

Spice Land of Kerala 2020

8 Day Private Tour – 4V

TOUR HIGHLIGHTS

- Private tour of Kerala • Overnight on a traditional Kerala Houseboat • Cochin tour • Extensions available

ITINERARY

Day 1 – Cochin

Welcome to Kerala! – Upon arrival, you will be met and transferred to the **Le Meridien Cochin hotel (deluxe room) or similar** where you will spend the next 2 nights. Cochin India's oldest European settlement, which grew on the wealth generated from the spice trade; Cochin has an eclectic mix of influences making it a delight to explore. Stay for 2 nights at the Le Meridien Cochin hotel.

Day 2 - Cochin

After a hearty breakfast set off on your morning tour of Cochin. Your tour will including a visit to the Dutch Palace (Mattancherry Palace), a quaint and charming palace actually built by the Portuguese but refurbished by the Dutch afterwards in 1663. The highlight is the intrinsically carved ceilings and mural. Visit the synagogue of Cochin: paying homage to India's Jewish community, constructed in 1568, it is the oldest synagogue in the Commonwealth. Finish the morning at the famous Chinese fishing nets, ingeniously created for this intriguing form of fishing.

After seeing the sights of Cochin, return back to hotel before heading out to witness a Kathakali classical dance performance at a local theatre. 'Kathakali' is special dance from Kerala, with its origins in the 'Theyyam', a ritual tribal dance of North Kerala. Kathakali represents a synthesis of all that is best in dance, drama and music and has been recognised by connoisseurs of art. (B)

Day 3- Cochin to Munnar

This morning, drive to Munnar (140 km and approximately 4 hours). Munnar is a magnificent hill station in the Western Ghats about 5000 feet above sea level and is the major center of Kerala's tea industry. It's surrounded by about 30 tea estates, amongst the highest in the world and a forest that is still rich in wildlife that continues to survive the increase commercial use of the hills. The hills around Munnar are covered with a rare Neelakurunji plant giving it a wonderful look, especially when the flowers bloom and cover the entire mountain range.

Drive up into the hills and visit the Tea Museum, the ideal place to showcase the genesis of tea in Kerala's high ranges and the process of tea making will be explained to you by your guide. The rest of the day will be your leisure. Spend the next 2 nights at the **Windermere Estate Munnar (garden room) or similar**. (B)

Day 4 –Munnar

After breakfast set off on your morning tour of Munnar, where you'll enjoy the charm of the Old Town visiting sites such as the Christ Church - constructed by the British in 1910 and is known for its stained glass windows and number of brass plaques in the memory of the tea planter of Munnar. You'll also visit the beautiful Mattupetty Lake and the Tata Tea Museum which houses interesting photographs and machineries, each illustrating a turning point that contributed to a flourishing tea industry. After a morning of learning about the tea industry, you will return back to the hotel for an afternoon of leisure. (B)

Day 5 - Alleppey

Late morning transfer to Alleppey (175 km and approximately 4 ½ hours) to board your **houseboat** for the next 2 nights, the most traditional and relaxing way to traverse the mirror still lagoons and palm fringed canals, bustling with glimpses of day to day life in the countryside. Spend the night on the boat under the stars on the calm waters. A houseboat is about 60- 70 feet in length, made of wooden planks joined and stitched together using coconut fiber ropes. Traditionally the boats are painted using cashew nut oil, which acts as a protective coating. Today will be spent on board experiencing the enchanting backwaters. As your houseboat drifts along the shady canals, appreciate the scenic beauty, enjoy authentic local food a, watch the villagers go about their daily lives and marvel the beauty of the backwaters.

Lunch and evening meal will be on board the houseboat. (B,L,D)

Day 6 - Alleppey

A full day at leisure and all meals will be taken on board the houseboat (B,L,D)

Day 7 - Cochin

After breakfast you will disembark your houseboat at Alleppey jetty and drive to Cochin (60 km and approximately 2 hours). Upon arrival you will check-in at the **Le Meridien Cochin hotel (deluxe room) or similar** for your overnight stay. The rest of the day will be at leisure to either take in some last minute shopping or sightseeing, the choice is yours. (B)

Day 8

This morning, you will be met by a representative from Cox & Kings in the hotel lobby and transferred to the airport for your onward flights arrangements. If you're not read to leave Kerala, why not extend your stay on a tropical beach, how about Marari Beach? (B)

Meals: B=Breakfast, L=Lunch, D=Dinner

Notes:

A truly memorable experience, your **Private Houseboat** or 'kettuvallom', is a palm-covered country boat designed to navigate the narrowest canals of Kerala's unique backwaters. Each houseboat is simply furnished has one or two comfortable twin bedrooms with en-suite facilities. Please note your houseboat is not licensed to sell alcohol. The houseboat also remains stationery at night and is moored up to the shore.

Also:

- Air-conditioning will be operational from 21:00 hrs in the evening to 06:00 hours in the morning
- The houseboat will be anchored on the bank of the lake by 1730 hrs in the evening as the fishermen start laying nets
- Liquor consumption is prohibited on board the houseboat
- Guests are recommended to carry mosquito repellent

This is a set tour itinerary, if you have booked any pre/post or optional tour arrangements please refer to your separate vouchers and final documents.

TOUR NOTES

A Private Tour

This is a private itinerary, where you will travel with a driver and be met by local English-speaking tour guides for any included sightseeing.

What to expect and is this tour for me?

A tour in India is an adventure where anything can happen. We recommend you are of a reasonable fitness as touring often involves long walks and uneven surfaces, this tour is not suitable for those who require special assistance.

Pre/Post Tour information

The first day of the tour is at leisure so allows you enough time to arrive and relax. If you wish to arrive earlier extra nights can be added to your tour in the Trident Cochin. We recommend extending your stay with a few nights at the Marari Beach Resort, this can be added to the end of your tour as a road transfer.

Time difference

GMT +5 ½ hours (summer) +6 ½ hours (winter)

Tour inclusions

- Air conditioned transport throughout
- Sightseeing as detailed including entrance fees and still camera fees
- The services of an experienced local guide in each destination
- Road taxes, parking fees, fuel surcharges, interstate taxes and portage at airports and train stations.

Tour exclusions

- International flight in economy class, including all UK and overseas airport taxes and applicable fuel surcharges
- Flight upgrades and airport transfers in the UK
- Insurance
- Items of a personal nature such as drinks, laundry, tips & gratuities, video camera fees at monuments
- The required Indian visa.
- Anything not detailed on the itinerary.

Dining inclusions

7 breakfasts, 2 lunch and 2 dinners.

Included activities

- Tours listed in the itinerary.

Accommodation

Occasionally we may need to substitute one or more of the hotels with that of a similar standard.

Journey times

India is a vast country and journey times between destinations can sometimes be long. Journey times are listed in the itinerary and are approximate. India is a vast country with different topography from the North to the South and road condition may vary depending on the region that they are travelling. You may find modern express highways to un-surfaced roads / tracks.

Group size

The Classic Kerala is a private tour, you a driver and local English-speaking tour guides for any included sightseeing only.

Language

English is widely spoken in India.

Visa requirements

An Indian visa is required for all British passport holders and MUST be obtained before your arrival in India. You can now apply for an e-Visa at a cost up to \$25 USD per person when staying 30 days or less. This can be obtained at <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html>. The application must be completed no later than 4 days prior to your arrival in India. Your e-visa will be valid for 60 days from the date of your arrival. You should ensure that your passport is valid for 6 months beyond your departure date from India and have at least two blank pages.

Currency

At the time of writing the Indian Rupee cannot be exported or imported to India. There is no limit to the amount of sterling travellers' cheques or currency (or equivalent) that can be taken into India. If you are carrying more than \$1000 this must be declared at customs. There are plenty of banks and ATMs, but you see less once you head out of the cities, so make sure you have enough to cover your drinks and ad-hoc item bills. You may want to carry small amounts of local currency for tips and to buy souvenirs from vendors too! Please note: Not all smaller hotels and shops can accept credit cards.

Electricity

The electricity supply in India is 220 volts, most hotels have a three round pin sockets so we recommend a travel adaptor set.

Tipping

It is customary to tip in India. 10% is usual in restaurants and as an idea tour guides receive USD\$5 per person per day and drivers receive USD\$3 per person per day.

Seasons and Weather

Generally speaking, the weather in India can be divided into three seasons – summer, winter and monsoon. The coolest and driest time of the year to visit is between October and February, which is regarded as the winter season. Temperatures will always be warmer in the south, with comfortable coastal beach weather. Following winter is the summer season which is hot and dry, lasting from March through to May, when temperatures reach their peak. May signals the start of the monsoon season, which begins in Kerala on the south-western coast, bringing with it regular downpours interspersed with sunny hot intervals that gradually work their way up the country. It is very humid during this time of year and the days are interrupted by intermittent rainfall. At the height of monsoon season there can be flooding in some lowland regions and most national parks may close during this time. Come November and December another monsoon hits southern India, sweeping in from the Bay of Bengal. Kerala receive most of their rainfall during this time.

What to pack

- Lightweight, cotton clothes. Smart casual is acceptable in hotels
- A light sweater or fleece for early mornings and evenings and air-conditioning can be cool in restaurants
- Comfortable, enclosed and sturdy footwear
- Casual clothing and sandals for dinner and relaxing at your hotel
- Sun cream, sunglasses and hat
- Camera and/or video camera with spare batteries and memory cards
- Swimming attire for an occasional swim
- Binoculars
- Mosquito repellent and spray
- Handy wipes, antiseptic hand gel and bottled water where possible
- Low denominations of local currency – handy for ad-hoc tipping!
- For visits to religious monuments and buildings clothing rules may apply, for example covering shoulders or removing footwear, your local guide can advise where necessary.

Recommended vaccinations

■ We advise you to discuss your individual requirements for India with your GP at least 6-8 weeks prior to travel.