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STAY AT

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF

LIFESTYLE

SPOTTED BY SITA

TOP CHEF RECOMMENDS

DESTINATION INSIDER

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# Art of Travel



## Maranat Mana, Nilambur

“Your stay at the 160 year old [Maranat Mana](#) is a step back in time. For starters there aren't too many homestays in India which have a live temple or shrine within its premises. In [Devra Homestay](#) at Udaipur there is a Tribal Shrine which does this very interesting service to the deity every Saturday. But at the [Ganesha Temple](#) located within Maranat Mana, close to 300 devotees turn up every day to pray,” says Kuntil Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre who stayed here recently. Maranat Mana which has only 3 airy rooms is a fascinating insight into the lifestyle of the Namboothiri Brahmins; the indigenous elite priestly class of Kerala who are custodians of some of the oldest rituals known to mankind; one of which may predate human speech ([click here to see the video and know more](#)). It is managed in a rather unique way, where one of the brothers stays in the house for 5 years to maintain the house before the next brother takes on.

“It is very informal out here and you eat what is being cooked; only vegetarian yet delicious, in the family kitchen. But your host Praveen and his wife Vidya who have lovingly restored the guesthouse of this traditional Namboothiri household into a homestay, welcome you warmly and take very good care of you,” says Kuntil. For those interested in traditional elite architecture of Kerala, Maranat Mana is very special as it is one of the last few surviving pathinaru kettu (four courtyards) Namboothiri households. “The house is huge. Praveen is happy to take you on a visit of the sprawling house which seems to be caught in a relentless time wrap, yet it is not a museum. Every nook and corner is very much alive with the present. He gently introduces you to the customs and traditions of the house with stories, which is a very interesting sneak peek into the life of this Namboothiri Household, their culture and beliefs,” says Kuntil. The Maranat Mana family also runs a school and has their own rubber plantations which Praveen is happy to take you to visit.

“Maranat Mana however, is not for everyone. To begin with the 3 rooms are basic, neat and clean and the bathrooms very simple. And they are accessed only by a narrow steep flight of wooden steps. No meat. Not even eggs and no alcohol. Recommend it only to those of your clients who take joy in the authentic, like to immerse themselves in culture and share knowledge and stories in good company,” says Kuntil.

# Stay At



The family pond of Maranat Mana. It's here the secrets of some of the oldest rituals known to mankind are passed on from father to son.



The ancient ritual of Kalamvarichipat of Nilambur. Oracles draw the mural of the deity with their bare hands which they later invite to possess their body.

Here are some recommendations by Kuntil for your clients to pick and choose during their stay at Maranat Mana - [Click here for the itinerary](#)





## Hosts, Harivihar Homestay

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“There are certain things in life you are destined to do,” says Dr Srikumar and Dr Neetha, the hosts at [Harivihar Heritage Homestead](#), Calicut in North Kerala. Otherwise, why should a child neurologist and dermatologist just starting their practice be interested in a crumbling grand old house, which would otherwise have been demolished and given way for a brand new house for their family. Harivihar was a 160 year old house and Neetha’s father, the owner had decided to inherit it to his two daughters. “All of us sat together and decided to save this house, but frankly we didn’t know what to do with it. It was when we read this article on homestays and then we knew that we could try to make this into a heritage homestead. Kerala is the land of Ayurveda and even though we are allopaths, we have a healthy respect for Ayurveda. Hence, we wanted to showcase Harivihar as a centre which promotes quality Ayurveda and Yoga. Well, that is precisely what we have become now,” says Dr Srikumar.

Harivihar is now a beautifully restored homestead which has a green leaf accredited Ayurveda centre attached to it. Apart from Ayurveda, there is the daily Yoga session done by Gopalji, the dedicated Yoga guru from Sivananda Yogasram. Life flows without much of a complication here. Dr Srikumar and his trusted aide, Vijay work in the garden in the morning, tending to the many plants and shrubs, while Gopalji teaches Yoga in the big octagonal shaped Yoga hall in the first floor. The lawns which tumble out of the house on all sides are carefully nurtured, as are the various plants and fruit trees. Krishna veni, the cook would be there in the kitchen making the morning breakfast, while Dr Neetha and Kavitha, would be hovering around the dining tables. The king fisher, which frequents the traditional bathing pond, would be trying its level best to catch a fish or two for breakfast (sometimes with little success!).

“We have to perform a balancing act, since we are both doctors with our own practices and at the same time are hosts at Harivihar. However, with such good staff as we have, we have managed to make our guests satisfied and happy. We make it a point to interact with them in the morning and evening. What makes us most satisfied at the end of the day is the opportunity to make friends with people from all around the world,” says Neetha.

# A Day in The Life of Dr Srikumar & Dr Neetha



“Harivihar is an oasis of tranquility in the raging city of Calicut. Even if you are not sold on the idea of Ayurveda and Yoga, you will love the company of Dr Srikumar and Dr Neetha. And the food cooked by Krishna veni is just so delicious. Visit the Dhow makers of Beypore not too far away. Their ancestors built these wooden ships for the Arab Merchants that once explored the remotest parts of the world. A tradition that has remained unchanged. Explore the many lanes of Calicut and its hidden gems with our friend who is a local, for the insight into a Calicut that you never thought existed. He will tell you that Vasco-da-Gama actually landed in a different place and not the one in Calicut that the guide books tell you. And if you are game, he will show it too,” adds Kuntal Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre who stayed at Harivihar.



## Monsoon in Wayanad

By the end of summer the trees of Wayanad in North Kerala shed their foliage and sprout new leaves and anxiously await the onset of the rain. Intermittent showers start in May and build up into monsoon by mid-June, when the lush Wayanad landscape bursts to life. The skies turn from shades of sparkling blue to ominous slate-grey in the course of a few hours. Streams that spring up on every mountain slope turn into roaring demons and spectacular waterfalls while the placid central Wayanad rivers morph into frothing brown torrents. The rampart of mountains around Wayanad transforms into an amphitheatre where cloud and mist and the occasional sun beam throw into sharp relief from forested crags and clefts.

For sheer fun and novelty, nothing can beat the unique pastime of mud football during Monsoon in Wayanad. Take a muddy paddy field, throw in a bunch of soccer crazy youth and a host of supporters on a lazy afternoon - and an exciting new sport is born. Mud football is as exciting for the participant as it is entertaining for the audience. Mud football tournaments during Monsoon are crowd pullers. The players wallow in shin deep mud, where every step takes enormous effort. They chase a soggy, heavy ball made even more so by the sticky mud. It is complete chaos and complete fun - for instance a powerful kick can land the attacker butt deep in mud and spray mud into the face of the defenders while the ball reluctantly hops all of six inches in any which direction. Participating in one of these is an experience that you will recount and chuckle about for a long time.

For the agrarian culture of old Wayanad, monsoon was the time to wrest with the earth and produce a large part of food to last the year. The traditional ways persist in the tribal lands of North Wayanad, where cattle harnessed to wooden ploughs are still preferred to more modern implements. Sowing and planting by the tribes are still ritualized, accompanied by age-old dances and songs. Soon the fields of mud brown turn into fields of emerald that stretch as far as the eye can see, turn even the most taciturn into poets.

The rains also bring changes in the cuisine of Wayanad [click here to read more.](#)







## Spirit of the Ancestor

“Beyond its lush coconut groves, pretty paddy fields and the contagious smiles which we all see in travel brochures, love to talk about and sell, there lies another Kerala which is seldom seen. A primordial Kerala which comes alive at night, combining several thousand-year-old customs, traditions and rituals, where everyone, irrespective of caste and class come together to witness ordinary men transform to Gods in a cacophony of hypnotic chants and music, during a Theyyam,” says Kuntal Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre who was in North Kerala recently.

Theyyam is a fascinating religious ritual, where an Oracle offers his body to the spirits -sometimes that of an ancestor, maybe a great forest hero of the yore or a serpent goddess - as a medium to communicate with the villagers, understand their problems, offer solutions and bless them.

We spotted this Oracle during a Theyyam in the countryside of North Kerala invoking the spirit of an ancestor of the host family and communicating with the family members. People wanting counsel approach the Oracle in a trance with their questions. Answers are given in whispers and sometimes in extensive outbursts.

# Spotted By Sita





## Drum Stick Leaves Soup

Krishnaveni who has been the cook at [Harivihar Heritage Homestead](#), since they started in 2003, recommends the Drum stick leaves soup as a must try during your stay here. “It takes just five minutes to prepare and the guests simply love it,” says Krishnaveni. The drum stick leaves soup is a simple, easy to make and highly rejuvenating soup. Harivihar, being an Ayurveda -Yoga centre, serves light vegetarian cuisine , using locally available vegetables and plants. The drum stick leaves soup , traditionally given to nurturing mothers ,uses drum stick leaves ,coconut milk ,shallots and pepper as the basic ingredients.

As easy as it may sound Krishnaveni has a challenging job in hand. Being an Ayurveda -Yoga centre, sometimes guests can have food restrictions and it may be necessary to have individual menus. “It is difficult but at the same time challenging,” smiles Krishnaveni.

The clientele at Harivihar with its fair share of single travelers, stay for seven to fourteen days for Ayurveda and yoga. They also have guests who stays for 2-3 nights to sample the life of a traditional royal Kerala House and to pause a little to reflect and to restore their inner rhythms.

Recipe available on request - [click here](#)

# Top Chef Recommends







## When Gods Descend on Earth

Dear Friends,

It was March end when I was in North Kerala. The Theyyam season was almost at its end in North Kerala. It was becoming more and more difficult to locate one. But that was actually fun and exciting. Travellers wanting to experience Theyyam in North Kerala during this time would invariably end up in the kavus (shrines) of local families in the countryside. It is much more genuine and authentic compared to the “peak” season (October to February) where Theyyams are happening just about everywhere. Families welcome you warmly, offer you tender coconut water and even invite you for a meal.

One day early in the morning, I was headed to a Kavu dedicated to a Serpent Goddess to watch Theyyam. We left about 4 in the morning, lost our way a couple of times and took about two hours to reach the place which was only 15 kms from [Ayesha Manzil](#); a 18th century old colonial style mansion overlooking the blue Arabian sea, where I was staying. Here at the Kavu, I met Velliamma. She came from a family of landlords and was well to do once upon a time. But no more. Villagers told me that she and her family ignored Theyyam in their family Kavu for 20 years and invited the wrath of the Serpent Goddess. Velliamma lost all her land and her two sons died in an accident. The third one went mad and committed suicide and the fourth one lost his eyesight and had a paralytic attack. Now the villagers are helping Velliamma with money to host Theyyams in the Kavu, since the past 2 years. The son who had lost his eyesight and had a paralytic attack is now recovering. His eyesight is getting better and he can now walk. All because of, the villagers say, Theyyams happening again in her Kavu.

You may or may not want to believe in this local yarn, but I walked away with a story I will remember for a long long time.

During my time in North Kerala I also met Hari Das, an accomplished local Theyyam dancer. Hari Das shot to fame after he was featured in William Dalrymple's book - [“Nine Lives: In Search of the Sacred in Modern India”](#), where the acclaimed travel writer explores the worlds of people deeply engaged with the sacred in a fast changing India.

# Destination Insider



Velliamma and her son seeking the blessings of a Theyyam

Hari Das and I chatted about life and times post Nine Lives and more. Here is what conspired - [click here for the interview](#)



## Maranat Mana, Nilambur

1. **Reaching Maranat Mana** : Your clients can travel to Maranat Mana from one of the three approaches in North Kerala – either descend down the forested ghats from [Wayanad](#) driving past acres and acres of rolling tea estates, or head from [Calicut](#) through plantations, or take the slow train-ride from Shoranur near [Pallakad](#) through the verdant countryside of North Kerala which stops at many small quaint stations. "Recommended for only those who are not in a hurry this little known railway journey is one my favourites, where you can get cosy with local life in North Kerala and make new friends. The entire train journey takes about 1 hour. Get down at the quaint station of Tuvur - [click here](#) to see the video of Tuvur station - which is closest to Maranat Mana, where your car will pick you up," says Kunttil Baruwa from our Destination Knowledge Centre who stayed at Maranat Mana recently.

2. **Charming and Authentic** : "When we reached Maranat Mana from the Tuvur Railway Station, it felt like entering someone's home. A big ancient one at that with probably many stories waiting to be told and listened to. It had none of the tell-tale signs of a Kerala homestay which I had encountered elsewhere during my travels," says Kunttil. As you enter the Maranat Mana, depending on the time of the day your clients will see the devotees who have come from far and wide to offer their prayers in the Ganesha Temple within the premises of the house, servants going about their daily chores, visitors chatting on the huge verandah with the family members, which runs across the entire front of the house from where Praveen Maranat, your host may emerge to welcome you warmly.

3. **The Live Ganesha Temple** : There aren't too many homestays in India which have a live temple or shrine within its premises. In [Devra Homestay](#) at Udaipur there is a Tribal Shrine which does this very interesting service to the deity every Saturday. But at the [Ganesha Temple](#) located within Maranat Mana close to 300 devotees turn up every day to pray. "Your clients can soak in the atmosphere while being comfortably seated in an easy chair in the veranda of the erstwhile granary of Maranat Mana, now converted into guest rooms," says Kunttil.

4. **The Architecture** : Maranat Mana is a fascinating insight into the traditional elite architecture of Kerala based on [Vastu Shastra](#). It is one of the last few surviving pathinaru kettu (four inner courtyards) of

# 6 Things We Liked About



Kerala occupying a plinth area of 1 acre. "Traditional Kerala homes have only one inner courtyard. Maranat Mana has four. So you can well imagine the size of the house," says Kunttil. "A tour of the house with your host Praveen will enlighten your clients on how the laws of nature affect human dwellings and why every nook and corner of Maranat Mana was built that way," says Kunttil.

5. **The Family Residence** : "A great way to spend the morning in Maranant Mana is acquainting yourself with the 160-year old house; the history and lore surrounding it with Praveen, your host," says Kunttil. Built largely of limestone and teak, mahogany and rosewood, the wooden walls within have traditional designs and carvings. The sprawling seems to be caught in a relentless time wrap, yet it is not a museum. Every nook and corner is very much alive with the present. Praveen gently introduces you to the customs and traditions of the house with stories, which is a very interesting sneak peek into the life of this Namboothiri Household, their culture and beliefs. Maranat Mana is managed in a rather unique way, where one of the brothers stays in the house for 5-years to maintain the house before the next brother takes on. "My favourite place in Maranat Mana was the Family Pond where I loved spending some solitary moments with a book," says Kunttil.

6. **The Hosts** : Praveen Maranat who has sailed all over the world as a Merchant Navy officer and his wife Vidya, who is a teacher in a local school run by the Maranat family are your hosts at Maranat Mana. "They both do a lovely job and make you feel at home in an unobtrusive manner," says Kunttil. It was Praveen who decided to quit his job at sea and open the doors of Maranat Mana to visitors who may be interested in knowing more about the lifestyle of the Namboothiris; the indigenous priestly class of Kerala. "He was telling me that it took a while to convince this huge family that comprises of 30 members. But they ultimately agreed with certain riders such as no meat, no alcohol, no eggs within the premises etc," says Kunttil.





# Festivals



## Kuttikkol Thampuratty Theyyam, Kasargod, 23-26 February, 2014

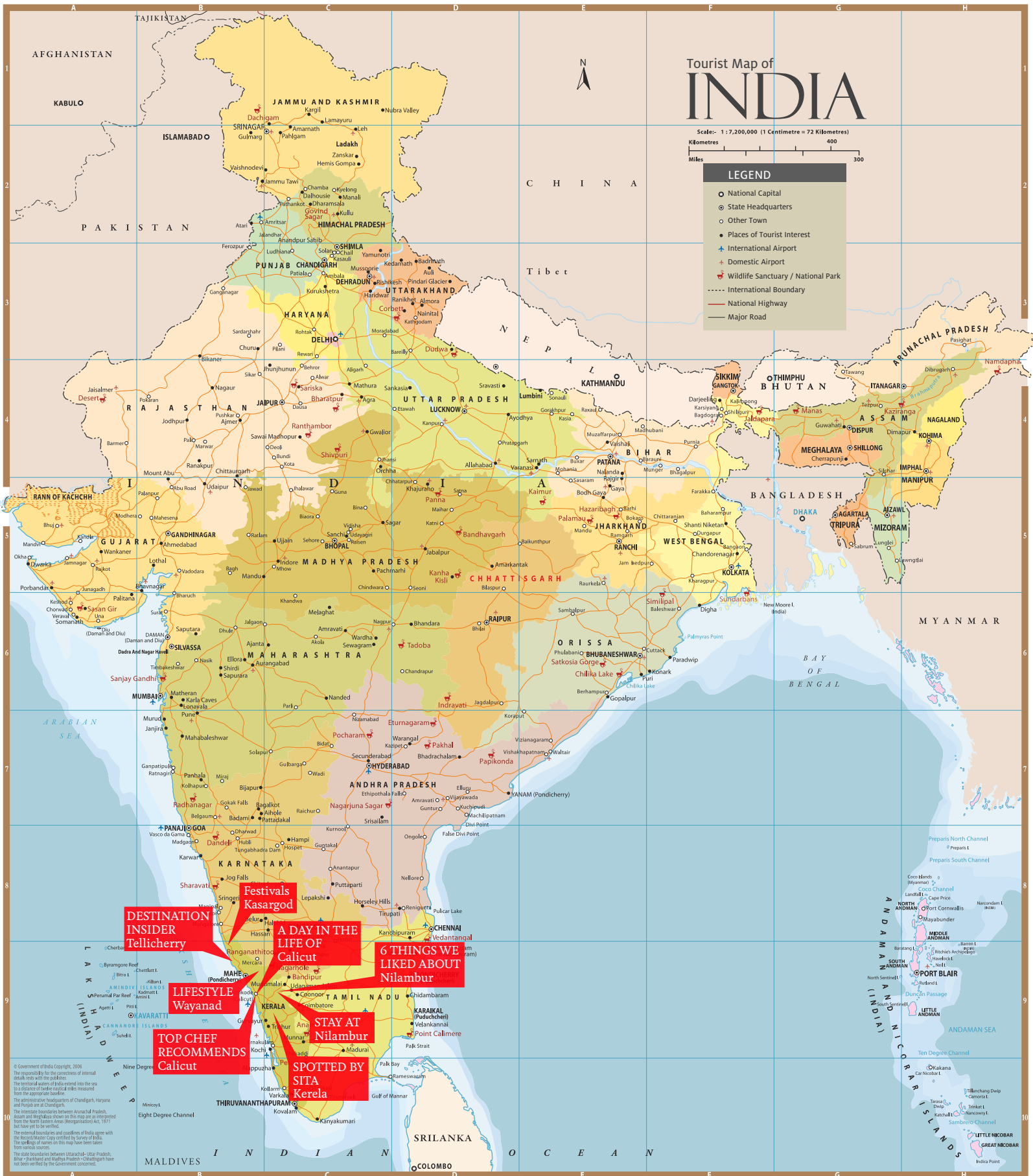
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The annual 10 day Kuttikkol Thampuratty Theyyam in Kasargod, with its psychedelic colours and pageantry can be an unforgettable experience for those of your clients who want a sneak peek into the strange, ancient and private universe of the simple country folks of North Kerala. The Kuttikkol Thampuratty Theyyam celebrates the Mother Goddess and incorporates dance, mime and music and enshrines the rudiments of ancient tribal cultures, which attached great importance to the worship of heroes and ancestral spirits.

“During one of the Theyyams in North Kerala I met a couple who came with their new born baby. It seems they were childless for almost 7 years until an Oracle blessed them one night in a similar ceremony last year. It is believed by the locals that the Oracle of a Theyyam possessed by spirits can cure an illness, ensure a good harvest or drive away evil spirits,” says Kuntal from our Destination Knowledge Centre.

[Click here to see where you can stay -  
Vivanta by Taj Bekal](#)









## Meet us at the Upcoming Trade Shows

If you wish to schedule a meeting, do e-mail us at [info@sita.in](mailto:info@sita.in)

Trade Shows	Booth No.	Whom to Meet
<b>OTDYKH Leisure Fair</b> Moscow 17th -20th September	Awaited	Ernest Dias & Deepak Sharma
<b>TOP RESA</b> Paris 24th -27th September	Awaited	Philip Thomas & Valerie Chalopet
<b>FITA</b> Mexico 26th -29th September	Trade Visitor	Neeraj Bhatt
<b>IATO Convention</b> India Awaited	Trade Visitor	Neeraj Bhatt & Philip Thomas
<b>ABAV</b> São Paulo 4th -8th September	Trade Visitor	Neeraj Bhatt
<b>UITM</b> Kiev 16th -18th October	Awaited	Deepak Sharma
<b>TTG</b> Rimini 17th -19th October	Trade Visitor	Matteo Pennacchi & Philip Thomas
<b>WTM</b> London 4th -7th November	Hall No S8, Booth No IN200	Neeraj Bhatt
<b>USTOA</b> Scottsdale 5th -7th December	Awaited	Neeraj Bhatt

# Trade Shows

