

# Tourism and Koothu

MannanKoothu has found a new platform through tourism initiatives in Kumily, supported by the Department of Forest and Wildlife under the Eco-Development Committee (EDC) scheme. Daily performances are held at the Vanashree Auditorium in Kumily. Earlier, the program also included visits to tribal hamlets and a museum experience, but at present, only the performance continues as an active component.

The integration of Koothu into tourism began as a revival effort by the Mannan community at their Kumily settlement. For nearly fifty years, the community faced challenges in preserving their cultural practices. Between 1998 and 2000, a conscious effort was made to learn, document, and revive Koothu. In 2009, the community established their own cultural centre at Kumily, marking a significant step in this revival journey.

The community's earlier performances revealed that the traditional, unstructured version of Koothu struggled to hold audience attention. This led to discussions on adapting Koothu for modern viewers while preserving its essence. Drawing inspiration from earlier special performances led by Thevan Rajamannan, visual and rhythmic elements were refined for stage appeal. Costumes were created using bark from the sacred Incha Kodi tree, and necklaces were made from Badraksham, another revered tree. Rhythmic dance steps were added to the narrative songs, giving the performance a more structured and engaging form.

Following the establishment of the EDC programs, Koothu performances moved from the community's own cultural space to the Forest Department's cultural centre. To better suit tourism contexts, the duration was shortened to about one hour, and audience interaction was added by inviting guests on stage.

Biju, a community member, expresses hope that the traditional version of Koothu will one day find equal recognition in tourism. At the same time, he acknowledges the success of the Kumily model as a promising example of how Mannan-Koothu can adapt, sustain itself, and continue to represent the cultural identity of the Mannan community.

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Revision #1

Created 10 October 2025 10:14:32

Updated 10 October 2025 10:15:03