kerala, a coastal territory is nestled between Western Ghats and Arabian Sea.

With its pristine beaches, enchanting hill stations, winding backwaters, exotic wildlife and sophisticated art forms Kerala remain a premium tourist destination.

Backwaters is an unique Kerala phenomenon. Without savoring it Kerala tour is considered incomplete. Canals and inlets which are manmade and of natural origins combine with estuaries of over forty rivers and five lakes to form the complex network known as backwaters. Before bridges, roads and ferries came, backwaters was the transportation medium for local people. They also depended on it for means of livelihood like agriculture and fishing. Backwaters make for idyllic setting.

Kumarakom is considered an ideal place to savor backwaters. Kumarakom is a tiny village nestled in backwaters. Kumarakom backwater is formed by Meenachil river and Vembanad Lake. True to the reputation of backwaters Kumarakom also make for fascinating setting. Its shores are lined by resorts and houses, swaying coconut trees, emerald mangrove forests and lush green paddy fields, fishing nets and various activities of life. Backwaters are marked by water flowers especially water lilies. You can savor this landscape from the balconies of resorts but Houseboats are the latest vehicles of relishing backwater.

Houseboats are the incarnations of â€œKettuvallamsâ€• of yesteryears. â€œKettuvallamsâ€• were used to transport rice and other household items through backwaters. They came with thatched roofs over wooden hulls to offer protection from elements of nature. Although the structure remains unaltered, Kumarakom Houseboats are modern day luxurious versions. Houseboats in Kumarakom are two to three storied affairs with one to five bedrooms included. It also houses dining space and a balcony open on all sides apart from sleeping space. From the balcony the exquisite charm of backwaters can be savored conveniently. Houseboats come adjoined with generators providing for air conditioning. A crew including a cook accompanies the guests. The menu is normally indigenous variety with local fish included. But it is up to the final decision of guests. Although Houseboats are motorized they are run in a sluggish pace.

Kumarakom homes a birdlife sanctuary. It is frequented by migratory birds especially Siberian Cranes. You can cruise in the Houseboats listening to the music from this sanctuary.

Kumarakom packages come with an opportunity to spend a night in Houseboat docked in backwaters. It is a heavenly affair. You can ask to switch off electric lamps and spend time in light of lanterns alone to get a feel. The eerie experience is multiplied if the night is moonlit. You can see the houses and boats far away as static and moving spots of illumination respectively. If you are fortunate, you could glimpse fireflies adorning the tree branches, blinking eternally.

Houseboats usually come in ninety five feet to one hundred and fifteen feet in length and between thirteen feet to fifteen feet in width. It is primarily made of wood 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 but coir is utilized by tying.

Apart from Kumarakom Houseboat cruises can be had in Alleppey, Kochi and Kollam.

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Anoop TU - About Author:
Anoop is an eminent writer and travel enthusiast, here giving valuable information on a Kumarakom Houseboats, Houseboats in Kumarakom, a Kumarakom Packages and Kumarakom Backwater. For more information visit our site a http://www.kumarakomhouseboats.org.in .

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