

The coastal regions of south-central Kerala before (6 February 2018) and after (22 August 2018) the flood. Images by Landsat 8 (NASA/USGS) and Sentinel-2 (European Space Agency) satellites. Wikimedia Commons

FactsDid you know

How one monsoon, the great flood of 1341, rebuilt Kerala’s coastline and started a new calendar

Before 1341 AD, Pliny, Ptolemy, Marco Polo, and Ibn Batuta did not mention Cochin. Yet they wrote detailed accounts of coastal towns immediately to

its north and south. At the time, only a small river with a narrow mouth flowed past Cochin. The main outlet for monsoon torrents rushing down the Western Ghats lay some twenty miles north at the ancient emporium of Cranganore (Muziris).

In 1341 AD, a Periyar flood swept down from the Ghats with such force that it silted up Cranganore's harbour, crippling its major maritime trade. The flood also carved a wide, deep estuary into the sea at Cochin, turning a quiet backwater into one of India's finest natural harbours. Alluvial silt deposits and coastal upheavals threw up the long island of **Vypin** on the harbour's northern flank. Locals named it **Puthuvaippu**, meaning "new deposit" or "new formation", and started the **Puthuvaippu Era** in 1341 AD. It was used for centuries to date Cochin property deeds and a 1663 copper-plate treaty between Cochin's Raja and the Dutch East India Company.

Maritime commerce shifted southward to the new harbour, and the Zamorin of Calicut pressed into their lands to the north. The Cochin royal house (the *Perumpadappu Swarupam*) moved its headquarters from Mahodayapuram to Cochin around 1405 AD. Shortly after, Ma Huan, a Chinese Muslim chronicler with Emperor Yong-Lo's envoy Cheng Ho, became the first known foreign writer to record the rising port. Italian traveller Nicolo Conti followed in 1440, and later historians added footnotes. Francis Day argued 1341 likely marked when Vypin's marshy ground first dried enough to farm and tax, or saw its first church. Other scholars suggested Cochin may have existed earlier as a smaller harbour (Kochu Azhi) before the deluge brought it to international prominence.