

WESTERN GHATS

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Mountains and Hills

The mountains and hills of Kerala have played their part in its history. The Western Ghats have formed almost an unbroken wall guarding the eastern frontier and helped the people of Kerala to lead a sheltered life of their own through the centuries. The Ghats range from 3,000 ft. to more than 8,000 ft. above the sea level. The Mountains forming the Western Ghats range from 915 to 1525 metres above sea level on the Coorg and Wayanad slope with one or two peaks rising over 1825 m. and upto nearly 2430 m. But on the Nilgiri Kundal face the average height springs upto over 1825 m. It falls again to about 1225 m. and lowers on the Southern slopes of Nilgiris and again rises to a high altitude in the Vadamala, fringing the northern edge of the Palghat gap.

► On the south edge of the gap the Tenmala, outliers of the lofty Anamala Mountains commence with an elevation of 1225 to 1525 m. above mean sea level. Dwarfed into insignificance, compared with the Ghat Mountains in the background, there also occur, dotted about on the plain country, several hills on considerable elevation.

► The Anamudi peak in the High Ranges of Kottayam district rises to a height of 8,841 ft. and represents the highest point in India south of the Himalayas. The Agastya kudam, the southernmost peak in the Ghats is 6,132 ft. above sea level and figures in the popular tradition connected with Agastya muni. Apart from the many hills and peaks which form part of the regular Ghats there are several hills which lay dotted here and there over the plain country.

► Some of the hills of Kerala are important from the political and cultural points of view. Ezhimala or Mount Eli, the conspicuous isolated hills jutting into the sea on the Cannanore coast in North Kerala, was in the early centuries of the Christian era the seat of a flourishing kingdom.

► It has served as a well-known landmark for mariners from very early times. The Puralimala in Tellicherry taluk played a crucial role in the Pazhassi revolt of the British period and it has a place of importance in Kerala history almost akin to that of the Aravali hills in the annals of Rajasthan.

- ▶ Some of the most important pilgrim centres of Kerala are located either on the top of the hills or in their valleys. The famous Tirunelli temple in North Wayanad taluk lies in the valley of the Brahmagiri peak (5,276 ft.). The celebrated Sastha shrine situated on the top of the Sabarimala (3,790 ft.) in Peermede taluk is perhaps the most important centre of Hindu pilgrimage in Kerala.
- ▶ The Catholic church (St. Thomas Church) located on the top of the Malayattur hill (1,500 ft.) in the Alwayis taluk is one of the major centres of Christian pilgrimage in the State. The hills and mountains have thus come to have a religious halo in popular imagination.
- ▶ They have also been of great value in safeguarding the territorial integrity and political freedom of the land. The Western Ghats have prevented largescale incursions into Kerala by aggressive powers from beyond and have thus acted as a natural wall of protection

- ▶ The Portuguese who landed on the Kerala coast were cut off by this mountain barrier from all contact with the interior of Peninsular India and prevented from building up a permanent Indian empire. It may be noted that the English who landed on the eastern coast fared better in comparison with the Portuguese. Among the peaks rising abruptly from the Wayanad plateau at an average elevation of 915 m. the most noteworthy are the Banasura mala (1912m.) and the Brahmagiri peak (1608m.)
- ▶ The Banasuramala derives its name from the allusion that the fort of the mythological character Banasura was situated at its summit. Brahmagiri is believed to be the abode of Lord Brahma. Eight kilometers to the north of Manantoddy is a lofty ridge branching off from the Ghats and six kilometers to its north is the Brahmagiri peak. This ridge forms the limit common to Coorg and Wayanad and between these two ridges lies the valley of Tirunelli. The Peria Ghat is an important pass into the Wayanad plateau and the main road passes from it through Manantoddy to Mysore. The smuggler's pass from Dindigal to Manattana is a minor one.

- ▶ From Morampara hill at the head of the Peria Ghat one can have a panoramic view of the lowland up to the coast. At the foot of the Ghat which are here at 1.225 to 1.525 m. are the Kannoth and 44 Kottiyoor reserve forests.
- ▶ Kanakamala a lofty spar of the Ghats projects into the plains within 16 kilometres of Telli chery. The isolated ridge in Tellicherry taluk, the Puralimala has played a notable part in the historic Pazhassi struggle.
- ▶ The Veidalmala (1371.6 m.), a long, level, grassy mountain ranging transverse to the Ghats in Taliparamba taluk ends precipitously on its western face. The Ezhimala on the coast, which is only 260 m. in height, had been a land mark from historic times.
- ▶ The highest mountain in the Ghat section within the district of Kozhikode is the Vaval mala (2339m.) in Ernad Taluk. The Mountains in Palghat section range in height from 915 to 2133 metres and is spread over all the taluks in the district.

- ▶ The most important among these are the Ananginada (2386 m.). Karimala (1998 m.) and the Padagiri (1585 m.) The ranges that form the portion of the Western Ghat in Trichur district range in height from 330 m. to 1440 m. above mean sea level. Among the labyrinth of these ranges, some rough elevated tablelands are to be found. The hills in Ernakulam district are mostly less than 915 m. in elevation.
- ▶ The most noteworthy among these are the Kudayathur Vindyans a group of hills ranging in altitude around 915 m. The Ghat section in Idukki district constitutes numerous mountains of great height and varied configuration and the associated uplands. The mountains in this section rise to elevation of more than 2,000 metres with high plateaus in between and some of the loftier ones are entirely detached from the surrounding lands.

- ▶ The Western Ghats in this district reaches the highest elevation in the Anamudi (2817.06 m.), which is the highest peak in Kerala and the highest in India next to those of the Himalayas. There are several other peaks more or less near the Anamudi varying in elevation from 1981.31 m. to 2698.68 m. These mountains together with the summit plain from which they rise form the High Ranges. Though often termed as a plateau, the High Ranges is really a succession of high hills with deep valleys between them, comprising also of several small plateaus like Gudarmala, Devikulam, Anaycoodu, Eravimala, Perumalmala, Anchanad and Vattavada. These plateaus are at heights ranging from 935 m. to 2225 m. Even the valleys in High Ranges are above 935 m. in elevation.

The height of the Western Ghats decreases toward south. In the Pathanamthitta and Quilon districts the average elevation is 1220 m. The highest peaks in Pathanamthitta section are the Sivagiri mala (1744 m.) and the Meen Mala (1734 m.) The maximum height attained in the Pathanapuram section (Quilon district) is at Muthira mala (1041.5 m.).

- ▶ Further south in Trivandrum district the average height falls to about 300 m. However the peak Agasthya mudi near the boundary of Nedumangad with Neyyattin kara taluk rises to a lofty height (1869 m.). Another important hill is the Mukkunni malai (1074 m.) in Neyyattin kara taluk.
- ▶ From the mountains in the east, the land slopes to other west in a series of hills and valleys traversed by several rivulets. Passes Mention may also be made in this connection of some of the important gaps or passes in the Western Ghats which have facilitated inter State contacts. The major gap is the Palghat gap, which is about 20 miles broad. “Here, by whatever great natural agency the break occurred, the mountains appear thrown back and heaped up, as if some overwhelming deluge had burst through, sweeping them to left and right.
- ▶ On either hand tower the giant Nil iris and Anamalas, over-topping the chain of ghats by several thousand feet, while through the gap the southwest winds bring pleasant moist air and grateful showers to the thirsty plains of Coimbatore and roads and railway link the

Through this the thousand streams of the higher mountains find their way to the sea and the produce of the eastern and western provinces is exchanged. The unique character – as a point of physical geography – of this gap in an otherwise unbroken wall of high mountains, six hundred miles long, is only equaled by its great economic value to the countries lying on either hand of it”. In addition to the Palghat gap, there are also others like the Perambadi Ghat which gives access to Coorg and the Periya and Tamarasseri Ghats which provide access from the Wayanad to Mysore.

These gaps have promoted contacts between Kerala and Mysore and have also served as routes of invasions. In the Travancore area the most important of the passes are the Bodinaya kannur pass which connects Bodinaya kannur in Madurai district with the High Ranges in Kottayam district, the Kambam pass through which was transacted much of the trade to and from Thodupuzha in ancient days and the Aryankavu pass which gives easy access by road to the adjoining district of Tirunelveli. Another important pass in the Ghats is the Armboli pass through which passes the trunk road from Tirunelveli to Trivandrum. It was through this pass that the Tamil powers often invaded South India in the early period. The Armboli pass, though now situated outside Kerala, has thus played a crucial role in the military history of South Kerala.

A photograph of a white rectangular card with the words "Thank You" written in a black cursive font. The card is placed on a bed of autumn leaves in shades of red, orange, and yellow. To the right of the card is a small, round, orange pumpkin with a short stem. In the upper left corner, there are some small, round, multi-colored berries. The entire scene is set against a background of more autumn leaves. A green geometric shape is visible in the top right corner of the image.

Thank You