



Nalukettu homes of Kerala: Making Vastu shastra an art of living

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Abstract

This paper explores the architectural and cultural significance of Nalukettu homes in Kerala, emphasizing their role in integrating Vastu Shastra principles into daily living. Nalukettu, the traditional quadrangular mansion of Kerala, is a unique representation of Dravidian architecture that harmonizes with the tropical environment and sociocultural context of the region. The study delves into the structural design, spatial organization, and symbolic elements of Nalukettu homes, highlighting how Vastu Shastra guidelines have been historically embedded to promote well-being, harmony, and sustainable living.

Keywords: Nalukettu, Kerala architecture, Vastu Shastra, Traditional homes

Introduction

Kerala, a state located in the southwestern part of India, stretches along a narrow strip from south to east, with an average elevation of approximately 63 meters above sea level. Culturally known as Malabar, it is situated between the Arabian Sea to the west and the Western Ghats mountain range to the east, bordered by Travancore in the south. The highest elevated areas reach about 800 meters above sea level. Kerala experiences significant annual rainfall, averaging up to 1000mm during the monsoon season, with peak temperatures ranging between 30 °C to 34 °C.

Common features of homes in Kerala

Kerala's vernacular architecture embodies a synthesis of Indian and Southeast Asian influences. The Indian influence is evident in the use of large-scale earthen materials and adherence to Vedic principles, particularly Vastu Shastra, in home design. Kerala extensively utilizes laterite, a common building material along India's western coast from Gujarat to Kanyakumari. Southeast Asian characteristics, as described by Reimar Schefold's "Southeast Asian House Type," are observed in Kerala's architecture through several elements: 1) use of natural materials like vegetal reeds, coconut, jackfruit, and rosewood; 2) sloping roofs to manage heavy monsoon rains; 3) slanting wall screens and

extended eaves to reduce sun glare; 4) emphasis on transparency and openness suited for hot and humid climates; 5) open-layout single-hall building typology with minimal furniture and discreet window openings; 6) transitional spaces marked by wall screens, trellis walls, and sun-shading features; and 7) unique spatial organization placing kitchens and female quarters on the East and North sides, diverging from mainstream Indian architectural norms. The architecture predominantly utilizes wood components that allow for disassembly, with its defining features being the imposing scale, pyramidal shape, and distinctive sloping roofs characteristic of Kerala's architectural heritage.

Kerala traditional architecture elements

Sloping roofs

In traditional Kerala architecture, sloping roofs are a defining characteristic, contrasting with the flat roofs commonly seen in modern homes and apartments. These sloping roofs are iconic features of traditional Kerala buildings, designed with a pronounced overhang that extends low to protect the mud or timber walls from rain and other weather elements. This design not only shields the interiors but also helps maintain a cooler atmosphere inside the homes. Carpenters historically considered the roof design as paramount, emphasizing its importance in home

construction. In Malayalam culture, there's a saying, "I want to make a Koorā (roof)," signifying the aspiration to build a home.

Courtyard

Historically, affluent members across communities in Kerala inhabited traditional courtyard buildings known as 'Nalukettu'. These structures feature a single central courtyard, whereas those with two courtyards are termed 'Ettukettu'. The grandeur of these courtyard houses was determined by the size and number of courtyards, which were often expanded as families grew within the joint family system. The internal courtyards were surrounded by walkways on all sides, ensuring ample ventilation and natural light for all rooms.

Verandah

The client's requirements were met with spacious verandahs, allowing for versatile use with a range of furniture combinations. Options included beds or writing desks, accommodating various activities. When needed, the verandahs could be partitioned into smaller sections. Overall, these verandahs provided a serene and relaxing environment for the occupants.



What is a Nalukettu home?

The Nalukettu is a traditional single-story home in Kerala, once common among Nair and Brahmin households in joint family settings. Also referred to as Tharavadu, Kovilakam, Kottaram, Meda, and illam, it gets its name from "Four Blocks" in Tamil, surrounding a central courtyard known as the Nadumuttam. The four blocks are: Thekkini (south), Vadakkini (north), Kizhakkini (east), and Padinjattini (west).

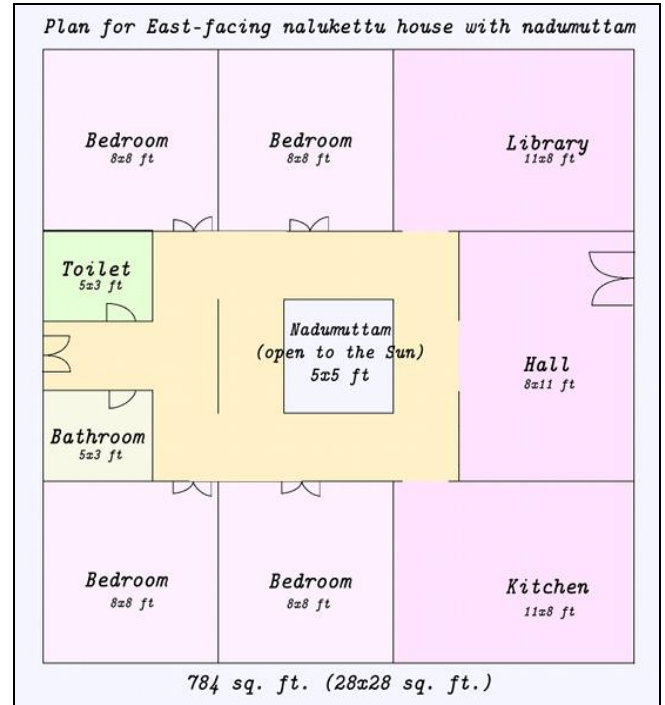
Originally stemming from salas, which were rectangular sitting rooms with one or two verandas, the Nalukettu evolved from akasala (single block) to dwissala, thrissala, nalukettu (four blocks), and ettukettu (eight blocks). Some expanded even further to Pathinarukettu (sixteen blocks and four courtyards). Larger homes often included amenities like granaries, livestock sheds, ponds, and small family temples, while smaller blocks were inhabited by lower castes.

What is Vastu shastra?

Vastu originates from the Sthapatyaveda, a branch of the Atharvaveda focused on the connection between humans and their structures. It evolved into Vastu Shastra, teaching the principles of living, designing, and constructing buildings in harmony with nature to enhance positive energy. Sthapatya Veda provides the theoretical foundation, while Vastu Shastra is the practical application, known as the "science of construction," that utilizes this knowledge.

Vastu shastra in Kerala Houses

Kerala's Vastu Shastra for houses originated during India's Vedic period. It is founded on five essential elements known as panchabhutas: Prithvi (earth), Agni (fire), Tej (light), Vayu (wind), and Akash (ether). These elements are believed to constitute the entire universe, including the earth and the human body, influencing cosmic forces and energy patterns. According to Vastu Purusha Mandal, aligning these elements creates a harmonious and auspicious living environment conducive to balanced and joyful living.



Kerala Vastu shastra for house

- North Wealth & prosperity Living room, seating, office, entrance
- North-East Religion & trinity Puja room, well, underground water tank
- East Progress & growth Entrance, guestroom, verandah, bathroom
- South-East Energy, vigour & strength Kitchen, generator, power supply
- South Poor Back yard and kitchen garden
- South-West Purity & cleanliness Toilet/ washing area
- West Water Overhead tank, study room
- North-West Air Bedroom

Kerala Vastu Shastra for housing, a Sanskrit term meaning "architecture science," encompasses design, layout, measurements, ground preparation, organization, and spatial geometry to create structures that promote peace, well-being, and prosperity. It integrates science, art, astronomy, and astrology to propose principles for harmonizing living spaces with nature. Employing geometric patterns, symmetry, and directional alignment, it aims to optimize the environment for positive energy flow and holistic living.

The Prominence of Vastu Shastra and the Science Behind It

In traditional Kerala houses, the kitchen was strategically

located in the northeast corner to benefit from prevailing southwest breezes, which helped carry away any fire risks from thatched roofs. This placement was also complemented by nearby wells for convenience. The main living areas were typically situated in the southwest corner of courtyard houses, away from the kitchen's heat and potential hazards.

Cattle sheds and gatehouses were positioned according to ancient principles, and trees were strategically planted around the house as per Vastu Shastra guidelines. In North Kerala, multi-story courtyard houses often had single-level sections in the northeast for kitchens, with bedrooms located upstairs in the southwest.

Today, Kerala's traditional houses remain culturally significant, preserving vernacular architectural principles. Surrounding grounds often feature fruit, vegetable, and coconut trees, reflecting a harmonious blend with nature. Designed in accordance with Vastu Shastra, these houses emphasize entry from the east or north, balancing aesthetics with climate resilience to withstand Kerala's heavy rainfall and intense heat.

Characterized by natural materials and spacious interiors, a well-designed traditional Kerala house, such as the nalukettu, typically includes granaries, livestock sheds, kitchens, dining halls, baths, bedrooms, puja rooms, and a well or pond, showcasing a holistic approach to living and architectural design.

Vastu for a North-facing House

In Kerala house Vastu Shastra, Lord Kuber, the deity of wealth, presides over the north direction. A north-facing home can potentially foster prosperity and positivity when aligned with Vastu principles.

Central to a north-facing Vastu house plan is the positioning of the main entrance towards the north. According to Vastu Shastra, the orientation of the main door dictates the overall energy flow and auspiciousness of the dwelling. It is crucial to adhere strictly to Vastu guidelines when designing such a home, ensuring that important elements and placements positively influence the occupants' lifestyle and well-being.

Vastu for a South-facing House

Kerala Vastu shastra for a house or place to guarantee that positive energy flows throughout the space. On a south-facing property, east a south-facing property's exposure to sunlight can be either a benefit or a curse, depending on its location and surroundings. Summer sun radiation is more harmful to the human body, but not in the winter.

Vastu for a east-facing house

Kerala Vastu Shastra for the House According to scientific studies, east-facing house Vastu plans bring prosperity and luck. East-facing residences receive early morning light. This method is intended to offer the owners with as much good energy and well-being as possible. Furthermore, homes with a wide field of vision and a lower elevation to the east are more prosperous than those with an unfavourable orientation. If it's in the northeast corner, leave a six-inch gap between the wall and the main door to allow positive energy to enter. Southwest direction for bedrooms in east-facing structures. Vastu Tip: Build the staircase facing the house's south or western orientation.

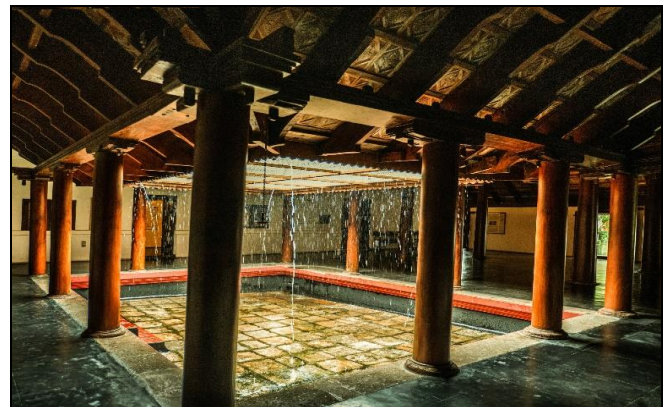
Vastu for a west-facing House

Kerala According to Vastu shastra for houses, the West direction gives money and success, which is especially beneficial for those in professions such as business, politics, nursing, and education. Pooja room Vastu for a west-facing home According to experts, placing a money plant Vast in the living room is essential for reaping its benefits. It should face south-east for prosperity and wealth.

Vastu in Nalukettu homes

Architectural Features and Spatial Arrangement

The four blocks of Paliam Nalukettu face the cardinal directions and provide a variety of tasks. The western block, or padinjattini, is separated into three rooms, the middle of which is the private strong room, or Ara, which houses all of the treasures; interestingly, it is reported that there is a hidden room beneath the Ara with a secret exit. The vadakkini includes both the kitchen and the dining room. The remaining rooms in the north quarter home are general rooms. The middle sections of Kizhakkini and tekkini are open hallways that welcome visitors.



Traditional Kerala house design Courtyards

Courtyards are an important element of any Kerala home, as they host the majority of family functions.

The courtyard is known as the nadumuttom and is the focal point of a Kerala residence. It is normally square and sits in the precise centre of the home. According to Vastu Shastra, this is a column-free space. The nadumuttom's tiled roof slopes keep heat and rain out of the veranda and interior spaces.

In the nalukettu design, all of the rooms open into a communal courtyard, which promotes natural ventilation and appropriate lighting for the dwelling. Traditional Kerala houses have two verandahs: internal and outdoor.

In traditional homes, the courtyard is always situated at the centre of the house, which is known as Brahmasthan as per Vastu. It radiates unlimited energy. This part of your home radiates energy in a huge way. The only best place to build the main hall, pooja room or the courtyard is the centre of the house. The exterior verandah helped to decrease direct sunlight exposure. The inside verandah allows light to enter the house via a courtyard. It was also used to dry rice and provide leisure and open space for youngsters to play. A tulsi plant was planted in the centre of a Kerala-style courtyard and worshipped.

The courtyard should be clutter-free and the circumference

of the courtyard should not have any sort of obstructions or built-up area.

The courtyard is a central, holiest and powerful place in the house. One must take sufficient care, while designing this section of the house, as all directions meet at this point and disperse positive energy in all directions.

- Sleeping at the centre of the house isn't considered good
- There should not be a beam at the centre of the house
- The courtyard should not contain beams, arches, staircase, storeroom etc.



Vastu Shastra's Advantages

Kerala Vastu Shastra for houses Vastu-compliant buildings made with natural materials balance cosmic energy and bring prosperity and general success. Positive energies pour into your home when Vastu is properly set up, promoting inner peace and harmony in relationships.

- Vast offers a clutter-free, well-lit home that draws positive energy and improves your financial status.
- Vastu house designs incorporate styles, colors, and materials that promote people's physical and emotional well-being.

Conclusion

Kerala's concept of many energies influencing people's life Vastu shastra for houses. Vastu Shastra principles integrate life with the energy of the environment. When building your home, keep these vastu ideas in mind for the main entry, master bedroom, kitchen, and other places to promote health and happiness. If you require any additional

recommendations or vastu support, please contact Square Yards.

The architectural scene has changed rapidly during the previous two decades. The younger generation does not appear to be interested in the preservation of historic buildings. Engineers and architects learned from western textbooks as well. They might not respect the country's traditions. The utilization of craftspeople has likewise decreased during the previous two or three decades. To overcome the current issue, an architecture typology that is appropriate for the location, climate, and people, such as traditional Kerala architecture, should be developed. The combination of ethnic or traditional styles with modern architecture could also be an option. A house's spaces should be properly designed, with areas that can be chosen based on one's mood. Ideally, modern traditional architecture must adapt to tenants' changing demands and requirements in order to gain popularity.

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