Keralam, the land of kera or coconut, is a never-ending array of coconut palms…sun blanched beaches…kettuvallams over enchanting backwaters… magical monsoon showers…silent valleys vibrant with flora and fauna…misty mountains of the Western Ghats…fragrance of spices…evenings reverberating with the rhythm of a thousand artforms...fairs and festivals... Welcome to Kerala benign and beautiful!

Origin of Kerala has been linked to a legend dating back to Satya Yug. According to this legend, Kerala rose up from the sea when Lord Parasurama threw his axe into it and the sea receded to bring up this narrow strip of land from underneath. Lord Parasurama, believed to be the sixth avatar of Lord Mahavishnu, threw his axe from Gokarnam southward across the ocean in rage and in repentance for his actions of killing Kshatriyas. The land of Kerala emerged from the waters of the Arabian Sea with the blessing of Varuna-the God of Oceans and Bhumidevi- the Goddess of Earth. The sobriquet “God’s own Country” thus bestows itself on Kerala.

Kerala lies along the coastline, to the extreme south west of the Indian peninsula, flanked by the Arabian Sea on the west and the mountains of the Western Ghats on the east. This land of Parasurama stretches north-south along a coastline of 580 kms with a varying width of 35 to 120 kms. Cascading delicately down the hills to the coasts covered by verdant coconut groves, the topography and physical characteristics change distinctly from east to west. The nature of the terrain and its physical features, divides an east west cross section of the state into three distinct regions- hills and valleys, midland and plains and the coastal region. Located between north latitudes 8018' and 12048' and east longitudes 74052' and 72022', this land of eternal beauty encompasses 1.18 per cent of the country.

The Western Ghats, bordering the eastern boundary of the State, form an almost continuous mountain wall, except near Palakkad where there is a natural mountain pass known as the Palakkad Gap. The average elevation of the Ghats is about 1500 meters above sea level, occasionally soaring to peaks of 2000 to 2500 m. From the Ghats, the land slopes to the west on to the plains, into an unbroken coastline.

The strip of hills and valleys on the eastern edge, close to the Ghats, comprises of steep mountains and deep valleys, covered with dense forests. Almost all the rivers of the state originate here. There are 44 rivers in the state, of which 41 originate from the Western Ghats and flow towards west into the Arabian sea. Only three tributaries of the river Cauvery originate in Kerala and flow east into the neighbouring States. These rivers and streams flowing down from the Western Ghats either empty themselves in to the backwaters in the coastal area or directly into the Arabian Sea. As the Western Ghats are nowhere more than 120 kms from the sea, all these rivers are comparatively short.

In the Midland Plains of central region, the hills are not very steep and the valleys are wide. The valleys have been developed as paddy fields and the elevated lands and hill slopes are converted into estates of rubber, fruit trees and other cash crops like pepper , arecanut and tapioca. Tea and coffee estates have cropped up in the high ranges during the last two centuries.

The Coastal Belt strip is comparatively plain. Extensive paddy fields, thick groves of coconut trees and picturesque backwaters, interconnected with canals and rivers, are the features of this region. No wonder, Alappuzha an old sea port town of this region is known as the 'Venice of the East'. In the southern and northern parts of the state, the coastal belt also has some small hillocks.

Backwaters & Rivers

The backwaters are a peculiar feature of the state. Canals link the lakes and backwaters to facilitate an uninterrupted inland water navigation system from Thiruvananthapuram to Vadakara, a distance of 450 kms. The Vembanad lake stretching from Alappuzha to Kochi is the biggest water body in the state and is over 200 sq.kms. in area. Kuttanad in Alappuzha district alone has more than 20 per cent of India's total length of waterways.

The important rivers from north to south are; Valapattanam river (110 kms.), Chaliar (69 kms.), Kadalundipuzha (130 kms.), Bharathapuzha (209 kms.), Chalakudy river (130 kms.), Periyar (244 kms), Pamba (176 kms), Achancoil (128 kms.) and Kalladayar (121 kms.). Other than these, there are 35 more small rivers and rivulets flowing down from the Ghats. Most of these rivers are navigable up to the midland region, in country crafts.