

cats of kochiStory

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The marathon mail runners of Fort Kochi Post Office

The green Anchal post box outside Fort Kochi Post Office is a reminder of Kerala's old postal system, when runners took mail eight miles a day on foot. The site has served as a postal hub since the 1500s.

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The Story Of This Historical Post Office

The pin code here is 682001. Locals sometimes call it “Pincode One.” That name is affectionate rather than official, but it shows how people see this place. This was the first postal hub in the Kochi region.

People have received and sorted mail at this exact location since the 1500s. When the Portuguese built their fort and settlement in 1503, vessels from Lisbon carried letters from loved ones alongside cargo. One vessel in the fleet carried mail only. Locals called it the “mail ship.” Postal workers received and exchanged mail from those ships right where the post office stands today.

The Dutch took over in 1663 and kept the postal system running. The British continued it until Independence. The three colonial powers that ran it all used the same address, 682001.

The postal department acquired the space you see today around 1922-23. Workers built the current structure in May 1928, when Fort Kochi was still part of the Kingdom of Cochin. If someone tells you the building is 500 years old, that is not quite right. The site has been a postal hub for five centuries, while the building itself is about a hundred years old. It is still impressive, but it is much younger than the site.

The Mysterious Green Box Nobody Uses

Walk up to the entrance and look to the side. You will spot a hexagonal cast-iron post box, painted green with gold details. No mail goes in anymore - someone has sealed it shut. But it is the most interesting object at this post office.



From the story of the Anchal mail runners at the Head Post Office, Kochi — mail handled here since Portuguese times.

This is an Anchal post box. The word “Anchal” comes from the Greek “Angelos,” meaning messenger.

Before India Post existed, the princely states of Travancore and Cochin ran their own postal system called the Anchal post. It started in Travancore in 1729 under Marthanda Varma. It later spread to Cochin in the 1770s.

Look closely at the post boxes. They are hexagonal, about a metre tall, and made of cast iron in Madras (now Chennai). Each one could hold up to 3,000 letters. Most Anchal boxes carry the Shankha (conch shell) emblem of the Travancore state, with two smaller conch shells flanking the mail slot.

The Fort Kochi box also has a British royal cipher with a lion, a unicorn, and the linked letters V and R - Victoria Regina. It is from the Victorian era, when British and princely postal systems overlapped in this part of Kerala.

In 1951, the Anchal system merged with India Post, and the boxes fell out of use. A few still stand at post offices across Kerala - Muvattupuzha, Krishnapuram Palace, and here in Fort Kochi.

The Anchal *Ottakkars* (Runners)

People called the mail carriers of the old system "Anchal Pillai." They ran with postal bags balanced on their heads and carried a two-foot staff with bells attached. They wore khaki shorts, a khaki shirt, and a khaki hat with a red lining. When people heard the bells coming along the street, they moved aside.



They carried mail eight miles a day on foot, with bells ringing. That was the postal service in Kerala before stamps and sorting machines.

A Postcard from 682001



From the story of the Anchal mail runners at the Head Post Office, Kochi — mail handled here since Portuguese times.

Most heritage spots in Fort Kochi have entrance fees, guided tours, and queues for photos. This one has none of those things. It is a government post office that stands on a spot where people have handled mail since Portuguese ships sailed into the harbour.

You can spend 10 minutes here. Look at the Anchal box, walk through the bungalow, and buy some stamps. Send a postcard to someone you like or to yourself, so you can see it when you reach home after your travel. Then continue your walk through Fort Kochi, knowing you have seen something that 90% of tourists skip.

The post office does not ask for your admiration. It just keeps doing its job. It has been doing it for a while now.

If you are following our 32 Things to Do in Fort Kochi guide, add this as a quick stop between St. Francis Church and the Parade Ground.

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Fort KochiSt. Francis CSI Church
Church
Ridsdale Road
Road
Bastian Street
Street
Head Post Office, Kochi
Post office