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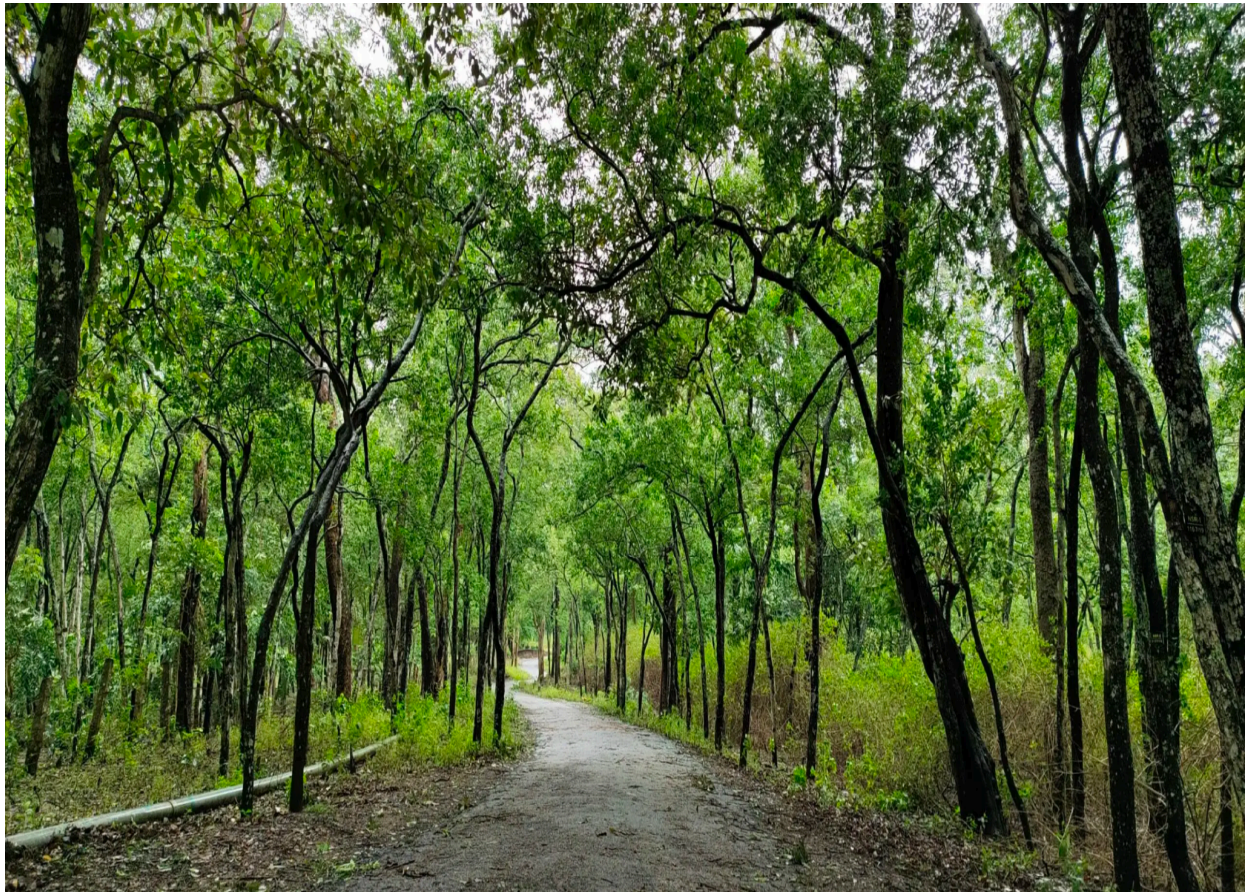
## Marayoor and Nearby Sandalwood Forest

Marayur or Marayoor is a town in Devikulam taluk of Idukki district in Kerala, India. It is located 42 kilometres north of Munnar on SH 17 connecting Munnar with Udumalpet, Tamil Nadu. Marayur is situated at around 1,600 metres above mean sea level and is the only place in Kerala that has natural sandalwood forests.

Marayoor and the nearby Kanthalloor are famous for a special variety of solid molasses produced here. The 'Marayoor sarkara', as it is known in the market, is of high quality with 97 percent sugar content.

Marayoor has a history that dates back to the Stone Age civilization that is as old as 10,000 B.C.E. At Marayoor you are welcomed by the silent tombs of primaeval times - the dolmens. The Dolmens (burial chambers made of huge stones), also known as muniyaras, belong to the Iron Age.

## Sandalwood Forests



At a distance of 5 km from Marayoor Bus Station, Sandalwood Forest is a naturally grown forest situated in Marayoor, Kerala. It is the only place in Kerala that has a natural sandalwood forest and also one of the popular places of sightseeing in Marayoor.

The Sandalwood Forest in Marayoor is a pristine naturally grown forest and is visited by a large number of tourists. Though Kerala has fewer acres of sandalwood forests than Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, it possesses the best types of sandalwood trees owing to a reduced rainfall, which favours its abundant growth. There are around 65,000 trees in the Sandalwood Forest of Marayoor and these are said to be of high quality. The forest department has rightly put a high fence and tagged sandalwood trees to prevent illegal activities.

Tourists can visit and gain more knowledge about Sandalwood trees at 'Sandalwood Regeneration Experimental Plot,' which is run by the State Forest Department. Also, one can see the processing of sandalwood in this forest and take a stroll in the jungle, but one needs to get permission from the forest department. Pure sandalwood oil and artefacts are the major point of interest for tourists who visit this place. Besides, this is

also the best place for trekking and for adventure seekers, who can catch a glimpse of the natural sights here while exploring the jungle. The lush green tea plantation and rain shadow trees make the atmosphere of Marayoor cool and refreshing.

## **Dolmens (muniyaras in south Indian Languages) in Marayoor**

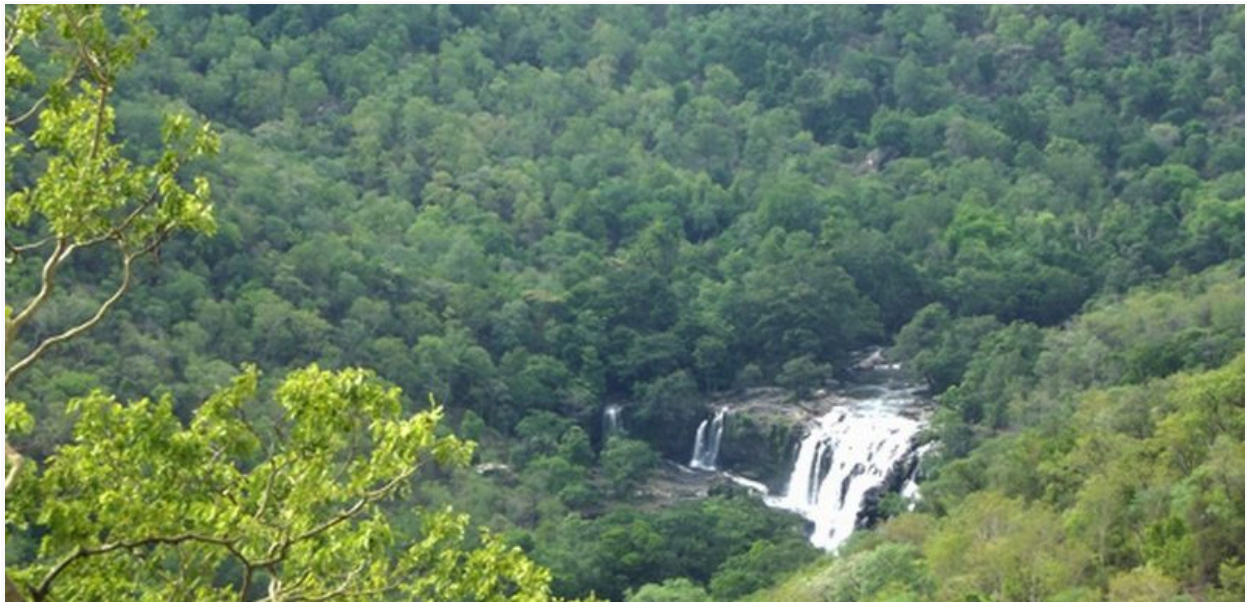
The magnificent Muniyaras or Dolmens belong to the Stone Age and are older than 10, 000 BC. More than 2,500 Muniyaras can now be seen in the entire region comprising Kanthalloor, Marayoor, and Chinnar. There are dozens of Dolmens around the area of old Shiva temple, also known as Thenkasinathan Temple, at Kovilkadavu on the banks of the River Pambar and also around the area called Pius Nagar, and rock paintings on the south-western slope of the plateau overlooking the Pambar River. A lot of archaeologists from all over the world visit this fascinating place to explore the remnants of Dolmenoid cists belonging to the Megalithic age. Apart from the dolmens of the Stone Age, several dolmens of the Iron Age exist in this region especially on the left side of River Pambar.

These dolmens are the most prominent Marayoor tourist places. Though there are several types of dolmens, a large number of Dolmens are overground with about 70-90 cm in height. These above ground Megalithic burial chambers are made of four stones placed on edges and covered with the capstone. Some of these Muniyaras contain several burial chambers, while others have a quadrangle scooped out in laterite and lined on the sides with granite slabs. These are also covered with capstones. Another type has a height of about 140-170 cm. There is an overground dolmen with double length up to 350 cm. Fragments of burial urns are also available in the region near the dolmens. This indicates that the dolmens with 70-90 cm height were used for the burial of the remains of people of high social status while the dolmens with raised roofs might have been used for the habitation of people.





## **Thoovanam Waterfalls**



At a distance of 8 km from Marayoor, and 45 km from Munnar, Thoovanam waterfall is a stunning waterfall located inside Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary in Marayoor. It is one of the popular Kerala Waterfalls, and among the must-visit Marayoor tourist attractions.



Situated on Munnar - Udamalpet Road, Thoovanam waterfall is formed by the Pambar River. It is one of the most prominent waterfalls near Kochi, and among the popular trekking routes in Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary. This cascading fall is a wonderful place to enjoy nature, dip & swim in the crystal clear water of the Pambar River. Since it is located inside the Cinnar Wildlife Sanctuary, the trek to the falls also provides a great opportunity for animal sighting during your Marayoor trip.

The waterfall has to be reached by a 4 km trek from Alampetty Checkpost, which is situated on Munnar - Udalampet highway. The Thoovanam waterfalls trip is a guided trek (forest guides must be accompanied) and usually takes 2-3 hours from the check post. This is a moderate-level trek through dense forest amidst a serene environment. The sight of Thoovanam waterfalls from a distance itself takes away all the fatigue of the long trek.

## Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary



Approximately 15 km from Marayoor lies Chinnar wildlife sanctuary. It is situated on the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border, it is bordered by Eravikulam National Park in the south, Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary in the north, and Kodaikanal Wildlife Sanctuary in the east. It forms an integral part of the 1,187 sq. km block of protected forests straddling the Kerala-Tamil Nadu border in the Anaimalai Hills. There are some significant peaks located in the sanctuary, namely Kumarikkal Mala peak, Nanadala Malai, Kottakombu Malai, Vellaikal Malai, and Viriyoottu Malai. The sanctuary receives its water from Chinnar and Pambar rivers. There are 11 tribal settlements, delimited by temporary stone walls inside the sanctuary. It is also home to the Thoovanam Waterfall, which lies on the Pambar River.

The Sanctuary has been declared as a biodiversity hotspot due to its unique topography and abundance of flora and fauna. An ideal home to a diverse range of wildlife, the Chinnar sanctuary boasts more than

1,000 varieties of flowering plants, 225 avifauna species, 34 species of mammals, 36 different types of reptiles, 22 species of amphibians, and 42 species of fishes. Indian Elephant, Panther, Gaur, Spotted Deer, Monkey, Sambar, and Grizzled Giant Squirrel are some of the main mammals at the sanctuary. The rich variety of birds here also includes the rare species of yellow-throated bulbuls. A storehouse of medicinal plants, the sanctuary is one of the most famous [wildlife sanctuaries near Kochi](#).

Owing to its salubrious eco-system, the sanctuary is revered as one of the most wonderful eco-tourism destinations in Kerala. There are multiple entry points to the safari - at Kerala border checkpost, at Chinnar check post, and Alampetty check post. Visitors can enjoy Elephant Safari and Hunter Jeep Safaris every day between 6 AM to 6 PM. Adding more to the charm and appeal of this wildlife reserve, there is a beautiful sandalwood forest located adjacent to the sanctuary. Also, the mixed deciduous forests of the sanctuary entice adventure junkies to indulge in amazing trekking options around the foothills of the mighty Western Ghats.

Chinnar Wildlife Sanctuary is also famous for its eco-tourism activities, which are jointly organized by the Forest Department and the Eco-development Committees of the local tribal communities. These activities include river trekking, trekking to the cultural site, nature trail to the watchtower, bird watching, a trek to the Thoovanam falls, interpretation activities and medicinal garden, tree house at Chinnar, trekking, and camping at Vasyappara. These are the guided tours (a forest guide must be accompanied) duration of the trek is usually around 3 hours. The treks are arranged between 6 to 11 AM and 3 to 6 PM. Except for the Thoovanam Falls trek, other treks start from Kerala - Tamil Nadu border check post.

The sanctuary enjoys inland climatic conditions - mainly hot and dry. The region experiences hot and harsh climate during summer and substantial rainfall during the monsoon. Hence, winter months from November to February are the ideal months to visit the sanctuary when the temperatures are mild and pleasantly cold.