

CULINARY & WELLNESS JOURNEY

Flavours of South India

A JOURNEY TO THE SOUL – WALKING, COOKING, TASTING, MEDITATION
AND YOGA IN KERALA, INDIA

12 DAYS



WALKABOUT
GOURMET ADVENTURES

Journey Overview

Kerala, the “land of coconuts” is situated on India’s west coast and has over 500 kms of tropical beaches facing the warm Arabian Sea. For centuries, South India's Malabar Coast has been the heart of the spice trade in the Indian Ocean. In its thriving port cities, the confluence of Greek, Roman, Phoenician, Arab, Chinese, and European cultures remain visible in the architecture, religion and daily life of the people.

We discover its incredible cultural heritage and lovely landscapes, from palm-tree lined white-sandy beaches and pastoral waterways where ornate “kettuvallam” houseboats lazily float, to rice paddies lined in coconut groves and rubber plantations where tigers once roamed.

In Cochin, with its stunning location along the Arabian Sea, our walks reveal the legacies of its European past, from British mansions and Dutch cottages to a 16th century synagogue.

In the cool mountain region of Munnar our walks are amongst the cool tea, coffee and lush spice plantations.

The very sound of the word Thekkady conjures up images of elephants, unending chains of hills and spice-scented plantations. In the Periyar forest of Thekkady is one of the finest wildlife reserves in India and spread across the entire district are picturesque plantations and hill-top towns with great mountain walks.

As we glide on our deluxe private houseboat, Kerala’s picturesque rural scenes are all around us. Our journey on waterways through this quiet region reveals the life of people working their fields with water buffaloes and fishing with nets from traditional longboats.

With such a rich and ancient culture influenced by so many different customs, Kerala has thrived. Many cuisines were developed over time but always without compromising the freshness of the local ingredients used. It is this philosophy that has kept the people so healthy. Their strong cultural ways are still practised and much respected. We learn how to prepare native dishes using spices from Kerala’s western ghats.

Soothe your body and soul with meditation and yoga practises with our master Sreejith. Find harmony with the Divine!

Journey Schedule

DAY 1

Cochin – City Explorer

DAY 2

Cochin – A Day for Body and Soul

DAY 3

Cochin – Ernakulam’s Broadway

DAY 4

Cochin – Munnar – Tea Plantation Museum

DAY 5

Walk Through the Teaplantations – Nimi’s Culinary Adventure

DAY 6

Devikulam – Pothamedu

DAY 7

Munnar – Aranya Naturals – Thekkady

DAY 8

Thekkady – Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary

DAY 9

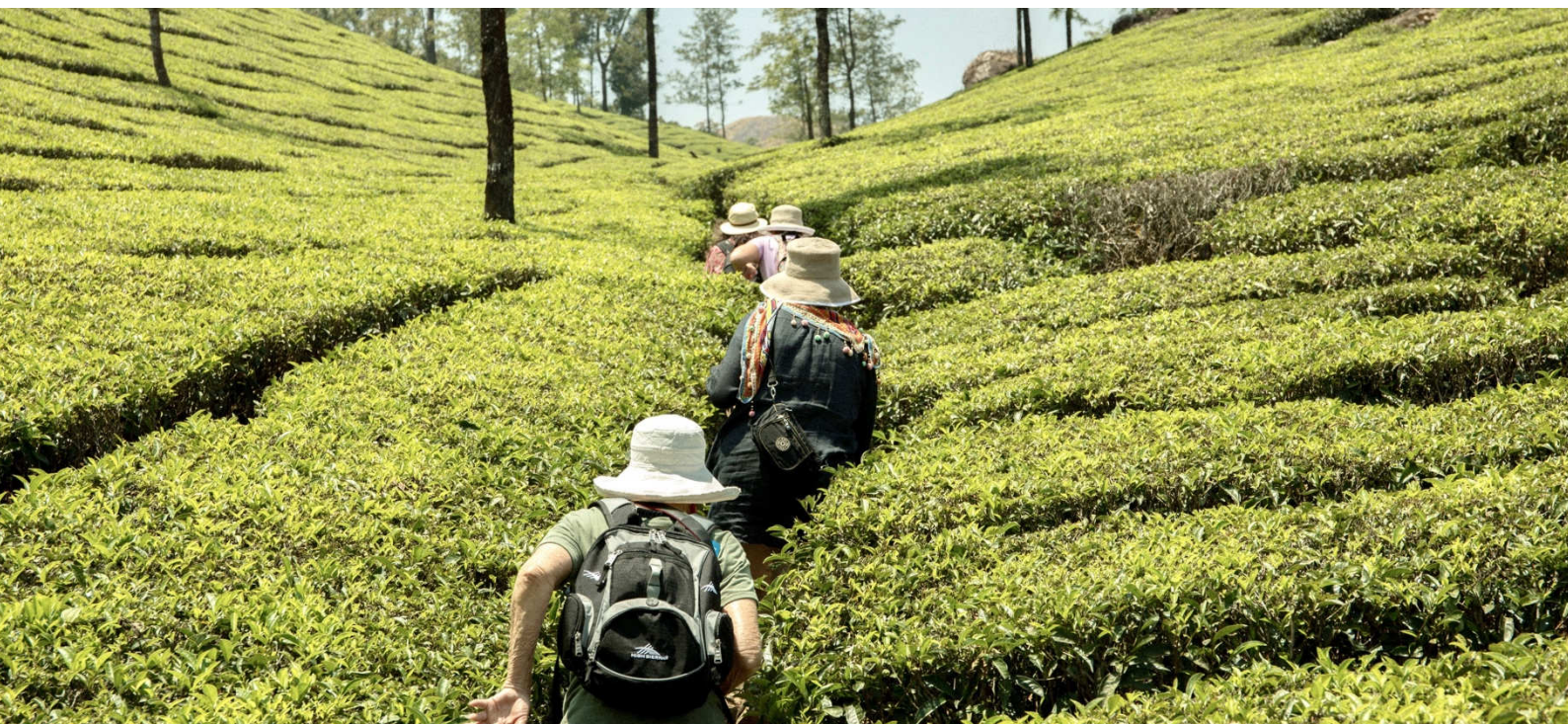
Thekkady – Periyar Tiger Reserve

DAY 10 & 11

Thekkady – Alleppy – Kerala Backwater Cruise

DAY 12

Cochin – Kerala Folklore Museum – End of Tour



Journey Itinerary



DAY 1

Cochin - City Explorer


We meet at 9.30 a.m. at Ginger House Museum Hotel in Cochin from where we start our visit of Cochin. It is a diverse and colourful port city spreading over 4-5 islands and peninsulas. The main town of Ernakulam is on the mainland. All the islands are connected by a ferryboat network and therein lies the charm of an exploratory stay here.

We start our walk from the headland of Fort Cochin, where a phalanx of cantilevered Chinese fishing nets dip into the sea at high tide. They are erected from teak wood and bamboo poles which work on the principle of balance. Records say they were first set up here between AD1350 and 1450. Vasco Da Gama

Square, the narrow promenade that lies parallel with the beach, is the best place to watch the nets being lowered and pulled out of the sea.

The Jewish community traces its history to nearly 2,000 years ago. In 1948 the community numbered 2,500 and today there are fewer than 30 people. The community is still centred around Jew town where you will visit its crown jewel – the Synagogue. Built in 1568 and reconstructed after a Portuguese bombardment in 1662, the synagogue is distinguished by its tiled roof and bell tower. The small synagogue is also known for its hand-painted, willow-patterned, blue and white Chinese floor tiles and the many brass and crystal lamps that hang from the ceiling.

We visit the interesting International Pepper Exchange, also located in Jew town. The two-storey Mattancherry or “Dutch Palace”, 20th century Santa Cruz Cathedral – in an Indo-Romano-Rococo style, the first European church in India, St. Francis Church, VOC Gate, Bastion Bungalow, David Hall, a surviving legacy of the Dutch Colonial rule, have now been renovated and converted into an art gallery. We return to our hotel with some time to relax. Dinner this evening will be at our hotel.

 **2 - 3 HOURS**

 **GINGER HOUSE MUSEUM HOTEL, COCHIN, KERALA, INDIA**



DAY 2

Cochin - A Day for Body and Soul

We start our day with a yoga and meditation class (optional) and then have time for a leisurely brunch. In the afternoon you have time to relax by the pool or go shopping for that special gift!

Tonight's special evening will be filled with culture and cuisine.

Our first stop will be the Cochin Cultural Centre, founded by Sukumaran Nedungadi in 1978. Kathakali Dance performance is one of the oldest theatre forms of dance-drama in the world, where the actors depict characters from the epics Ramayana and Mahabharata.


Watch them love, fight and cry in an art form that's more refined and more colourful than any other performing art in the world.

The Kathakali make-up is a lengthy affair but fascinating to watch the slow transformation of mortals into immortal deities and demons.

Using natural pigments like manayola, the actors turn themselves into mythical beings step-by-step. Once the brilliant headgear is fixed on their human heads, they become larger than life realities.

Photos can be taken with the dancer after the performance.

Kerala cuisine at Malabar house is one of only 500 hotels and restaurants in the world that are chosen from 60 countries around the world to attain this standard. Tonight's chef degustation dinner will be a highlight of Kerala regional cuisine.

 **1-2 HOURS**

 **GINGER HOUSE MUSEUM HOTEL, COCHIN, KERALA, INDIA**




DAY 3

Cochin - Ernakulam's Broadway

Today we leave at 10.00 a.m. to the Ernakulam's Broadway area. Here we immerse ourselves in Indian day to day life.

The district is the traditional nerve centre of business in the city. The British took over control of this part of Cochin from the Dutch and the traders moved from Mattanchery to Broadway to set up their shops. We wander along Marine Drive Promenade (a car free zone) amongst the many bazaars, cafes, fish traders, fruit and vegetable of all kinds. Although there are many spice shops here to tempt you, spices are fresher and cheaper to purchase from the spice farms when we visit Thekkady. The evening is at your leisure.

 **2 - 3 HOURS**

 **GINGER HOUSE MUSEUM HOTEL, COCHIN, KERALA, INDIA**



DAY 4

Cochin - Munnar - Tea Plantation Museum

We drive the 160 kms through the lush hills to Munnar where we will spend the next 3 nights.

Munnar is situated at the confluence of three mountain streams - Mudrapuzha, Nallathani & Kundala. At 1,600 metres above sea level, this hill station was once the summer-resort of the British Government in South India.

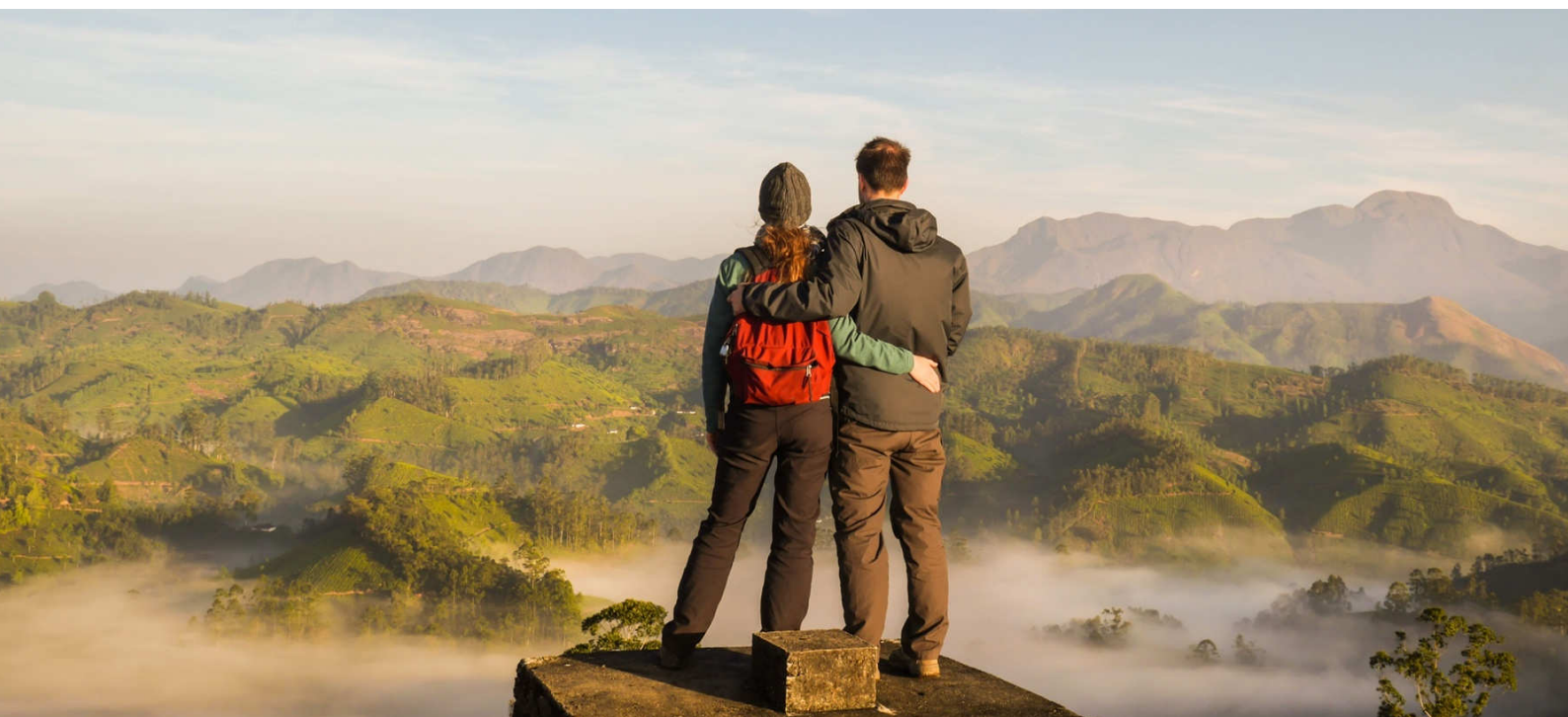
Sprawling tea plantations, picture-book towns, winding lanes and holiday facilities make this a popular resort town. Among the exotic flora found in the forests and grasslands, here is the Neel Kurinji. This flower bathes the hills in blue every twelve years. Munnar also has the highest peak in South India - Anamudi, which towers over 2,695 metres.

On the way to our hotel we visit a tea plantation museum. It gives us a fascinating insight into the production of one of the world's most popular drinks. We watch and learn the process of how tea is made, starting from the plant you see covering the landscape, all the way to the teacup. Some great tea can be purchased here for tea lovers as gifts.

Dinner is at The Fog Hotel.

 **1 HOUR**

 **HOTEL THE FOG MUNNAR, KERALA, INDIA**



DAY 5

Walk Through the Tea plantations - Nimi's Culinary Adventure

After breakfast we drive to Munnar where we meet our local guide for a fascinating walk through Munnar's luxuriant tea plantations, which are wrapping the local mountain ranges. Our walk takes us through the narrow pathways, which separate these beautiful fields. As we are climbing up to the ridge, we are rewarded with the best views over this picturesque landscape. Along the way our local guide will give us some interesting information on how to recognise the various stages in tea growing. Most of Munnar's residents are employed in the tea industry, but strangely enough, it is mostly women who do the back-breaking work of harvesting the plants. With their days often starting from 6.30 a.m. to commute to the plantations, they then spend all day doing hot, sweaty work until 6.00 p.m. in the evening. Hearing the reality of what this life is like for locals makes you really appreciate every cup of tea. In the afternoon we make our way to Nimi's Culinary Ventures. This well acclaimed published culinary cook will teach us all about using spices, herbs and the ingredients in traditional Kerala cuisine. Dinner will be included after the class is over. A copy of her acclaimed cookbook is included as a gift for you to take home.

 **3 HOURS**

 **HOTEL THE FOG, MUNNAR, KERALA, INDIA**



DAY 6

Devikulam – Pothamedu

Our walk today takes us past buildings of historical importance, tea plantations and then continues to the hill station.

We discover the curiously western-looking building of Christ Church, which was built in 1910 by the British settlers in Munnar. The stained-glass windows are amongst the most interesting features, while plaques, standing in memory of British tea planters, offer an insight into the history of the town.

We continue to Devikulam, arguably one of the most picturesque spots in the world. This tiny hill station, located only 7 kms from Munnar, is a paradise of flora and fauna, with spanning views of the picture-perfect countryside.

The crystal mineral waters of Sita Devi Lake, teeming with freshwater trout, provide the perfect spot to continue our idyllic countryside walk.

On our way to Pothamedu we walk through cardamom and coffee plantations and will be rewarded with spectacular views across the vast tea plantations of the area. The town itself is typically Indian with the usual shops and traditional guesthouses. It is a great place to stay and also a popular place for Indian honeymooners.

This evening we enjoy a complimentary cooking demonstration by the head Chef at the Fog Resort hotel

Dinner will be at our hotel.


 **3 - 4 HOURS**

 **HOTEL THE FOG, MUNNAR, KERALA, INDIA**

DAY 7

Munnar - Aranya Naturals – Thekkady

In the morning we leave our comfortable Fog Hotel behind and drive to Thekkady. On our way we visit Aranya Naturals, which is a natural dyeing unit that forms a part of Srishti Welfare Centre - a Tata initiative in Munnar. The idea behind its formation started in 1994, when the need was realised to save the rich Indian craft of dyeing clothes naturally. Another aim behind its formation was providing employment to the differently abled youngsters from Srishti's rehabilitation unit named Developmental Activities in Rehabilitative Education (DARE). It is known for the production of exquisite fabrics using environment-friendly techniques and non-toxic products. In present times, products by Aranya Naturals are in huge demand all over the world. The surrounding rolling hills and lush forests of Munnar are ablaze with the exuberant colours of nature. The climate creates an environment that allows diverse flora and fauna to thrive. The raw materials they use at Aranya Naturals derive purely from nature's abundant resources in the virgin forests of Munnar. With these seeds, leaves and flowers, natural dyes are prepared for use on silk and cotton fabrics and the magnificent prints are beautiful to say the least. Fashion aficionados can purchase saris, shirt materials, stoles, shawls and various other apparel at this centre. Designed using ethnic dyeing techniques and vibrant colours, these clothes never fail to impress onlookers. Heritage crafts like batik, tie and dye, shibori, mordant painting and block printing are used to create meticulous designs on the fabric. Raw materials used for the colouring include catechu, lac, manjista, turmeric, eucalyptus and other natural ingredients. There is also a hand making paper workshop with all the craft being carried out by differently abled people. These beautiful shawls, scarves and paper products are ideal gifts or you can spoil yourself! Before our departure we have the opportunity to visit the school and if you like to bring a very small gift like pencils or pens from Australia, the children would be very happy. Later in the morning we continue our drive and before arriving in Thekkady we visit a spice plantation that grow cardamom, cinnamon, vanilla, pepper, mace, coffee and more. Our spice farm guide will explain the benefit and importance of the spices grown, many of which are not only used for culinary purposes alone but for natural medicines in which Indians trust the power of nature's plants much more than modern medicines. Spices and medicines can be purchased directly from the farms. This is a great opportunity to purchase the best and freshest spices to take home. Provided they are dried in sealed packaging and declared, you can bring them into Australia. Dinner tonight will be at Elephant Court.

 1-2 HOURS

 HOTEL SPICE VILLAGE, THEKKADY, KERALA, INDIA

DAY 8

Thekaddy - Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary

This morning we visit the Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary – one of the major wildlife reserves in India. Indian elephants, wild boars, lion-tailed monkeys, ibex, tigers, leopards and sloth bears are on the list. The park surrounds a large, many-fingered lake and is rich in bird life. Great hornbills, kites, darters, herons, egrets, owls and kingfishers are in abundance. We proceed for a 3 hour jungle walk experience in the park with a tribal guide. He will be happy to answer any questions along the way.

Before dinner we have the opportunity to watch martial art at the Kadathanadan Kalari Centre. Kalaripayattu is the oldest of martial arts. A legend traces the 3,000-year-old art form to sage Parasurama – the master of all martial art forms and credited to be the re-claimer of Kerala from the Arabian sea. Kalaripayattu originated in ancient south India. Kung-fu, popularized by the monks of the shaoline temple, traces its ancestry to Bodhi Dharma, an Indian buddhist monk and Kalaripayattu master. The holistic approach is aimed at the ultimate co-ordination and control over mind and body – the weapons become an extension of the body, controlled by the mind to achieve a high degree of protection in both offensive and defensive combats. The inherent beauty of this art form lies in the harmonious synergy of art, science and medicine. The grand training schedule demanding dedication, discipline and devotion is stratified into different levels. The basic level includes unarmed techniques through which the aspirant achieves mastery over his body movements and balance. At the intermediate level, the student is trained to attain the agility, flexibility and co-ordination of body movements. Advanced level involves training with weapons. Instructor level involves proficiency in the usage of sword and shield, spear and lastly urumi or the spring sword. After the performance our dinner will be at the Spice Village.



3 - 4 HOURS



HOTEL SPICE VILLAGE, THEKKADY, KERALA, INDIA

DAY 9

Thekkady - Periyar Tiger Reserve

In the morning we will join our tribal guide again for a walk and visit to the tribal village, situated within the Periyar Tiger reserve.

The Mannans are amongst the oldest indigenous group of people to inhabit the Periyar Tiger Reserve, even as late as the 1940s. Living in the remotest part of the park they were still making a simple living from fishing and growing a few crops.

Tonight, we are in for a real treat while watching traditional dance forms of the Paliyan community, who are amongst one of the most ancient tribes inhabiting India. This performance is bringing back their glorious past of their parents and forefathers. The dance program depicts their various ritual habits during bamboo rice harvesting, marriage function and thanks to forest and nature gods for their grace on this community.

After the performance we return to the Spice Village and dinner will be at our hotel.

 **2 HOURS**

 **HOTEL SPICE VILLAGE, THEKKADY, KERALA, INDIA**



DAY 10 & 11

Thekkady - Alleppy - Kerala Backwater Cruise

Today we leave our charming Spice Village and drive to Alleppy where we check in to our deluxe, private houseboat and have a late lunch. We cruise through the tranquil backwaters of Kerala – a beautiful region nestled between the sea and the hills of Cochin. A two-day journey through this quiet region reveals the picturesque rural life of Kerala people working their fields with water buffaloes, fishing with nets from traditional longboats and washing their clothes at the water's edge.

The backwaters of Kerala are a unique product of Kerala and are found nowhere else in the world. Backwaters are a network of lakes, canals and estuaries and deltas of forty-four rivers that drain into the Arabian Sea. The backwaters of Kerala are a self-supporting eco-system teeming with aquatic life. The canals connect the villages together and are still used for local transport. Over 900 kms of this labyrinthine water world is navigable.

The houseboat called 'Kettuvallom' – Kettu means to tie, Vallom means boat. The wooden planks are tied together with coconut ropes and painted with cashew nut oil outside. They are 70 to 100 feet long and 15 to 20 feet wide. The art of tying these boats are done by very skilled craftsmen.

These were and some still are the transport barges on the lakes.

Many of these boats are now converted with all modern comforts for tourists to enjoy. A ride on the houseboat is a fabulous way to explore the fascinating beauty of the backwaters, watching the ducks being called to their night shelter, children going to school and the village life pass by.

All meals will be served on the boat, freshly prepared by the crew, while you relax and take in the views. In the evening the boat will anchor by the lush paddy fields to enjoy the tranquillity of the water around (so that the local fishermen are not disturbed).

To stretch our legs, we walk around the rice fields at sunset. These fields are below sea level. Two lunches, two dinners and two breakfast will be served on the boat.

 **2 HOURS**

 **2 NIGHTS ON XANDARI RIVERSCAPES**

DAY 12

Cochin - Kerala Folklore Museum - End of Tour

After breakfast on the boat we travel back to Cochin and visit our last, but certainly not least attraction to be seen in Kerala.

Jacob. V. Thaliath was joined by his son George J Thaliath (after his post graduate study.) Both men, fascinated by folklore and tribal art, have put together this amazing museum. Jacob collected the art pieces over the 35 years he evaluated antiques.

The building that houses this collection is an art form in itself. Relocated from many parts of Kerala historical buildings, these were rebuilt by some 60 carpenters and took seventy one and a half years to complete. What is amazing is that this is a one-man collection.

After our farewell lunch, the Flavours of India tour ends at Ginger House Museum Hotel in Cochin.



Journey Accommodation

Ginger House Museum Hotel, Cochin

NIGHTS 1 - 3



Hotel The Fog, Munnar

NIGHTS 4 - 6



Hotel Spice Village, Thekkady

NIGHTS 7 - 9



Xandari Riverscapes

NIGHTS 10 - 11



Journey Notes

TOUR INCLUDES

- Accommodation at mentioned hotels.
- Daily breakfasts at hotels and dinners as listed.
- Air-conditioned vehicle with driver for the tour.
- English speaking local guides at all applicable places.
- Monument entrance charges.
- All hotel and government taxes.
- Driver allowance, parking and toll taxes
- Service tax as per government regulations.

SPECIAL HIGHLIGHTS

- Daily Yoga and Meditation Practise with Yoga Master Sreejith Balakrishnan
- Kathakali dance presentation in Cochin.
- Tea estate visit in Munnar.
- Aranya naturals - tour.
- Spice plantation tour/nature walk in Thekkady.
- Houseboat for two nights cruise.
- All meals on the houseboat.
- Dedicated tour manager/coordinator for tour.

Please note that lunches (other than the mentioned) are not included along with personal expenses. The international airfare is not part of the tour package.

TRAVEL TIPS

A visa is required for India - your travel agent can arrange this or you can apply online.

Check with your doctor which medication is recommended for your protection.

For your wellbeing do not drink the water even at the resorts and 5-star hotels use the very cheap bottled water, even to brush your teeth and gargle.

The average temperature is around 29c and cooler in the mountains - about 26c.

We have chosen resorts and hotels that have a bar so you can enjoy a nice cold beer and a glass of wine with dinner. Remember most of the country's inhabitants are Hindus, Muslims who do not drink alcohol. They are happy about the fact that you do like a drink with or before meals. The beer is very good and there are some very good Indian wines.

Only one hotel, The Fog in Munnar, does not have a liquor licence as yet, but we are happy to take you for a pre-dinner drink to another bar near-by.

Arrivals and departures meet and greet to and from the airport can be arranged for a small fee.

NOT INCLUDED IN TRIP COSTS

- Transport before and after the "tour", drinks, lunch, travel insurance, laundry, medical expenses and items of a personal nature.
- \$150AUD for tips are not included in the tour price as tips are very common in India. The money will be collected on our first day of the tour.

WHAT TO BRING

Daypack, walking shoes or boots, water bottle, waterproof raincoat, sun hat and bathers.

LUGGAGE

Please ensure that suitcases do not exceed 20 kg per guest.

PLEASE NOTE

All accommodation on tour includes private facilities (toilet and shower/bath).

Single rooms can usually be arranged for a supplement. Please ask for details. We will endeavour to match people together if they would like to share a twin room with another guest to avoid paying the single room supplement. However, as this is not always possible, 'single' clients will have to pay the supplement. All activities during the "tour" are optional or can be taken in parts. The walking pace on all walks is leisurely. Guests do not have to be experienced although a good level of fitness is necessary.

LUNCHES/NATURE STOPS

Our drivers are well aware of the group's requirements for a break along the way.

Chilled bottled water will be provided free along the days when travelling while lunch is not included in the tour cost unless mentioned.

The amounts are usually under \$10.00 or less. You may also wish to arrange a cut lunch from the hotel's kitchen.



Get in touch and book your journey today.

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