

# EXPLORE!

## Kerala Backwaters + Kovalam Extension

11 days

India - Trip code KBB



## Kerala Backwaters + Kovalam Extension

Unwind with us on this relaxing exploration of Kerala, a corner of India known by its welcoming locals, as God's own country. We cruise tranquil backwaters by houseboat, trek in search of wildlife in Periyar National Park and visit hilltop tea and spice plantations. Along the way we discover colonial Kochi and spend a night in a family run homestay.

### Trip highlights

- ★ **Houseboat** - Drift through the backwaters on a traditional houseboat
- ★ **Homestay** - Enjoy a tasty homecooked curry whilst spending the night with a local family
- ★ **Hill stations** - Head for hills and spend time in the cooler climate perfect for cultivating tea
- ★ **Kochi** - Explore Kochi from the water, including Fort Kochi, St Francis Church and Mattancherry Palace

#### ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

##### Standard

Our standard, mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service, often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en suite facilities.

**TRIP PACE:****Moderate**

Moderate pace tours are ideal if you want a holiday which combines exciting activities and experiences with plenty of time to relax and unwind. Typically you'll be active and busy for part of the day but then also have time to rest and recharge your batteries.

**GROUP SIZE:****10 - 16**

Maximum group size ranges from between 6 to 20 people, depending on the type of trip, the transport and accommodation used and activities included. We rarely have groups that are smaller than five or six people and the average is 12 people plus an Explore leader.

# Itinerary

Itineraries on some departure dates may differ, please select the itinerary that you wish to explore.

## DAY 1 - Join tour in Kochi

Our tour begins this afternoon in the coastal city of Kochi (Cochin).



**Accommodation: Hotel Casino** (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

## DAY 2 - Explore the fort and Jewish Quarter of Kochi

Kochi has been a gathering place of merchants since antiquity and is full of bustling traders. A half day tour by boat is planned for today. Fort Kochi is the oldest European settlement in India (1500), and has a mixture of English, Dutch and Portuguese influence. The Mattancherry Palace was built by the Portuguese in the 16th century, but extensive renovations by the Dutch some hundred years later earned it the name the Dutch Palace. It has some of the best murals in India, depicting scenes from the Ramayana and other great legends. On our tour we visit the Jew town synagogue where Kochi's surviving Jewish community come to worship. Nearby are the interesting cantilevered Chinese Fishing nets. In the early evening we see a performance of Kathakali, which is thought by some to be the very essence of the culture of Kerala. Its origins may have come from traditional temple rituals and from an art form known as Koodiyattam. It is the face make up which makes this dancing so unique. The dancers can take up to three hours painting their faces - the features are heavily emphasised as it is the facial expressions and co-ordinated eye movements which are important in the dance. The dances usually portray events from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, great Indian epics.



**Accommodation: Hotel Casino** (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available

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Single room available

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Meals Provided: Breakfast

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## DAY 3 - Drive through spice and tea plantations to Munnar and enjoy free time in the town

This morning we drive to Munnar through an area of spice and tea plantations. Kerala has been renowned for its spices for at least 2000 years, the coast had been known by the Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs and Chinese for its sandalwood and spices. There was also a flourishing trade in 'black gold' - pepper - which, along with the spices, was sent to Europe by the Jewish and Arab traders. In return, copper, brass and gold coins came to Kerala. It was this trading link which brought Christianity and Islam into Kerala - the first place in India to host these two faiths. Munnar is a pleasant place to spend time, with its green tropical forests, fresh mountain air and neat tea plantations. It is hardly surprising it has become a favourite for Indian honeymooners. The afternoon is free to explore this beautiful town.



**Accommodation: Edassery Eastend** (or similar)

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Standard Hotel

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Single room available

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Meals Provided: Breakfast

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## DAY 4 - Visit tea and spice plantations; drive to Thekkady

Our day starts with a fascinating visit to a tea museum where we can learn how it is processed. It is the women who usually pick the tea because of their nimble fingers, their brightly coloured clothes contrast sharply with the greenery of the plantations. Leaving the tea museum, we drive for around 4 hours to Thekkady where we'll take a nature walk through delightful countryside and visit a spice garden, learning about how the spices are grown and processed.



**Accommodation: Abad Green Forest** (or similar)

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Premium Hotel

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Meals Provided: Breakfast

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## DAY 5 - Take a walk in Periyar National Park

Our route this morning takes us past rubber plantations and varied spice gardens to Periyar wildlife sanctuary, close to the border with Tamil Nadu. One of 16 tiger reserves in India, Periyar is it is perhaps better known for its elephants. There are about 40 tigers living in the 777 sq km park but, as they are solitary creatures, the chances of seeing them are very slim. We go for a walk in search of other wildlife such as the wild boar, giant malabar, porcupine and the flying squirrel. The Park itself is made up of a variety of habitats, open grasslands, deciduous, semi-evergreen and tropical forests all of which have different animal species. The ecosystem of the tropical evergreen jungle is very interesting as the trees grow up to 40m, and the dense canopy only allows in limited sunlight. Therefore at ground level, there are abundant ferns, orchid and airplants- plants which need little light to survive. Leaving the park we head back towards the coast and our homestay for the next two nights. We stay with local families within a village, and your tour leader will brief you on local customs and traditions. It is a great opportunity to spend time learning about the real life of Keralans as well as an opportunity to sample some delicious home cooking - perhaps a spicy coconut curry. The rooms are in the same style as a traditional Keralan home with mattresses made locally using coir fibres, a material taken from coconut husks which allows air to flow naturally - ideal in this humid region. All rooms are twin share and the majority of them have their own attached bathrooms, although there are some rooms with a private bathroom located in a corridor next to the room. Bathrooms are basic with a toilet

and a simple shower, and hot water can be limited at times. All bedding and towels are provided.



**Accommodation: Gaaby World Homestay** (or similar)



Simple Homestay



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Dinner

## DAY 6 - Take an optional cooking class or village walk

We spend today exploring the village and getting to know our host families. There will be a chance to take a cooking lesson, take gentle walks through the surrounding villages or just kick back and relax for the day.



**Accommodation: Gaaby World Homestay** (or similar)



Simple Homestay



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## DAY 7 - Board a houseboat and float through the backwaters

This morning we board our houseboats and begin our journey into the network of the Kerala backwaters. The traditional houseboats are simple vessels, with en-suite twin rooms. The pace is relaxed - enabling us to see riverside village life in its entirety. The industrious villagers survive on narrow spits of land, keeping cows, chickens and cultivating vegetable gardens. Even the shells from the fresh water mussels are burnt to make building lime, and the fibre from the coconut palm has many uses including coir products made from coconut fibre. The gardens are generally well tended often with brightly coloured flowers, such as hibiscus, contrasting sharply with the tropical greenery.



**Accommodation: Houseboat** (or similar)



Simple Boat



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## DAY 8 - Free time to explore Kochi

After a relaxed breakfast we disembark from our houseboats and return to Kochi where the rest of the day is left free for personal exploration.



**Accommodation: Hotel Casino** (or similar)



Premium Hotel

Swimming pool available



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 9 - Take a train to Kovalam and relax on the beach

After breakfast this morning we take a short transfer to Ernakulam train station where we board the Kerala Express train to Trivandrum. The journey will take a little over four hours and we travel in air-conditioned carriages (subject to availability). On arrival a short transfer is provided to the hotel, our base for the next two nights just outside Kovalam. We are not travelling with an Explore Leader while in Kovalam, time is left free to relax on the beach or explore the nearby town.



**Accommodation: Abad Harmonia Beach Resort** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 10 - Free day to explore the town of Kovalam or enjoy the beach

Today is again left free for you to do as you wish. There is the option to book an excursion to Kanyakumari, the town located on the southern tip of India. The town is named after the goddess Devi Kanya Kumari, the sister of Krishna, and as such is a popular site for pilgrims to visit and take a dip in the ocean. Alternatively you can take an afternoon tour of Trivandrum with a local guide taking in the Padmanabha Swamy Temple, Napier Museum and the art gallery.



**Accommodation: Abad Harmonia Beach Resort** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 11 - Trip ends in Kovalam

The trip ends this morning after breakfast.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



## Why book this trip

This tour will suit anyone looking for a relaxed introduction to south India. It offers a chance to fully experience life in Kerala's beautiful backwaters by spending two nights in a family home. With a slightly more relaxed vibe than India's northern states you can get a taste of Indian culture, and learn a little of the spices and tea that are exported from what is known as Gods own country.

## What's included?



### Included meals

Breakfast: 10  
Lunch: 2  
Dinner: 3



### Transport

Bus  
Boat



### Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader  
Boat Crew  
Driver(s)



### Accommodation

1 nights simple boat  
2 nights simple homestay  
4 nights premium hotel  
3 nights standard hotel

## Trip information

### Country information

### India Holidays & Tours

#### Climate

There is considerable variation between the different regions of India but, in general, the climate is tropical. Summer temperatures on the plains are very hot, but cooled by the South-West Monsoon, which lasts from June- September. During these months it can be very wet and therefore very humid. At altitude, temperatures can become quite cool at night even in the summer and may drop below freezing between December and February so warm clothing is necessary. In the winter, northern and mid India can be very cool, with cold evenings, so warm clothing, including plenty of layers, are essential. The south of India remains warm and sunny during the winter months.

#### Time difference to GMT

+5

#### Plugs

3 Pin Round

#### Religion

Catholicism, Hindu, Islam and Sikhism

### Language

Hindi and English.

## Budgeting and packing

### Optional activities

Kovalam Excursion to Kanyakumari - £25 per person (based on 2 people) Half day sightseeing tour in Trivandrum - £13 per person (based on 2 people) Cooking lesson - £7 per person

### Clothing

Kerala is a tropical region with high humidity. Lightweights are needed all year round with some warmer clothes for the cooler winter evenings (November to March) in Munnar and Periyar. Casual clothes are the most practical: tight fitting garments, brief shorts and skirts should be avoided, since they attract unwelcome attention. A beach towel is also recommended.

### Footwear

Walking shoes or trainers and sandals.

### Luggage

20kg

### Luggage: On tour

One main piece of baggage and a daysac. Remember - hotel porters are not always available, so don't overload yourself.

### Equipment

Binoculars, torch, insect repellent and water bottle. You may wish to take a mosquito net for use in the village house as they are not provided.

### Tipping

#### Explore leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

#### Local crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour. Accordingly, you should allow £30 for tipping. Your tour leader will account to you for any organised tipping.

### Country Information

## India Holidays & Tours

### Food and drink

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide. Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

#### Lunch price

£6

#### Dinner price

£8

#### Beer price

£1.4

**Water price**  
£0.5

## Foreign Exchange

### Local currency

Indian Rupee Recently new 500, 1000 and 2000 rupee notes have been brought in to circulation and as the old notes are no longer accepted there have been some cash flow issues. You don't need to worry about being given old notes as it's very easy to tell the difference, the new notes are pristine in comparison with most Indian money which is fairly tatty.

### Recommended Currency For Exchange

GBP/US\$ are the best currency to change into local currency.

### Where To Exchange

The Indian rupee is a restricted currency and it is best not to obtain in the UK as rates are very poor. You can either change money at the airport on arrival or in major towns during the tour. Your Tour Leader will advise you on the best places in each town. Both GBP and USD cash are easy to exchange at the airport and at hotels however you will be restricted to changing £60 cash at a time and it's not possible to change money at these locations using a credit or debit card.

### ATM Availability

ATMs are available in most large cities in India but they are very limited elsewhere so please do not rely on this.

### Credit Card Acceptance

Very rarely, only in the larger outlets.

### Travellers Cheques

Opportunities to exchange are limited.

## Transport, Accommodation & Meals

### Transport Information

Bus, Boat

### Accommodation notes

#### Booking a Single Room

All of our group tours are planned and operated on a twin-share basis, meaning that the standard cost is based either on individual travellers sharing accommodation with another group member of the same sex, or people who book together sharing accommodation. Please refer to the tour notes where the single room option availability is detailed on a night by night basis for this tour, and the price for the available nights is detailed on the dates & prices tab by departure date. For Self-Guided trips the Single Room supplement offers the option of a single room each and is charged per person. The Single Room supplement also applies to the third person in a party of three that will be accommodated in a single room.

Accommodation in India is as varied as the country itself. On our tours we stay in a mix of hotels, heritage properties, camp sites and homestays. Standards do not equate to standards in the UK and it's best to approach each type of accommodation with an open mind. Service can be slow in places especially when travelling with a group. For the most part hotels do not have heating so in the winter months it can be chilly and if you feel the cold you may wish to ask for extra blankets. Hot water is not always available 24 hours a day in some of the smaller properties, and with a group staying you might find if you are showering last you may miss out on the hottest water.

## Essential information

### FCO Advice

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office advice click here.



For more information from Explore about travel advice, [click here](#)

### **Under 18 immigration guidance**

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

## **Essential Information**

Once your booking has been confirmed we guarantee the price will not increase, whatever the circumstances. Before booking please ensure you have read our important tour pricing information. [Booking Conditions](#)

## **Visa Information**

India: Holders of passports endorsed 'British citizen' may be eligible for the e-Tourist Visa to enter India. The visa can be applied for through the official Indian government visa website only - <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html>. Please check all eligibility criteria that can be found on the website but important points are listed below - You must be arriving into one of 24 selected entry points which can be found via the official Indian Government website link above. However, you can exit from any of the authorised immigration check posts in India. Passports must have at least 6 months validity from the date of arrival in India and at least two blank pages for stamping. The visa application will take approximately 4 days to process. It is valid for 60 days from the date of arrival in to India, and double entry is permitted on the e-Tourist visa. You can only obtain 2 e-visas for India in a calendar year. The visa costs \$75. Biometric data will be collected on arrival in India. Whilst the online form offers a relatively quick way to apply for a visa, a number of applicants have reported difficulty in completing the form. Travcour will complete the on-line visa on your behalf for a fee of £25 + the visa cost. Please contact them directly if you wish to take up this service. If you are not eligible for the e-Tourist Visa, please refer to VFS Global to apply for your Indian visa - [http://in.vfsglobal.co.uk/how\\_to\\_apply.html](http://in.vfsglobal.co.uk/how_to_apply.html). If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See [www.travcour.com](http://www.travcour.com) to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See [www.travcour.com](http://www.travcour.com) to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

## **Booking conditions**

Before booking your Explore trip, please ensure that you read both our Essential Information and Booking Conditions.

## **Transfers**

[Find out more about Trip Transfer Terms and Conditions before you book.](#)

### **Booking a land only package with Explore**

Customers who have chosen to book on the 'Land Only' arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific 'Joining Instructions' prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found below in the dates and prices information.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer.

### **Joining Tour Abroad**

Customers booked on the 'Land Only' arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer [click here](#)

## **Insurance**

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

Read more information about what travel insurance is required.

## **Flight information**

Explore offers a wide range of flexible flying options to make joining and leaving our trips easy. Read more about them [here](#).

### **Flight Information**

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a 'flight inclusive' package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

### **Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore**

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

## **Non refundable permits**

## **India Holidays & Tours**

### **Vaccinations**

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against Tetanus, Infectious Hepatitis, Typhoid and Polio. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at <http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth> and from your local healthcare provider.

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