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Kerala Backwaters - Private Tour

INDIA - TRIP CODE PTKB

DISCOVERY

Why book this trip?

Known as 'God's Own Country', Kerala is a relaxing contrast to other Indian states. Explore tea and spice plantations at Munnar, learn about a rich history in the ancient trading port of Kochi, and overnight on a traditional houseboat, experiencing village life as you glide through the tranquil Keralan Backwaters.

- **Kochi** - Explore colonial Kochi from the water, including the Fort, St Francis Church and Mattancherry Palace
- **Kumarakom** - Witness waterfront village life as you cruise through the tranquil 'backwaters'
- **Periyar** - Search for elephants and other wildlife in Periyar National Park



INCLUDED MEALS
 Breakfast: 8
 Lunch: 1
 Dinner: 1



TRIP STAFF
 Boat Crew
 Driver(s)
 Local Guide(s)



TRANSPORT
 Bus
 Boat



ACCOMMODATION
 1 nights simple boat
 7 nights comfortable hotel



TRIP PACE:
 Moderate

Itinerary

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

DAY 1 - Trip begins in Kochi (Cochin)

Kochi (Cochin) has been a gathering place of merchants since antiquity and is still full of bustling traders. The Fort Kochi area is the oldest European settlement in India (dating from 1500) and has a mixture of English, Dutch and Portuguese influences, much of which survives in the remaining architecture. Built on several islands and criss-crossed with waterways, the city has a very cosmopolitan feel today and attracts artists and artisans from around the region.

You will be met on arrival at Cochin International Airport (COK) by a local representative, and driven to your centrally-located hotel. The city is about 40km and a 1.5 hour drive from the airport. There are no activities planned today, so feel free to arrive in Kochi at any time. For those booking their own flights, you will just need to let us know your flight details no later than three weeks prior to departure, in order to be met on arrival.



ACCOMMODATION:
 Hotel Bright Heritage (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE





MEALS PROVIDED: NONE

DAY 2 - Explore the fort and Jewish Quarter of Kochi

Delve in to Kochi's eclectic past today with a guided visit to the Mattancherry Palace, built by the Portuguese in the 16th century. Extensive renovations by the Dutch some hundred years later earned it the name the Dutch Palace. It houses some of the best murals in India, depicting scenes from the Ramayana and other great legends. The guided tour continues both on boat and on foot, visiting the Jew town synagogue where Kochi's surviving Jewish community come to worship. Nearby are the famous cantilevered Chinese Fishing nets, and in the early evening you'll 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 and 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.

It's important to note that the Mattancherry Palace is closed on Fridays, and the Synagogue is closed from Friday afternoon throughout Saturday. If you wish to visit these sites then you may wish to avoid beginning your trip on a Thursday or Friday. Alternatively, it may be possible to visit these sites at the end of your trip upon your return to Kochi.



ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel Bright Heritage (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 3 - Travel to the tea gardens of Munnar

Take a five-hour journey today to Munnar, driving through an area of spice and tea plantations. Kerala's coastline has been renowned for its spices for at least 2000 years, attracting ancient communities of Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs and Chinese for its sandalwood. There was also a flourishing trade in 'black gold' - pepper - which, along with other 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)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

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

Visit one of Kerala's tea museums with a local guide and learn the fascinating process of tea production. 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, drive for around 4 hours to Thekkady and take a walk through one of the region's many spice gardens, where the passionate staff will tell you all about how the famous spices are grown and processed.



ACCOMMODATION:
Abad Green Forest (or similar)



Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 5 - Take a walk in Periyar National Park

The route this morning takes you 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. The naturalist guide will take you, and possibly other customers up to small groups of six people, 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, drive back towards the coast at Kumarakom, one of the most famous and lively places on Kerala's bustling backwaters.



ACCOMMODATION:
Eastend Lakesong Resort (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 6 - Free day; take a bike ride around the area or visit a bird sanctuary

Today you're free to explore Kumarakom. The bird sanctuary nearby is home to many species of bird including the cuckoo and Siberian stork. The quiet roads and trails are also the perfect place to take a leisurely cycle, and a traditional Ayurvedic massage can be arranged post-ride. Alternatively, experience the tradition of 'toddy tapping' - a South Asian practice involving the 'tapper', usually a slim, agile young man, scaling coconut palms to tap into the sap at the top, which is then predominantly used for drinking. Often they walk tightropes between palms to tap multiple plants at the same time. The sap begins fermenting immediately after collection, and is usually alcoholic within several hours. After that, it may also be used in leavening bread or as a pickling liquid.

However you choose to spend the day, the interweaving network of canals and warm breeze make this a great place to soak up Kerala's relaxing atmosphere.



ACCOMMODATION:
Eastend Lakesong Resort (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



SWIMMING POOL AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 7 - Board a houseboat and float through the backwaters

Board a houseboat this morning and begin your journey into the network of the Kerala backwaters. The traditional houseboats are simple vessels, with en-suite twin rooms. We endeavour to book a boat that fits your group - so if you are a couple, the boat should only have one bedroom, and so on. Witness riverside village life in its entirety, as you float down the river at a relaxed pace. 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)

Grade: Simple Boat



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST, LUNCH & DINNER

DAY 8 - Free time to explore Kochi

After a relaxed breakfast, disembark from your houseboat and return to Kochi where the rest of the day

is left free for you to explore at your leisure.



ACCOMMODATION:
Hotel Bright Heritage (or similar)

Grade: Comfortable Hotel



SINGLE ROOM AVAILABLE



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

DAY 9 - Trip ends in Kochi (Cochin)

Your trip ends today, and you will be taken to the airport to meet your international flight. There are no activities planned today, so you are free to depart from Cochin International Airport (COK) at any time. If your flight is departing later in the day, luggage storage facilities are available at our hotel.



MEALS PROVIDED: BREAKFAST

Trip information

Climate and country information

India

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	Plugs	Religion
+5	3 Pin Round	Catholicism, Hindu, Islam and Sikhism
Language		
Hindi and English.		

Budgeting and packing

Optional activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations. Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

In Kumarakom you are at your leisure to explore the area. There are plenty of things to do, and some of the options available are detailed here:

Cycle ride - 500 INR

Kumarakom Village visit and Toddy Tapping - 1000 for Toddy Tapping & local guide charges 3000 INR

Bird sanctuary - Entrance 150 INR & local guide charges 3000 INR

Clothing

Kerala is a tropical region with high humidity. Lightweight clothes 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, short 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 daysack. 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

Local crew

In India, tipping is a recognised part of life. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. That being said, a certain degree of firmness is required in certain instances. If you do not need the help of porters, you must say so and be firm with them. It is useful to keep some small denomination notes for tipping and small purchases.

As a guideline, a small party of two people could budget the following per person for tips:

Porterage at hotels - 100 INR per piece

Drivers who travel with you (ie staying overnight) - 300 INR per day

Transfer drivers - 100 INR

Local guides - 500 INR half day tour / 600 INR full day tour

Houseboat owners - 350 INR

India

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	Dinner price	Beer price	Water price
£8	£10	£3	£0.5

Foreign Exchange

Local currency

Indian Rupee Recently new 500 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

Accommodation in India is as varied as the country itself. On this tour you will stay in a mix of hotels, as well as one night on a houseboat. Standards do not equate to standards in the UK, with occasional slow service or hot water only at certain times of day, and it's best to approach each type of accommodation with an open mind. 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.

Essential Information

Government Travel Safety 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 citizens, check the latest Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office advice.

Please refer to our COVID-19 entry requirements page for any country-specific conditions of entry. Whilst we strive to update this on a regular basis we recommend you also check the FCDO website for the latest advice on entry requirements in this fast-evolving situation. Information can change at any time.

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.

Price Guarantee

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 and Passport Information

Visas are required for citizens of the UK, Australia, New Zealand, US and Canada and can be obtained in the form of an e-visa. Other nationalities should consult their local embassy or consular office.

The e-visa can be applied for through the official Indian government visa website only -

<https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/evisa/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 28 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. Visa applications will take approximately 4 days to process.

There are different validity visas and the costs are as follows:

30-day validity (travelling between April and June) - \$10

30-day validity (travelling between July and March) - \$25

1-year validity - \$40

5-year validity- \$80

Those applying for a 30 day electronic visa can only apply within 30 days of arrival for your visa to be valid. Furthermore double entry is permitted and you can only obtain two 30-day visas in a calendar year.

Please note these costs are subject to frequent change so you should check on the official Indian government visa website mentioned above. Biometric data will be collected on arrival in India.

If you are not eligible for the e-Tourist Visa, please refer to VFS Global to apply for your Indian visa - https://www.vfsglobal.com/india/uk/how_to_apply.html

Whilst the online form offers a relatively quick way to apply for a visa, some applicants have reported difficulty in completing the form. If you do require assistance, then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. They can complete the online visa on your behalf for a fee of £30 + the visa cost. See 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 be able to apply through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See 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.

It is your responsibility to ensure that you are in possession of a full passport, with the correct validity for your chosen destination.

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 receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The complimentary transfers will be arranged from the Explore designated airport or train station to your trips joining point, and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. Generally the airport or station that Explore have selected will be the one that is closest to the town or city where the trip starts, or the one nearest to the joining point. It will be either an airport or train station but not both.

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, Polar, 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. The cost of many of our Polar Voyages will exceed the capped amount covered by standard insurance premiums and you will be required to pay an additional premium to cover the full value of your trip. Please ensure that you are covered for the full amount of your holiday cost, as insufficient cover could invalidate a claim under the policy. 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.

Ability to swim

An ability to swim is essential for your safe enjoyment of the water based activities on this trip. If you wish to participate in these activities then you must be able to swim.

India

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. Please check the latest requirements with your travel clinic or doctor prior to departure. 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 Explore Travel Health and from your local healthcare provider. Visa and vaccination requirements are subject to change and should be confirmed by you before travelling.

Additional Information



Tour Staff

Unlike our group tours our private journeys do not have a Tour Leader. However, you are still in safe hands as we work closely with our expert local suppliers on the planning and organisation of your holiday to ensure that you have a fantastic time. You'll be met on arrival in Kochi (Cochin) by one of our english-speaking representatives, who will go through your holiday details and answer any questions you may have. The guides throughout the trip are excellent, and will help to bring the destination to life. At times you may travel only with a driver, but you will have all the information that you need to explore and there is always the reassurance that you have someone on hand with our 24/7 emergency contact number.

Reviews



AWARD WINNING
EXPLORE LEADERS



PRICE GUARANTEE
PROMISE



AIRPORT
TRANSFERS