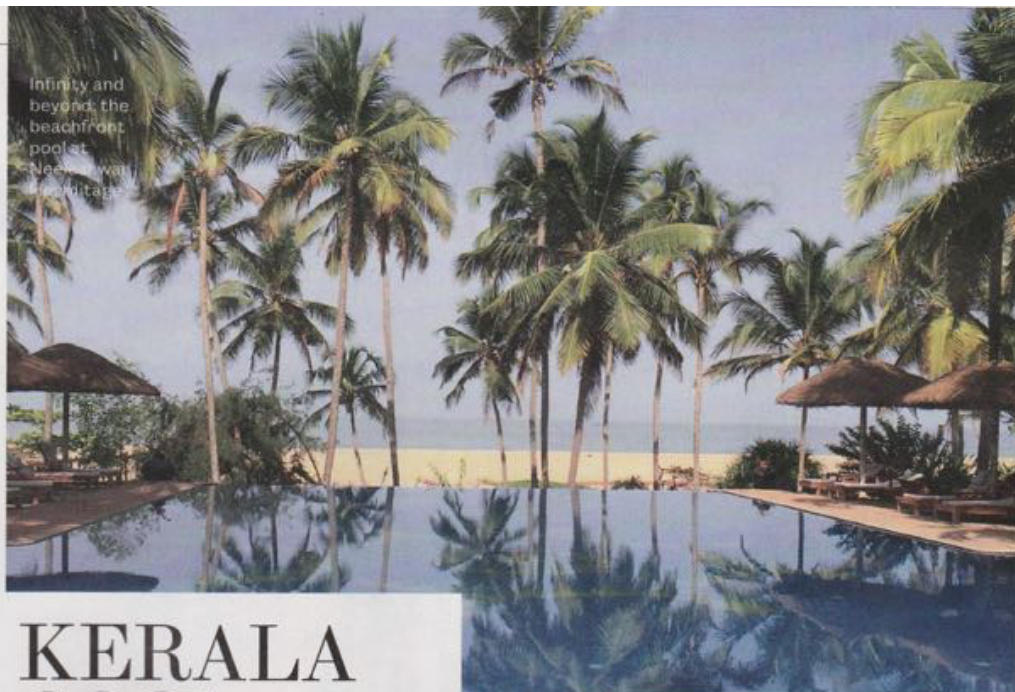


# ESCAPE

EDITED BY DIPAL ACHARYA



Infinity and beyond: the beachfront pool at Neeleshwar Hermitage



## THE CHIC RETREAT

Wellness and tranquillity are at the core of **NEELESHWAR HERMITAGE**, an unpretentious eco retreat. Each of the 18 individual thatched cabins has a private terrace and exquisite open-air granite bathroom. The architecture is designed according to the laws of **VASTU** (an Indian version of Feng Shui in which a building's relationship to the sun provides a cosmic harmony leading to peace, prosperity and good health), which further enhances the sense of calming balance. If the views across the freshwater lagoon and vast unspoilt beach don't send you into a state of Zen then a visit to the on-site Ayurvedic Doctor (Dr Suma), who can prescribe a series of therapeutic treatments and offer bespoke nutritional advice, will.

Doubles from £221 ([neeleshwarhermitage.com](http://neeleshwarhermitage.com))

## KERALA COOL

The land of winding backwaters, converted rice barges, Ayurvedic medicine and mouth-watering Indian seafood, secluded Malabar in Kerala's north is a world away from the chaos of Mumbai, promising unspoilt, palm-lined tropical beaches and a slower pace of life. *Lily Worcester*

## TUCK IN

The Neeleshwar is purposefully tucked away; fortunately it has two restaurants, both offering local styles of food. The **MEENAKSHI** is the highlight and is situated on the beach. Instead of a menu, a chalkboard lists the seafood caught that day, cooked up with your choice of curry. Try the lobster with mango coconut curry, lemon rice and crispy parotta bread. ([neeleshwarhermitage.com](http://neeleshwarhermitage.com))



The colourful celebrations of the Theyyam

## JOIN THE PARTY

The **THEYYAM**, a Hindu dance ritual popular in northern Kerala, includes a display of vibrant face paint and costumes, drumming, fireworks and men being repeatedly thrown onto hot coals. Tip: go before sunrise to avoid the heat. ([theyyamcalendar.com](http://theyyamcalendar.com))

Run for the hills: the countryside of Ranipuram



Living barge: cruising Kerala's backwaters on The Lotus

## SAIL AWAY

You can't go to Kerala without exploring the unspoilt Valiyaparamba backwaters aboard the world-famous converted rice barges, or *kettuvalam*. Spend a lazy afternoon on **THE LOTUS** house boat, soaking in the views while snacking on onion bhajis and fresh juices. There are charming sleeping quarters if you are inclined to stay the night. *Two hours, £56 per person* ([thelotuskerala.com](http://thelotuskerala.com))



PS: The **OLIVE RIDLEY** is an endangered breed of turtle that lays eggs on the beach right outside Neeleshwar Hermitage. The eggs are collected by a sanctuary to ensure their safety and once hatched, the babies (*above*) are released back into the wild.

## HIT THE TRAILS

Trekking through the tropical **RANIPURAM HILLS**, located 2,500 feet above sea level on the border of Karnataka state, you may catch a glimpse of elephants, bison and monkeys wandering across the hilltops. Or get a natural pedicure from nibbling fish or a massage from cascading waterfalls while exploring the lush countryside around the Kundamkuzhy plantations.

