

# EXPLORE!

## On Foot in Kerala

11 days

India - Trip code WIK



## On Foot in Kerala

Discover the diversity of tropical Kerala on this walking holiday to India's far south. We trek amongst the forests and grasslands of the mountainous Western Ghats - a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the world's top ten biodiversity 'hot spots'. We also walk in search of elephant and other wildlife in the Periyar National Park. In the tranquil Backwaters we ramble through villages, meeting the locals and spend the night aboard a coir-roofed houseboat.

## Trip highlights

- ★ **Western Ghats** - Trek amongst the plantations and jungle of this biodiversity 'hot spot'
- ★ **Meesapulimala Peak** - Enjoy the views from one of South India's highest peaks (2635m)
- ★ **Backwaters cruise** - Observe daily life in the tranquil Backwaters aboard a converted rice barge
- ★ **Village walks** - Meet the sociable Keralan people on rambles through the Backwaters
- ★ **Kochi** - Explore colonial architecture and city sights on a walking tour

### ACCOMMODATION GRADE:

#### Simple

These are often small, family run establishments or campsites which provide a no-frills experience with adequate amenities and service standards. Sleeping arrangements are simple, sometimes with en suite facilities.

#### WALKING GRADE:

##### Moderate

For those who are fit and active, these moderate walks are normally on good paths and tracks at low altitude. Days may include some fairly demanding ascents and descents, so previous experience is preferable but not essential.

#### 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 trip Kochi

Our Kerala adventure starts in the harbour city of Kochi, a gathering place for merchants and traders since antiquity. Beginning with the arrival of Jewish and Arab spice traders in the first century AD, its prosperity and importance increased with the arrival of the Portuguese, who were later followed by the Dutch and the English. This eclectic heritage has invested the city with a fascinating mix of styles and influences.



**Accommodation: Hotel Bright Heritage** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: None

### DAY 2 - Morning tour of historic Kochi; drive to Munnar

This morning we drive to Fort Kochi and take a walking tour of India's oldest European settlement. We take in the architectural charms of the Church of St Francis and some of the other notable colonial buildings - the site of the city's 16th century Jewish synagogue (closed on Fridays), the oldest in the Commonwealth and the exterior of the Mattancherry Palace, originally built by the Portuguese as a gift for the Raja of Cochin in 1555, but later extensively renovated by the Dutch. In the afternoon we then drive inland to Munnar and the stunning vistas of the Western Ghats. The 140 kilometre drive takes us into the heart of tea country, where fresh mountain air and tropical forests share the landscapes with spice plantations and tea estates. Our walking tour today is graded easy and we expect it to take approximately two hours.



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



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 3 - Hike to Seven Malai Hills through tea, coffee and spice plantations

Our first day's hiking in the Ghats begins from the small village of Nagarmudi (1500 m), just a short drive from old Munnar. Beginning with a gradual climb, we ascend through the tea plantations up into the Seven Malai Hills, passing crops of coffee and cardamom as we make our way to the summit (1700 m). The walk today will take us around four to five hours, but the views more than compensate for the hard climb, as we are presented with some spectacular panoramas across the Chittrapuram Dam and out towards the Anamudi Peak, Munnar and the local villages. Descending to our vehicle, we then drive back to Munnar for our second night. Our 11 kilometre walk today is moderately-graded and we expect it to take approximately four to five hours.



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



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 4 - Trek to Silent Valley through tea estates and shola forest

A short drive via the forest office this morning brings us to Signal Point, the start of our three day point to point hike. Beginning at around 1600 m, we start with a walk through a landscape blanketed with tea plantations and sholas of eucalyptus, as we make our way past the Gudarelle Tea Factory and up towards the grassland. The views today are simply breath-taking and the endless array of tea estates laid out before us give a real flavour of the area. Stopping to enjoy a picnic lunch in the shade of the forest, we then continue climbing towards our camp in the Silent Valley, situated in a meadow close to a small stream. Ascending to a height of 2000 m, today's walk will cover around 15 kilometres, taking us between five and six hours to reach the camp.



**Accommodation: Silent Valley Camp** (or similar)



Simple Camping



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## DAY 5 - Trek to Meesapulimala Peak (2635 m)

Leaving camp after breakfast this morning, we begin the ascent of Meesapulimala Peak, the second highest in South India. The trail towards the summit takes us from rough grassland and up onto the ridge line, where we continue climbing through patches of open grassland towards the peak. The journey to the top will take us around three to four hours and from its lofty heights, the views look down across Kerala and Tamil Nadu (if the summit isn't shrouded in mist). You might even pass the odd herd of Nilgiri Thar (a type of wild goat) on the way. After a chance to rest and enjoy the scenery, we then descend towards Rhodo Valley (2300 m), stopping off for a picnic lunch en route. As the camping area at Rhodo Valley is currently closed, we return by jeep for a second night at our Silent Valley camp. Our walk today is moderately-graded and we expect it to take approximately six to seven hours to cover eight kilometres.



**Accommodation: Silent Valley Camp** (or similar)



Simple Camping



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## DAY 6 - Hike to Top Station through villages and plantations

Today provides us with our longest day's walking, as we meander our way through a stunning backdrop of verdant plantations and vivid red rhododendron forests. This part of the Western Ghats is home to a staggering array of life, with wild boar and Atlas moths sharing the stage with a dazzling mix of local flora. As we climb, the views out across the local countryside take in villages and lakes, before we begin a gradual winding descent towards Yallapatty village and lunch. The four hour walk this morning ends with a short climb to the village, where we enjoy our picnic surrounded by the vegetable gardens planted by the local tea workers. Our post lunch walk then takes us on through the tea plantations towards our final camp at Top Station (1900 m). Our walk today is moderately-graded and we expect it to take approximately seven-and-a-half hours to cover 17 kilometres.



**Accommodation: Top Station Camp** (or similar)



Simple Camping



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## DAY 7 - Drive to Thekkady, gateway to Periyar National Park

Breaking camp for the last time today we drive back towards Munnar and on to Thekkady, gateway to the Periyar National Park. Taking up much of the morning, the 160 kilometre drive weaves across the Western Ghats before reaching Thekkady later this morning. This part of India has long been renowned for its abundant spices. Indeed, it was to the spice rich shores of the Malabar Coast that Christopher Columbus was heading when he bumped into America by mistake. After lunch we take a short walk around a spice garden, enjoying an aromatic wander through crops of black pepper, cardamom, cinnamon and clove. There should also be time to explore the local bazaar before dinner.



**Accommodation: Hotel Grand Thekkady** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 8 - Trekking in Periyar National Park

This morning we enjoy a walk in observation of the flora and fauna in the Periyar National Park. Set around the picturesque shores of Lake Periyar and one of the largest parks in South India, it is home to an incredible diversity of wildlife including elephant, tiger (although we don't expect to see one!), sambar, wild pigs, bison, monkeys and langurs. It also boasts some 112 species of butterflies and 246 species of birds including cormorants, darters, ospreys, kingfishers, hornbills and kites. The walk will take between two to three hours, after which there may be an opportunity this afternoon to enjoy an optional boat trip on the lake. Please be aware, tickets for the cruise are only available locally and are on a first come, first served basis. Our walk today is graded easy, mostly flat and at a leisurely pace as we take in the flora and fauna of the park. We expect it to take approximately two to three hours.



**Accommodation: Hotel Grand Thekkady** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

## DAY 9 - Drive to Alleppey on the coast; Backwaters houseboat cruise

Driving to the coastal town of Alleppey this morning we head for the myriad canals and channels that make up the Kerala Backwaters, boarding a traditional houseboat for an overnight cruise through the region. A time-honoured form of transport, these wonderfully characterful boats are made of anjili wood and bamboo and come with en-suite twin bedrooms and an on-board chef, providing the perfect way to enjoy the scenic and cultural beauty of this remarkable setting. Along these narrow channels, the industrious villagers survive on narrow spits of land, keeping cows, pigs, chickens and even cultivating vegetable gardens. Nothing goes to waste: the shells from the fresh water mussels are burnt to make building lime and coir is used for just about everything. This evening we'll moor up along the banks of Vembanad Lake.



**Accommodation: Kerala Houseboat** (or similar)



Simple Boat



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

## DAY 10 - Backwaters village walk; drive to hotel near Kochi airport

After a relaxing breakfast on board, we then drive on to the village of West Chennamkary in the heart of the Backwaters for a short walk around some of the local villages, soaking up the atmosphere of a region that provided Arundhati Roy with the inspiration for her book, 'The God of Small Things'. We'll enjoy a traditional Kerala lunch with a local family before driving back to Kochi later in the afternoon. As most international flights depart Kochi early morning, we spend our final night at a hotel not far from the city's airport. Our walk today is graded easy and we expect it to take up to two-and-a-half hours at a very leisurely pace.



**Accommodation: Hotel Airlink Castle** (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Lunch

## DAY 11 - Trip ends near Kochi airport

Our trip ends today at our hotel.



Meals Provided: Breakfast

# Walking and Trekking information

## Walking grade

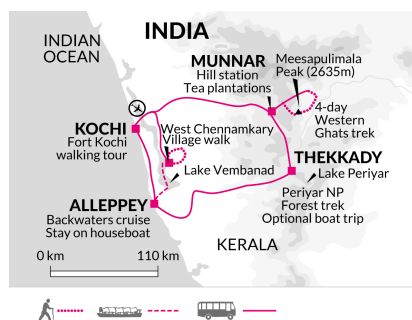
Moderate

## Trek details

Walks on 6 days for between 2 to 7.5 hours in duration. On 4 of the days we will be trekking on uneven mountain trails through the plantations, jungle and grasslands of the Western Ghats. On the 2 other walking days the terrain is generally flat - the jungle trails of Periyar National Park and village footpaths in the Backwaters. The overall grade of the walking is Moderate.

## Max walking altitude (m)

2635



## What's included?



### Included meals

Breakfast: 10  
Lunch: 5  
Dinner: 4



### Transport

Bus  
Boat



### Trip staff

Explore Tour Leader  
Boat Crew  
Driver(s)  
Ranger(s)  
Trek Crew



### Accommodation

1 nights simple boat  
3 nights simple camping  
6 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

Kochi - Kathakali dancing - £3 Thekkady - cookery course- £6.50

## Clothing

Due to the diversity of altitude encountered on tour, you will need to bring a range of comfortable lightweight clothing that can be layered according to the fluctuating temperature. On the coast and in the Backwaters you can expect both days and nights to be warm and humid and lightweight clothing is all that is needed. In the Ghats and especially on the 3-day trek, nights can be cold (possibly below freezing in Rhodo Valley). We recommend walking trousers and shorts, breathable T-shirtshirts, walking socks, fleece jacket, waterproof jacket, warm hat and gloves and sunhat. Whilst monsoon rainy season is from June through to early October, it can rain outside of this time. When it has rained there may be leeches in the Ghats and we highly recommend bringing your own leech socks which can be bought through outdoor equipment providers or online through retailers such as Amazon. Please bear in mind that shorts and tight revealing clothing worn by women can cause offence and unwelcome interest.

## Footwear

Walking boots with good ankle support, trainers and/or sandals for travelling and general wear.

## Luggage

20kg

## Luggage: On tour

You will need a daypack and your main luggage. Daypack: 30-35 litres recommended. During the course of the Western Ghats trek you do not have daytime access to your luggage which is transferred between camps by jeep. In any mountain region the weather can change rapidly and you must be equipped for this eventuality. Your daypack should therefore be large enough to carry waterproofs, fleece jacketweater, long trousers (if walking in shorts), warm hat and gloves, sun hat, sun cream, water bottle and your camera. It should be waterproof or have a rain cover. Main luggage: As this will be transported between the camps by jeep and stored overnight in your tent this needs to be a kitbag, large rucksack or soft holdall style bag that is easily stored and transported.

## Equipment

Bring a 3-season sleeping bag (whilst on trek you will be provided with a 5 centimetre thick foam sleeping mattress), 2 litre water bottle, sun cream, sunglasses and head torch. Bring your walking poles if you usually use them. An umbrella is useful for both rain and as a sun shade.

## 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 recognised 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. Accordingly, you should allow £30 for tipping of trek staff, houseboat crew, drivers, guides etc. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leader may organise a group tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.

## 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 bought 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.

The tents we use for the 3 nights on the Western Ghats trek are 2-man 'Alpine' brand Indian tents which will be erected and broken down for you by the camp crew. 5 centimetre thick foam sleeping mattresses are provided - you just need to bring your own 3-season sleeping bag. Kitchen and mess tent, table, chairs and all cutlery and utensils are also provided. A field toilet tent serves the camp and water for washing will be provided by the bucket. On day nine you stay on a simple boat. A time-honoured form of transport, these wonderfully characterful boats are made of anjili wood and bamboo and come with en-suite twin bedrooms and an on-board chef, providing the perfect way to enjoy the scenic and cultural beauty of this remarkable setting.

## 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.

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### 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.

## **Maximum altitude (m)**

2635

## **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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