



St. Francis Church **AD 1503**

Fort Kochi, Kerala, India

Location: Fort Kochi, Kerala, India

Denomination: Church of South India (CSI)

Originally built by: Portuguese Franciscan friars

First name: St. Birtholomio Church

Category: Historic colonial church

**The oldest surviving European church in India
and the first burial place of Vasco da Gama.**

Why this church matters?

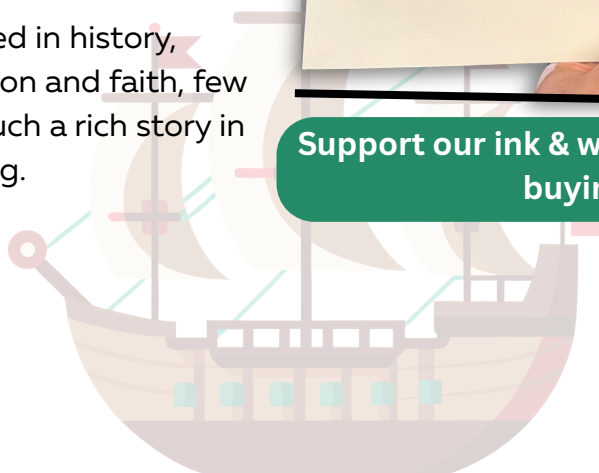
- **St. Francis Church** is one of the most important historic churches in Asia. It is the oldest surviving European church in India and has witnessed more than five centuries of change. Portuguese explorers, Dutch merchants, British administrators and generations of local Christians have all left their mark on this building.
- Its story is especially interesting because European Christianity arrived in Kerala centuries after Christianity had already taken root here through the ancient tradition of St. Thomas the Apostle. St. Francis Church therefore represents the meeting of two Christian histories: one ancient and Indian, the other European and maritime.
- For travellers interested in history, architecture, exploration and faith, few churches in Asia tell such a rich story in such a modest building.

What not to miss

- Original burial site of Vasco da Gama.
- Historic hand-operated cloth fan (punkah).
- Memorial tablets and gravestones.
- Timber roof and Portuguese colonial architecture.
- Peaceful churchyard with excellent sketching view.



**Support our ink & watercolour archiving by
buying a print.**



What not to miss

- The original burial site of Vasco da Gama.
- The large manually operated cloth fan (punkah), once used before electric fans.
- Old memorial tablets and gravestones along the walls.
- The timber roof and simple colonial architecture.
- The peaceful churchyard, which offers excellent sketching viewpoints.

Visiting information

Location: Church Road, Fort Kochi, Kerala.

Best time to visit:

Early morning on weekdays or late afternoon for softer light and fewer visitors.

Sunday visits:

Church services in the morning. Open for visitors from 1 pm onwards

Time required:

Allow 15–30 minutes for the church and surrounding grounds.

A brief history

Before the Portuguese

Christian communities had existed in Kerala for many centuries before the arrival of the Portuguese. According to long-standing tradition, St. Thomas the Apostle reached the Malabar Coast in the first century AD.

1498 – Vasco da Gama reaches India

The Portuguese sea route around Africa opened direct trade between Europe and India, changing world history.

1503 – Construction of the church

Portuguese Franciscan friars built the first church on this site. The original structure was largely made of timber before being rebuilt in stone and brick. Originally dedicated to Bartholomew, later to St. Anthony. Later, when the British took control of Kochi, they renamed the church St. Francis's Church, honouring the founding congregation.

1524 – Vasco da Gama's burial

When Vasco da Gama died in Kochi, he was buried inside this church. Fourteen years later, his remains were taken to Portugal, but the original burial site is still marked.

1663 – Dutch period

After capturing Kochi, the Dutch converted the church from Roman Catholic to Protestant use and removed many Catholic features.

1795 – British period

The British took control of Kochi, and the church later came under Anglican administration.

Today

The church is part of the Church of South India and remains an active place of worship as well as one of Fort Kochi's most visited heritage sites.



Tomb of Vasco da Gama



[watch the video](#)



Surroundings of the church. These buildings are believed to be Vasco da Gama's residences

St Francis Church Colouring Sheet

