

# PORT OF COCHIN

## ABOUT

Welcome to Port of Cochin...! It is a major port on the Arabian Sea – Laccadive Sea – Indian Ocean sea-route in the city of Kochi and is one of the largest ports in India. It is also the first transshipment port in India. The port lies on two islands in the Lake of Kochi: Willingdon Island and Vallarpadam, towards the Fort Kochi river mouth opening onto the Laccadive Sea. The International Container Transshipment Terminal (ICTT), part of the Cochin Port, is the largest container transshipment facility in India. The port is governed by the Cochin Port Authority (CoPA), a Government of India establishment. It was established in 1928 and has completed over 90 years of active service. The Kochi Port is one of a line of maritime-related facilities based in the port-city of Kochi. The others are the Cochin Shipyard, the largest shipbuilding as well as maintenance facility in India; the SPM (single point mooring) facility of the Kochi Refineries, an offshore crude carrier mooring facility; and the Kochi Marina. The Cochin port was formed naturally due to the flooding of the Periyar River in 1341 AD, and, over time, has become a major flashpoint for trade. The port in its initial history attracted European merchants- predominantly Dutch and Portuguese- and was later expanded by the British with the establishment of Willingdon Island.

The idea of establishing a modern port in Cochin was first posited by Lord Willingdon during his governorship of the Madras Province. The opening of the Suez Canal allowed several ships to pass near the west coast and he felt it was necessary to build a modern port in the southern part as well. He selected the newly joined Sir Robert Bristow, a leading British harbour engineer, to head the project, and Bristow became chief engineer of Kochi Kingdom's Port Department in 1920. From that point forward until the port's completion in 1939, he and his team were actively involved in making a greenfield port. With extensive research spanning over a decade toward securing a permanent manmade port that could withstand monsoon erosion, he was convinced that it would be both feasible and largely beneficial to develop Kochi through its port. He believed that Kochi could become the safest harbour in India if the ships could enter the inner channel. The challenge before engineers was a rock-like sandbar that stood across the opening of Kochi backwaters into the sea. Its density prevented the entry of all large ships (requiring more than eight or nine feet of water). It was thought that the removal of the sandbar was a technical impossibility, and the potential consequence on the environment was beyond estimation. Efforts that had been previously undertaken on this scale had led to ecological atrocities such as destruction of the Vypeen foreshore. However, Bristow, after a detailed study of wind and sea current conditions, concluded that such issues could easily be avoided. He addressed the immediate problem of Vypeen foreshore's erosion by building granite groynes that were nearly parallel with the shore and overlapped each other. The groynes enabled a system of automatic reclamation which naturally protected the shore from monsoon seas. Spurred on by this success, Bristow planned out a detailed proposal of reclaiming part of the backwaters at a cost of ₹25 million (equivalent to ₹4.6 billion in 2020). An ad-hoc committee appointed by the Madras government examined and approved the plans submitted by Bristow.

During World War II, the port was taken over by the Royal Navy to accommodate military cruisers and warships. The strategic importance of Cochin during the World Wars was one immediate reason for the construction of the harbour. It aided the British in resisting the Japanese threat, but it also proved crucial domestically in the shaping of Cochin as a modern urban space, reorganising local caste and labour relations. According to a recent study, the 20-year long project appropriated, modified, or undermined existing social institutions of labour recruitment, work processes, skills and local technologies. The large-scale appropriation and modification of local skills and labour recruitment and work process in this colonial project produced a space of disparity by reinforcing the pre-capitalist caste-based corecive labour relations. The project also involved a massive destruction and appropriation of the social spaces of the urban poor. In 1932, the Maritime Board of British India declared the Port of Cochin as a major port and was opened to all vessels up to 30 feet draught. It was returned to civil authorities on 19 May 1945. After the Independence, the port was taken over by the government of India, and in 1964, the administration of the port was vested to a Board of Trustees under the Major Port Trusts Act. The port is currently listed as one of the 12 major ports of India. The board is headed by the chairman who acts as the chief executive officer. The government may from time to time nominate the trustees in the board representing various interests. The chairman is assisted by the deputy chairman who in turn is assisted by department heads and officials of the port departments .