



Gentle Culture and Wildlife of Kerala, India, 15 – 27 February 2019 (Fri – Wed)

With the Arabian Sea in the west, the Western Ghats (UNESCO World Heritage Site) towering in the east and networked by 44 rivers, Kerala enjoys unique geographical features that have made it one of the most sought-after destinations in the world. An equable climate, a long shoreline with serene beaches, tranquil stretches of emerald backwaters, lush hill stations, sprawling plantations and paddy fields...all of which offer a unique experience.



This walking and culture tour of Kerala offers rich art and culture at Cochin, amazing bird and wildlife at Thattekkad and Periyar, Spice mountains and plantations at Munnar and Thekkady, serene Backwaters at Kumarakom and the azure beach of Marari.

Highlights of the tour

- Spectacular Kathakali dance performance in Cochin
- Bird watching at Thattekkad, one of the best bird sanctuaries in India
- Tea Museum and tea tasting in Munnar
- Trek through the majestic Western Ghats with picnic lunch
- Spice plantation walk in Thekkady
- Nature walk in Periyar Wildlife Reserve
- Houseboat cruise with lunch in the Backwaters of Kerala
- 2 free days at lovely Marari beach

Itinerary (*subject to change*)

Feb 15, 2019 (Friday) Leave on your overnight flight to Kochi.

Feb 16, 2019 (Saturday): Arrive in Kochi. You will be met at the airport and taken to your hotel.

If Kerala is India's most beautiful state, which many believe, then the lovely port of Kochi is its jewel. It has been variously hailed as the Queen of the Arabian Sea, the Venice of Orient, etc. Some choose to call it simply a museum city due to its rich past and colourful present. Kochi displays a blend of people and architecture. It is one place where you see a Jewish synagogue, Portuguese churches, Dutch architecture, mosques, temples and Chinese fishing nets all in one day.

In the evening you will be taken to witness spectacular Kathakali Dance Drama. Kathakali is Kerala's very own classical dance-drama form which combines facets of ballet, opera, mask and pantomime. Kathakali explores ideas and stories from the Indian epics and other story books. Presented in the temple precincts after dusk falls, Kathakali is heralded by the Kelikottu or the beating of drums and to the accompaniment of the Chengila (gong). The riches of a happy blending of colour, expressions, music, drama and dance are unparalleled in any other art form.

Accommodation: Casino Hotel Meals included: none

Feb 17, 2019 (Sunday): Kochi. Fort Kochi area is the main focus of interest here, where the city's extraordinary history of foreign influence and settlement is reflected in an assortment of architectural styles. A walk through its streets is one of the best ways to discover all that it has to offer. Its each and every nook is steeped in history, retaining elements of a bygone era. The highlight of today's walking tour will be the St. Francis Church and Chinese Fishing Nets.

Built in 1503 at Fort Kochi, St. Francis Church is one of the oldest churches in the subcontinent. It was built by the Portuguese but became a Protestant church with the arrival of the Dutch and an Anglican church after the British occupation. Vasco da Gama was buried in its churchyard.

After visiting St Francis Church, we walk across to see the Chinese fishing nets along the shores. Chinese fishing nets are believed to have been introduced in Kochi by Chinese explorer Zheng He, from the court of the Kubla Khan. The Chinese nets, suspended in mid-air and standing in line on the beaches, is one of the most photographed scenes in Kochi. After lunch, we explore other sights in Kochi – the Jewish Synagogue and The Mattancherry or Dutch Palace.

The Mattancherry Palace was built by the Portuguese in 1555 for the maharaja of Kochi. Later renovated by the Dutch, it came to be known as the Dutch Palace. It has a large central courtyard and a temple depicting scenes from the Ramayana and other legends. The little museum at the palace has a collection of costumes, palanquins and other artefacts from the royal family. Adjacent to the palace is the Jewish Synagogue built in 1568. This simple building has marvellously rich interiors. There are clusters of coloured glass lamps hanging from the ceiling and the floor has blue willow patterned tiles, none of which are identical.

Accommodation: Casino Hotel Meals included: breakfast Walking: 2-3 hours

Feb 18, 2019 (Monday): Kochi - Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary

This morning we drive to Thattekkad Bird Sanctuary (2 hours). Also known as the Dr Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary in honour of the pre-eminent birder of all times in India, it is located on the northern bank of the Periyar River. He described Thattekkad in the 1930's as the richest bird habitat in peninsular India, comparable only with the Eastern Himalayas.

This afternoon, enjoy a walking tour of the bird sanctuary. A trip through this sanctuary is a bonanza for any birder with over 270 species in a relatively small area of 25 sq km. Noted birds here are rare Mottled Wood Owl, Spot-bellied Eagle Owl, Malayan Night Heron, Sri Lanka Frogmouth, Rusty-tailed Flycatcher, Grey-headed Bulbul and the Nilgiri Wood Pigeon. Thattekkad is also home to nearly 28 species of mammals and 9 species of reptiles.

Accommodation: Soma Bird Lagoon Meals included: breakfast Walking: 2-3 hours

Feb 19, 2019 (Tuesday): Thattekkad - Munnar

After breakfast we drive to Munnar (4 hours). Munnar is situated at the confluence of three mountain streams – Mudrapuzha, Nallathanni and Kundala. At 1600 m above sea level, this hill station was the summer resort of the British Government in South India. With its sprawling tea plantations, picture-book scenery and winding lanes, Munnar is a popular hill station in Kerala.

After lunch we will walk through a tea plantation and see tea pickers going about their job. Learn the method and norms of picking, join them and start picking tea leaf. We will come across a wide variety of flora and fauna on this plantation walk. After the walk, we

will drive to a tea museum, see a large variety of locally produced tea and also sample some of them.

Accommodation: Copper Castle – Superior Room Meals Included: Breakfast Walking: 2-3 hours

Feb 20, 2019 (Wednesday): Munnar

After breakfast this morning we head out to walk through the majestic Western Ghats. Many tribal colonies here farm spices such as cardamom and pepper, which grow abundantly here.

The Sholas or high altitude montane evergreen forests are typical of the Western Ghats and considered biologically extremely fragile. Our treks will pass through countless Sholas, tea estates and rolling grasslands.

Accommodation: Copper Castle Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch Walking: 4-6 hours

Feb 21, 2019 (Thursday): Munnar - Thekkady

Today we drive to Thekkady (4 hours). Thekkady is widely known for its spice plantations. A walk through them gives an interesting insight into the world of spices with vistas of pristine greenery shrouded by low hanging clouds, gurgling brooks and the Western Ghats in the background. Thekkady is also a base for visiting Periyar National Park.

Later in the afternoon, we will go for a spice plantation walk. Accompanied by a guide we will be taken on a tour to see the cardamom, nutmeg, vanilla, pepper, coffee and other spices. Stroll amid lush, terraced farms, sprawling plantation estates while listening to bird songs and the murmuring of mountain streams. Make stops along the way to take pictures of the verdant surroundings, and breathe in the fresh mountain air, before continuing to some of the most picturesque vantage points in Kerala.

Accommodation: Green Forest Meals Included: Breakfast Walking: 2-3 hours

Feb 22, 2019 (Friday): Thekkady – Periyar - Thekkady

Today we head to Periyar Tiger Reserve covering an area of 925 Sq. km. Periyar is one of 27 tiger reserves in India. It is a repository of rare, endemic and endangered flora and fauna and forms the major watershed of two important rivers of Kerala, the Periyar and Pamba. You can see herds of elephants and sambars and also tiger, gaurs and lion tailed macaques.

Enjoy a nature walk on trails traversing diverse habitats. This will be an interpretive programme offering excellent opportunity to watch birds, butterflies and other wildlife. The trails often pass through evergreen and deciduous forests interspersed with marshy grasslands.

Accommodation: Green Forest Meals Included: Breakfast Walking: 3-4 hours

Feb 23, 2019 (Saturday): Thekkady - Kumarakom

Drive to Kumarakom (4 hours). Kumarakom is a serenely beautiful and scenic backwater destination, a charming peninsula jutting into the ever-effervescent Vembanad Lake that is dotted with plenty of traditional rice boats and canoes, a scene that is immensely pleasing to the eye. It is undoubtedly one of the most invigorating and fascinating places to unwind in Kerala. The slender coconut palms, its never-ending paddy fields, meandering lagoons and backwaters and mangroves with nestling birds will all serve to calm and inspire your mind.

In the afternoon, we explore Kumarakom on foot visiting local farms, temples and coir factories. The region is a hub of Kerala's coir industry. The factories still practice the traditional method of extracting coir fibre from coconut husks. There are several factories manufacturing coir products such as, mats, matting and handicrafts.

Accommodation: Whispering Palms Resort Meals Included: Breakfast Walking: 2-3 hours

Feb 24, 2019 (Sunday): Kumarakom

Today we enjoy a houseboat cruise on the famous Backwaters of Kerala. The entire state of Kerala is criss-crossed with waterways that provide for irrigation and also serve as convenient modes of transportation and commerce. Next to the coastline, these endless stretches of lakes and lagoons are called the backwaters. Life along these canals and byways is quite different from that seen along the highways. Many of the villages are isolated and entirely dependent on the canals for their livelihood, transportation and communication...and the best way to explore these surroundings is by a 'kettuvallam' or houseboat.

Accommodation: Whispering Palms Resort Meals Included: Breakfast, Lunch

Feb 25, 2019 (Monday): Kumarakom – Marari

After breakfast, you will be driven to Marari beach. The village of Mararikulam lies on a forgotten shore, midway up the Malabar Coast, where the Indian Ocean finally decides that it has now become the Arabian Sea. Marari is a perfect picture of Kerala's fishing villages, its essence. The rest of the day is free for you to relax by the seashore.

Accommodation: Abad Turtle Beach Resort – Beach Cottage Meals Included: Breakfast

Feb 26, 2019 (Tuesday): Marari

At leisure in Marari. Time to relax, enjoy and unwind in this stunning beach location. The long white sand beach, studded with palm trees is the perfect tropical idyll and a most relaxing end to our adventure.

Accommodation: Abad Turtle Beach Resort – Beach Cottage Meals Included: Breakfast

Feb 27, 2019 (Wednesday): Marari – Cochin Airport

This morning you will be driven to Kochi airport (2.5 hour) for your onward flight.

Meals Included: Breakfast

Price includes: 11 nights Bed and breakfast accommodation in twin ensuite rooms (single rooms available at a supplement of £20 per night); 3 lunches; Transport in air-conditioned minibus; Entrance fees to cultural sights and wildlife parks; Kathakali Dance Performance in Kochi; Backwaters houseboat cruise

Not included: flights; tips; meals not mentioned above; visa fee; any camera charges at monuments

Flights & Transfers – Flight to Kochi is not included. We believe that this gives maximum flexibility and the best chance of getting a good price as well as the option to extend your stay. Flights must fit with the transfers below otherwise you will be responsible for your own transfer. To find suitable flights try www.skyscanner.net.

Oman Air from London Heathrow

| DATE | FLIGHT | AIRPORT | COUNTRY | CHECK-IN | DEPART | ARRIVE | AIRPORT | COUNTRY |
|----------|--------|-----------------|---------|----------|--------|----------------------|-----------------|---------|
| 15/02/19 | WY102 | London Heathrow | UK | 17:35 | 20:05 | 07:35 (+1) on 16 Feb | Muscat | Oman |
| 16/02/19 | WY223 | Muscat | Oman | transfer | 09:00 | 14:00 | Kochi | India |
| DATE | FLIGHT | AIRPORT | COUNTRY | CHECK-IN | DEPART | ARRIVE | AIRPORT | COUNTRY |
| 27/02/19 | WY226 | Kochi | India | 07:20 | 09:50 | 12:10 | Muscat | Oman |
| 27/02/19 | WY101 | Muscat | Oman | transfer | 14:00 | 18:25 | London Heathrow | UK |

Oman Air from Manchester

| DATE | FLIGHT | AIRPORT | COUNTRY | CHECK-IN | DEPART | ARRIVE | AIRPORT | COUNTRY |
|----------|--------|------------|---------|----------|--------|------------|------------|---------|
| 15/02/19 | WY106 | Manchester | UK | 17:25 | 19:55 | 07:50 (+1) | Muscat | Oman |
| 16/02/19 | WY223 | Muscat | Oman | transfer | 09:00 | 14:00 | Kochi | India |
| DATE | FLIGHT | AIRPORT | COUNTRY | CHECK-IN | DEPART | ARRIVE | AIRPORT | COUNTRY |
| 27/02/19 | WY226 | Kochi | India | 07:20 | 09:50 | 12:10 | Muscat | Oman |
| 27/02/19 | WY105 | Muscat | Oman | Transfer | 14:00 | 18:25 | Manchester | UK |

Transfer from / to Kochi

There will be a single transfer to connect with the above flights. Further details of the meeting up arrangements will be sent out 2 weeks before the trip.

Visa

Along with your application and fee, for an Indian Tourist Visa you'll need to submit your passport, a recent passport sized photo, and details of your itinerary. Please check that your passport will be in date for **at least 6 months** after the trip finishes, as this is a requirement when entering India.

You can apply for an e-visa online using the following website <http://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/>. This is cheaper - currently \$75 (around £55 depending on exchange rates). You will need to upload a copy of your passport and photo to attach to your application. For travellers from outside the UK, the visa process may be longer and more expensive – please consult the above website for information.

Vaccinations/health

There are no compulsory vaccinations for India but the NHS recommend protection against Tetanus, Hepatitis A, Typhoid and Dyptheria. We would advise you to consult your local health service 8 weeks before travel to obtain up to date recommendations. You can also check the NHS website <http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/Travel-immunisation>

Foreign Currency

The currency in India is the rupee. You can only obtain rupees once you have arrived in India and there are ATMs and exchange bureaux at the airport and in the cities. At other times we may not be near an ATM so it is advisable to change enough in advance, and always bring and carry some sterling. Hotels and some restaurants will take cards.

You will need money for meals not included, any drinks and souvenirs as well as tips – see below. You should allow around £5 for lunches and between £10 – 15 for dinners. Additional charges may apply for the use of a camcorder in some places we will visit.

Tipping

Tipping is very much part of Indian culture and although 'gratuities' are at the discretion of each individual, we are aware it can also be an area of concern for some visitors to India. In this regard, we have listed some guidelines, in order to assist, although the decision is ultimately yours. Above all, it is to be remembered that tipping is a sign of gratitude for good service. At the end of the holiday the WW Guide will collect tips for the Tour Escort guide and driver (suggested amounts are around £30 and £15 per person respectively).

A guideline for other tips:

| | |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Local Guide (in wildlife park etc) | Rs 300 - 500 |
| Local Driver (in wildlife park) | Rs 200 |
| Bell Boy in hotels | Rs 50 |
| Restaurants | About 10% of the bill total (Unless service is included). |

Temperature

Kerala has a tropical climate. Average temperature in February is between 22 and 30 degrees Celsius. Munnar is the exception as it is high altitude and will be cooler. A sweater/jacket is needed evenings and early mornings. February is one of the driest months with little or no rainfall expected.

What to bring:

Please wear appropriate colours when in any National Park – these should be muted earthy colours.

- Walking shoes/trainers/sandals** - broken in and comfy. Walking sandals are usually adequate for all the walking on this holiday (risking a possible drop of rain!).
- Several pairs of light walking socks.** If you're bringing trainers, or to go under your sandals if it is chilly in the morning /evening
- Lightweight waterproof jacket**- rain can occur occasionally.
- Fleece or sweater** – for the evenings/ early mornings.
- Lightweight walking trousers and/or long three-quarter length shorts** – for daytime. You may not feel comfortable culturally wearing above the knee shorts.
- Light t shirts** – for daytime, and you may want something lightweight and long-sleeved in case you want to cover up from the sun or have extra protection against insects.
- Underwear** – obviously!

- Change of clothes for the evenings** – you will probably want a couple of casual 'outfits' for the evenings, and again, layers are useful as it may be cool in the evening. There is no dress code, and whatever you feel comfortable in will be fine.
- Swimming costume and beach towel** (light micro fibre towels perfect)
- Day pack** - to carry camera, water & other bits and pieces.
- Water flask** or strong plastic water bottle. Bottled water will be available but we encourage you to think instead about treating water from the hotels if available, or purify your own water with chlorine diox to reduce the amount of waste plastic which is a problem in India
- Strong anti-insect cream or spray** - consider 50 plus Deet. Anti-mosquito plug-ins will be provided in most hotel rooms but you may prefer to bring your own.
- Sun screen, sunglasses, sun hat**
- Passport, visa, plane ticket, insurance policy, cash and ATM card** – Please bring a photocopy of your passport (photo page) and completed WW personal details form. Bring some sterling, do not rely on ATMs
- Binoculars** - for the wildlife parks.
- Camera** with space on the memory card and spare charged up batteries or charger for digital camera.
- Chargers** for phone, etc and converter plug - India voltage is 220 volts AC
- Ear plugs**, useful if you're a light sleeper when sharing a room or if there's street noise in cities
- Herbal tea bags** – if you like herbal tea. Kettles are most rooms with ordinary tea and coffee provided
- Hairdryer** - although these are available at Cochin, Thekkady (on request), Kumarakom (on request)