



## The Paradox of Infectious Diseases in India Kumarakom-a Hidden Gem

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### Dear Editor

India has become one of the world's premier tourist destinations. Known for its ancient history and civilization, varied topography and people, it has drawn visitors to its shores for many years. However, as being in the tropics, the risk of acquiring many diseases such as malaria, dengue fever, chikungunya, malaria and gastrointestinal diseases such as amoebiasis and shigella is very possible [1-2].

This is a description of a small sleepy village that is situated in the South West of India, in the state of Kerala where the prevalence of such diseases seem practically non existent.

The natives called this town "God's Country" (small village called Kumarakom). God's Country is situated approximately 55 km from the city of Cochin. It is about 30 square km in size and is situated on the East coast of India. This town is a well-kept secret drawing to its shores both local tourist and foreigners alike. Access to this sleepy fishing village is by one lane road or boat. The landscape is green, dotted with coconut trees and rice fields. There are several small waterways throughout the village and town connecting the main lakes to smaller villages and towns. These waterways are called "backwaters". They originate from a large lake which spans over 200 km in diameter and is fed from the Arabian Sea and three other rivers that feed into the lake.

The rivers and lakes are teeming with fish and other creatures of the sea such as oysters, mussels and crab. Fishing had been a major source of income in this part of the country in the past.

Women wash their clothes on flat rocks along the edge of the water as well as use it for bathing and cooking. The water ways are lined with banana trees and larger local tropical trees. Many of the trees and plants are used by the natives for medicinal purposes for several hundred years. The system of medicine practiced in the State is called Ayurveda. It is an ancient system of medicine based on herbs and roots acquired locally and then subsequently processed. It is used to treat a variety of non-surgical illnesses even until today.

They have no allopathic physicians close by and treatment for common ailments such as cold, diarrheas, and skin conditions are done by the elders of the village. These include potions and ointments derived from the bark and the leaves of the local flora. If they get severely ill and do not improve with the use of these local treatments, they are seen by the Ayurvedic physicians. They are trained in the same basic anatomy, physiology, etc., that allopathic physicians are trained in except that their emphasis was on a holistic and naturopathic approach to medicine. This includes massage therapy and treatment with local potions and ointments made out of plants and vegetation that are present in the area. According to the local natives, there is very little need for the allopathic physician except when a surgical catastrophe occurs. If such catastrophe occurs, the patient is taken to the city for appropriate surgical intervention. The physical features of the local folk reflected a mixture of a variety of races including the Dravidian, Aryan, Persian, Portuguese, and Caucasian.

The people are lean, physically strong, and healthy. There is no significant malnutrition in the children or in the adults in this area. There is also no evidence of filariasis or other obvious nutritional diseases. It appears that the vector control has been stringent for many years and continued to be used effectively resulting in a decrease in the incidence of filaria, malaria and even dengue.

The Public Health Department of Kumarakom and local physicians in the area appears to treat such diseases such osteoarthritis, diabetes and hypertension. The incidence of tropical diseases appears to be low and has been low for quite a while.

### References

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