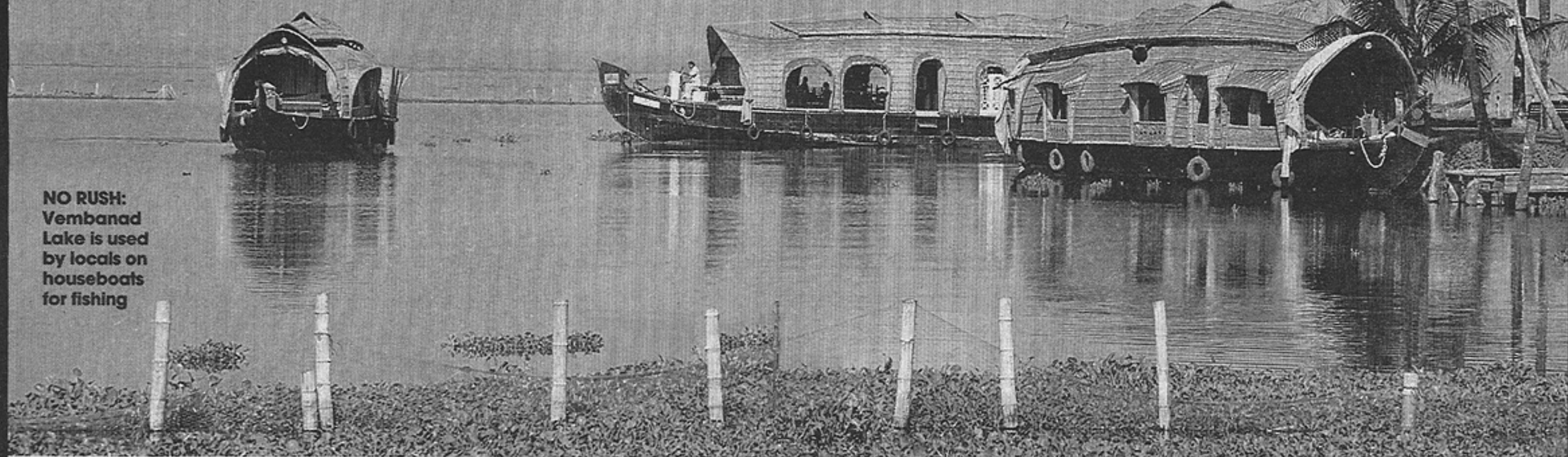


Travel

Edited by Jane Memmler

Sweet smell of Indian success

NO RUSH: Vembanad Lake is used by locals on houseboats for fishing



IT MAY be an old cliché but to say that India is an assault on the senses is completely true.

It's a place of intense colours: rich dark greens, vibrant reds and yellows, stark whites and deep browns. Add gold-fringed saris and silky shalwar kameez and you've got a hot, heady and tropical mix of culture.

This is my first visit to India and if you'd told me before I left London that the air is scented with the fragrance of flowers and spices I wouldn't have believed you, but it is.

My friend Kate and I flew direct to Cochin in Kerala. Our hotel, The Zuri Kumarakom Resort & Spa, is a two-hour drive from the airport. Set deep in the jungle near the south-west India coast, it lies on a series of interconnected caramel-brown waterways called the backwaters. To reach it we drive down twisting narrow lanes lined with people and animals.

At the water's edge, women wash their clothes on stones; not out of necessity but because stones and lake water give a better finish than soap powder and a washing machine.

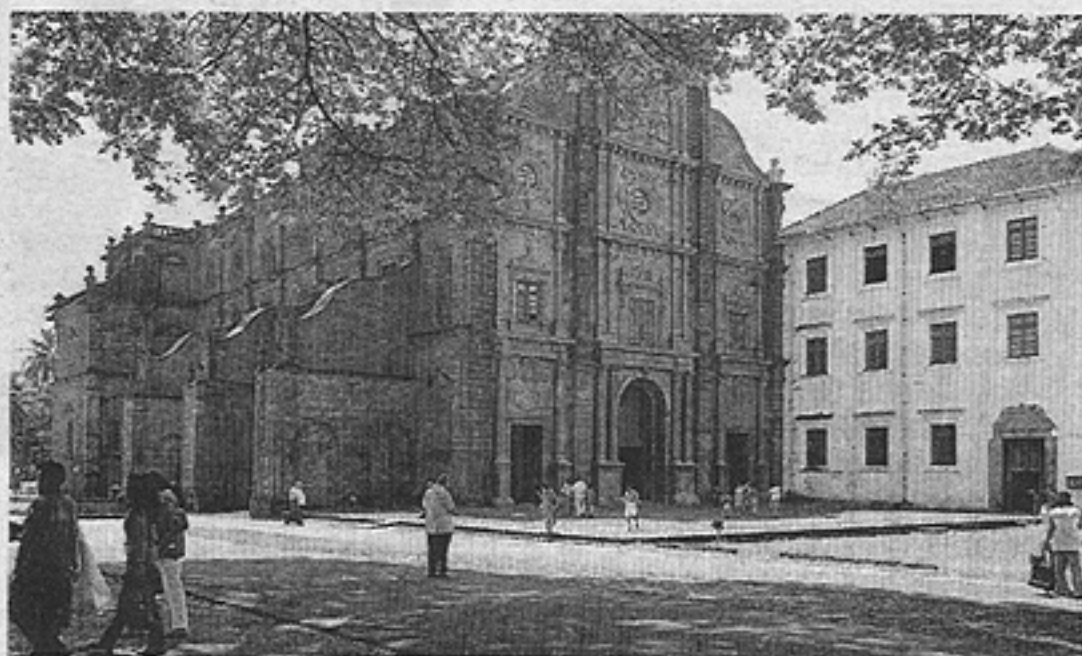
The hotel is an oasis set around lush green lawns and an ornamental lake and surrounded by the backwaters.

My room, overlooking Vembanad Lake, is more a small cottage encompassing four rooms, three showers and a swimming pool.

Due to its relative isolation the hotel happily organises plenty of excursions to explore the surrounding area.

We visit Aymanam, the village once home to writer and political activist Arundhati Roy whose book *The God of Small Things*

With its amazing mix of culture and plants, Kerala not only looks incredible but smells it too, writes **CAROLINE JOWETT**



SHRINE: St Francis Xavier's tomb at the Basilica of Bom Jesus in Old Goa

won the Man Booker Prize in 1997. We also visit the house of Kathakali maestro Mathoor Govindankutty. Kathakali is a 400-year-old dance-drama and martial arts tradition which includes hand-to-hand combat, fighting with staves, knives, nets and daggers and an impressive display of fire-eating and flame-throwing.

We try some of the dance moves but thankfully the lid of the petrol can stays firmly on.

As we travel through the village, children run alongside showing off their toys (a wooden car and a huge rubber tyre) and to their delight we give them pens.

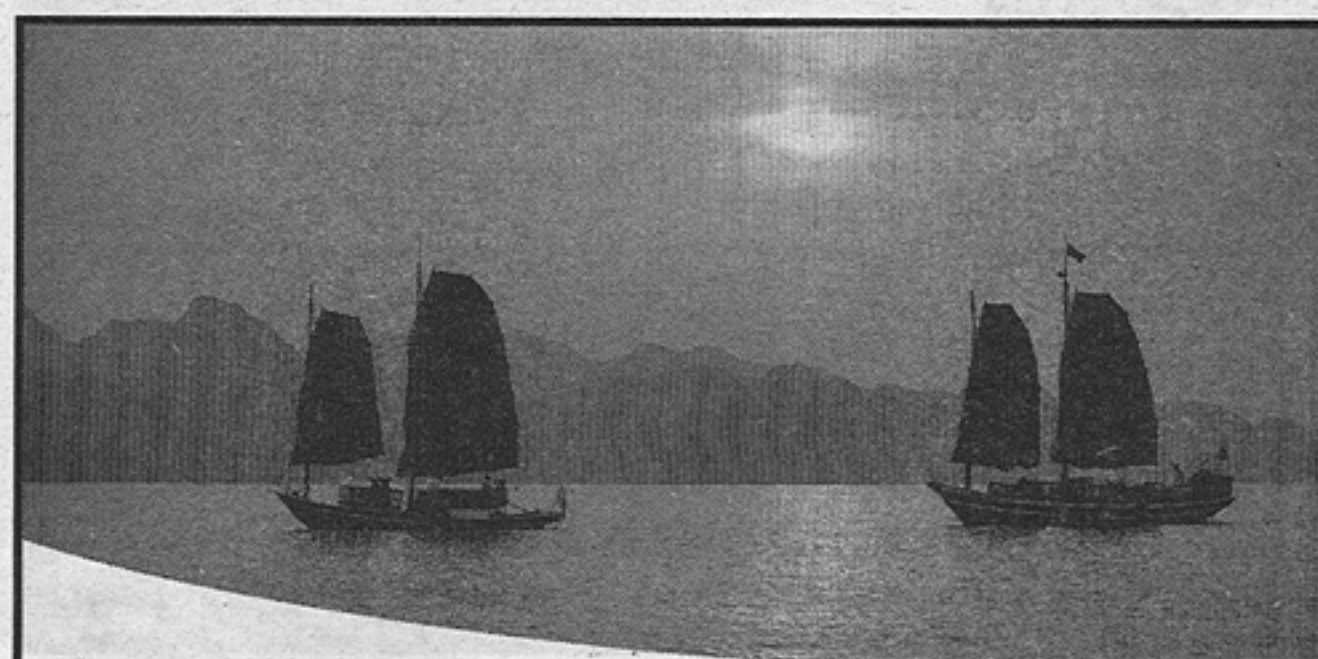
At the hotel that evening the martial artists perform with knives, spears and kerosene. It really is death-defying. Exotically

made up and elaborately dressed, dancers tell the story – any one of 101 classical tales – through symbolic actions, facial expressions and stylised movements accompanied by a drummer and a singer. Both are exhilarating to watch and it has been useful to visit an expert beforehand.

Kerala's backwaters are home to people who live on sturdy rush houseboats that resemble very fancy barges. These potter around the waters as their residents earn a living fishing.

Sadly the backwaters are congested with water hyacinth, a rampant American invader choking them to death. It is a Catch-22 situation: the

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE



Travel Collection
co.uk

11 night tour of Vietnam

from **£1,395**

DATES AND PRICES

16 March 2011	£1,745
06 April	£1,875
04 May	£1,585
15 June	£1,395
10 August	£1,775
21 September	£1,675
12 October	£1,795
02 November	£1,815
30 November	£1,675

PRICE INCLUDES: Return scheduled flights from London; internal flights as detailed; pre-paid government departure taxes; 11 nights' accommodation with breakfast; 5 lunches & 3 dinners; sightseeing & transfers as detailed.

NOT INCLUDED: Travel insurance; any departure taxes payable locally; Vietnam visa.

Prices per person based on 2 sharing. Prices subject to availability. Booking conditions apply. Please see our website for full details. Price shown is best available at time of going to press.

CALL US NOW TO BOOK

01306 871135

OR VISIT travelcollection.co.uk

Discover Vietnam

Offering a rich mix of history, scenery, food and culture, Vietnam is a fascinating country ripe for discovery.

Travel from the elegant city of Hanoi in the north to vibrant bustling Saigon in the south. En route learn about the country's history and visit areas of spectacular scenic beauty including Halong Bay, Hoi An and the Mekong Delta.

- Day 1 to Day 3 – Hanoi: Overnight flight from London to Hanoi for 2 nights in Vietnam's capital.
- Day 4 to Day 5 – Halong Bay cruise: Enjoy a 2 night cruise aboard our traditional junk through the scenic limestone scenery of Halong Bay.
- Day 6 to Day 8 – Hoi An: Spend 3 nights in the delightful town of Hoi An, including a trip to historic My Son.
- Day 9 to Day 14 – Saigon & Mekong Delta: Continue to Saigon (now officially Ho Chi Minh City) for 3 nights in this bustling metropolis. Plus an overnight cruise along the waterways of the Mekong Delta.
- Optional extensions: Choose from city stopovers, Vietnam beach or Angkor Wat.

Book with confidence. Travel Collection is part of the Kuoni Group.

KUONI
Part of the Kuoni group

