



EXPLORE!

Kerala Backwaters, Highlights of Sri Lanka and Maldives Dhoni Cruise
23 days

India - Trip code KSM

Kerala Backwaters, Highlights of Sri Lanka and Maldives Dhoni Cruise

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

- ★ **Wilpattu National Park** - Take a jeep safari to search for leopards, elephants and sambar deer
- ★ **Sigiriya** - View the colourful painted frescos on the climb up to King Kasyapa's ancient sky fortress set on the top of Lion's Rock, a UNESCO World Heritage Site
- ★ **Kandy** - Explore the Temple of the Tooth and share a meal with a local family
- ★ **Unawatuna** - Relax on the pristine beaches of the west coast or take an optional whale watching excursion
- ★ **Seven - day cruise** - Relax on board a traditional dhoni boat, with all meals included and freshly prepared by the boat crew
- ★ **Uninhabited islands and pristine beaches** - Visit unspoilt, idyllic corners of the Maldives, far away from the tourist resorts
- ★ **Remarkable snorkelling and swimming** - Enjoy warm, clear water and spot manta rays, turtles and clown fish on spectacular reefs
- ★ **Traditional fishing villages** - Spend time with the local people to gain an appreciation of their life in this tropical paradise

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. The Fort Kochi area is the oldest European settlement in India (1500) and has a mixture of English, Dutch and Portuguese influence including the Mattancherry Palace which was 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. On our tour around the city by boat and on foot, we also visit 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 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 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.



Accommodation: Hotel Casino (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

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

This morning we have a drive to Munnar of around 5 hours 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)



Standard Hotel



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

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)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

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



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



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



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 9 - Fly to Sri Lanka

Flying to Sri Lanka, we head for the coastal town of Negombo, famous for its fishing industry and golden sands. Our hotel is just a 15 minute drive north of the airport. From its beach location, we are likely to see fishing boats bring in the day's catch. We may also be treated to a stunning sunset over the ocean.



Accommodation: Catamaran Beach Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 10 - Boat ride through Muthurajawela Wetlands

This morning we'll visit the nearby Muthurajawela Wetlands and explore by boat. Inhabitants include over 70 species of birds, crocodiles, monkeys and even some very rarely seen otters. In the afternoon we'll meet up with the rest of the group for the Sri

Lankan section of our adventure.



Accommodation: Catamaran Beach Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 11 - In search of leopards in Willpaththu National Park

Leaving Negombo we travel north following the coastal road via the small towns of Chilaw and Putalam before reaching the entrance to Willpaththu National Park. Here we will leave our bus and change to jeeps for an afternoon safari through the park hoping to spot Sri Lanka's most elusive resident, the leopard. Despite Willpaththu National Park's location in Sri Lanka's dry zone, it boasts nearly 60 lakes and is renowned for leopard, elephant and sambar deer sightings. We choose to visit this park, rather than Yala National Park further south because we believe it offers our customers a better experience. The same animals can be seen here as in Yala, however it is less crowded, making our visit more enjoyable and responsible. Leaving the park, we drive to nearby Anuradapura, where we will spend the night.



Accommodation: The Lakeside Nuwarawewa (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 12 - Explore cave temples and take lunch with the locals

We start this morning with a visit to the mountain peak of Mihintale. It is believed that this was the site of a momentous meeting between the monk Mahinda and King Devanampiyatissa, introducing Buddhism to the country. Exploring Mihintale involves climbing a flight of 1,840 shallow stone steps leading to the summit of the Missaka Mountain. There are excellent views from the top looking back to Anuradhapura. After the exertions we swap our bus for a bullock cart and make our way slowly through a small village on the outskirts of Habarana. After this rather relaxing ride we change seats again and use dugout canoe style boats - adapted with seats for a more comfortable ride! - to cross the short distance across the lake to Hiriwaduna Village where we are met by the villagers and treated to a traditional Sri Lankan lunch. We can watch as delicious curries and fluffy rice are prepared and try out creating a traditional spicy sambar. After sharing the meal and spending time in the village we make our way to Sigiriya, stopping on the way to visit Dambulla, where a great series of caves have been turned into temples dating from the 1st century BC. This World Heritage Site still attracts scores of worshippers. We will visit five separate caves, which contain a large number of Buddha images and sculptures of Hindu Gods.



Accommodation: Acme Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast & Lunch

DAY 13 - Climb Lions Rock at sunrise. Drive to Kandy

An early start this morning as we plan to climb Sigiriya Rock ahead of the crowds and whilst it is cool. The ruins of this 5th century 'Sky Fortress' are one of Sri Lanka's major attractions, a stupendous sight to behold and a feat of consummate engineering skill. Built in just seven years as a fortified palace to protect the reign of merciless King Kassapa, who had assassinated his father and deposed his brother, it is seen as one of the world's best preserved examples of ancient urban planning. Unfortunately for the king, despite its impregnable reputation, he was defeated here by his brother after a reign of just 18 years. A switchback series of steps and steel stairways ascend to the top. Halfway up, tucked beneath a sheltering overhang of rock, are the famous frescoes - the Sigiriya Damsels, their colours still glowing. Before our final ascent to the summit, we pass between a set of enormous lion paws carved out of the rock - all that remain of an ancient gateway that gave Sigiriya, the 'Lion Rock', its name. Once at the 200 meter summit, magnificent views can be enjoyed of the surrounding jungle and countryside. This afternoon, a two-hour drive takes us to Kandy. On arrival the time is free to explore this historic town. Perhaps visit the Temple of the Tooth, situated on the shore of the lake or take a short tuk tuk ride out to the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens which alongside beautiful displays of Sri Lanka's finest flowers is home to thousands of flying foxes.



Accommodation: Mahaweli Reach Hotel (or similar)



Premium Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 14 - Learn about Sri Lanka's tea en route to Unawatuna

Leaving Kandy behind we stop at a tea factory to learn about the processes involved in Sri Lanka's largest export. Originally a tea bush was brought from China in 1842 to be planted at the Peradeniya Botanical Gardens, it was 25 years later that James Taylor established Sri Lanka's first tea plantation, the Loolecondera Estate in Kandy. These days more than one million people in Sri Lanka are employed by the tea industry. After seeing the process of drying and grinding the leaves we sample some of the blends before leaving tea country and making our way back to the coast. Our destination is Unawatuna on the south west coast. The shallow waters and long, pristine beaches make it perfect for a spot of relaxing.



Accommodation: Hotel J Unawatuna (or similar)

Standard Hotel



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 15 - Free time to explore Galle or whale watching (seasonal)

Today is left free to do as little or as much as you wish. A short tuk tuk ride can take you to visit the neighbouring pretty coastal town of Galle. An important trading centre since ancient times, the fortifications that can be seen today were built by the Portuguese and then the Dutch from the 16th to the 17th centuries. The fort ramparts of this World Heritage Site protect the harbour and a myriad of fascinating old houses, churches and warehouses. Today, the town has a strong arts vibe, with foreign and local artists, writers, photographers, designers and poets drawing inspiration from their surrounds. Boutique shops and cafes around the town showcase their work. There is plenty to explore in the town and enjoyment can be gained simply by wandering around its streets, soaking up its unique atmosphere. For those seeking pure relaxation, local Ayurvedic massages with natural, aromatic herbal oils are highly recommended. Alternatively, between the months of December and April, you might prefer to go on a whale watching trip in the hope of spotting humpback and blue whales.



Accommodation: Hotel J Unawatuna (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 16 - Fly to Male

After breakfast this morning we drive to Colombo Airport where we take the short flight to Male, the capital of the Maldives. After meeting up with our Explore representative and the rest of the group we walk to our hotel close to the harbour in Male. The circumference of the island is little more than 5 kilometers so it's very easy to explore on foot. After freshening up at the hotel we will walk down to the Mosque, to the fish market and along the waters edge to watch the ferries coming and going.

Please note that from January to early April 2017 Colombo airport will be closed for several hours during the day. This means that we will be flying in the early evening, arriving around 19.30, and will miss the short walk in Male. However, there will still be time to enjoy an evening meal and meet up with the rest of the group on your first night in the Maldives.



Accommodation: Mookai Hotel (or similar)



Standard Hotel



Swimming pool available



Single room available



Meals Provided: Breakfast

DAY 17 - Sail to Vavuu Atoll and explore Kuda Anbaraa Island

This morning we walk to the waterfront to meet our moored dhoni and crew. We take our breakfast on the boat and then begin cruising south for two to three hours, passing through the Vaadhoo Canal to the South Male Atoll - a smaller and quieter neighbour to the more developed North Male Atoll. Here, many of the islands are inhabited simply by vegetation and white sand, surrounded by clear turquoise water and reef. Heading further south we cruise to the Vavuu Atoll, where we spend time exploring the uninhabited and picturesque islands of Kudiboli and Kuda Anbaraa. When exploring this and other islands in the itinerary, it isn't necessary to bring special footwear. Most customers seem to manage well in flip-flops, and these have the obvious advantage of being quick to get on and off - ideal for walking through sand. Our afternoon is spent snorkelling or relaxing on board. Over the course of the week, underwater fauna we are likely to see include green turtles, reef sharks and gigantic manta rays, as well as smaller sting rays and eagle rays. At each stop, we will also swim among a rainbow of small, colourful fish, including the famous Clown Fish. Our knowledgeable Explore representative will be able to help identify many of the underwater species that we come across.

Today, and each day, afternoon tea with freshly baked cake will be served by our talented chef.

Every meal is included on the dhoni. Menus are likely to include freshly-caught fish each day, as well curries and pasta. Drinking water, tea and coffee are readily available, with alcoholic and soft drinks available for purchase on-board. US Dollars are accepted on the Dhoni and you can pay your bill for drinks at the end of your cruise.

Our cabins are compact, but with plenty of room for two people and luggage. However, many customers choose to enjoy the tranquillity of sleeping under the stars on deck for at least some of the nights.



Accommodation: Aboard Dhoni (or similar)



Simple Boat



Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 18 - Snorkel in the clear waters of the Meemu Atoll

Today we sail south for a further two to three hours, crossing to Meemu Atoll - home to one of the longest stretches of reef in the Maldives. On this or other crossings, we may be lucky enough to be chased by spinner dolphins, who like jumping in our wake. We are also likely to see flying fish, sometimes leaping right over the deck of our dhoni. Meemu Atoll is made up of 34 islands, of which 25 are uninhabited. Some of the inhabited ones grow yams, and all of them are largely dependent on fishing. Here more than anywhere, we are likely to experience the true Maldivian way of life. Shortly after entering the atoll, we arrive at Fenboa Finolhu - another beautiful uninhabited island where we aim to base ourselves for the night. We will have plenty of time to enjoy the white-sand beach and to snorkel on the reef. This evening, we can look forward to a barbeque beach banquet in an idyllic spot on the island, laid on by the dhoni crew.



Accommodation: Aboard Dhoni (or similar)



Simple Boat

DAY 19 - Cruise to Dhiggaru Island for a Bodu Beru display

After a relaxed start, we head east to the inhabited island of Dhiggaru. Here, we drop our anchor by a particularly good snorkelling reef. Later in the afternoon, when it has cooled down a bit, we plan to go ashore to meet the island's inhabitants. We may be struck by the traditional, yet relaxed, way of life in the island's lively village. Very few tourist groups visit and we must remember to dress and act respectfully, removing our shoes when visiting a house or a mosque. In the evening, we hope to be invited to a performance of Bodu Beru (Big Drum) - the traditional folk music of the country.



Accommodation: Aboard Dhoni (or similar)



Simple Boat

DAY 20 - Visit the traditional village of Felidhoo

Today, we head back to Felidhoo Atoll and its administrative centre, Felidhoo. With a population of about 400, this is the least populated of all the country's administrative centres. Again, we take time to visit the village and have the opportunity to enjoy another Bodu Beru performance.



Accommodation: Aboard Dhoni (or similar)



Simple Boat

DAY 21 - Discover Hulhidhoo reef before sailing to Fulidhoo

By now, we are likely to be feeling completely relaxed, as our routine of reading, sunbathing and napping between island stops and snorkelling spots has become second nature. With a subtly different name to our previous day's stop-off, we break today's journey with a visit to Fulidhoo Island. Once again, we meet the locals and gain more of an appreciation of their life in this tropical paradise. After a further visit to the island of Hulhidhoo, we anchor by a large reef, where we can spend time snorkelling.



Accommodation: Aboard Dhoni (or similar)



Simple Boat

DAY 22 - Sail to Male stopping to snorkel at Embudhoo Reef

Our last full day on the boat sees us cruising back towards Male. We take the opportunity for some final snorkelling and swimming, before enjoying a farewell meal with our boat crew.



Accommodation: Aboard Dhoni (or similar)



Simple Boat



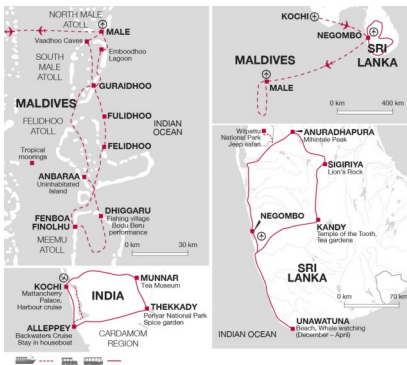
Meals Provided: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner

DAY 23 - Tour ends in Male

Our tour ends this morning after breakfast. Once we have said our goodbyes to the crew, we disembark the dhoni and are transferred to Male International Airport.



Meals Provided: Breakfast



Why book this trip

This tour will suit anyone looking to explore South India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. It offers a chance to fully experience life in Kerala's beautiful backwaters by spending two nights in a family home and learn a little of the spices and tea that are exported from what is known as Gods own country. We have the chance to see elephants in the wild, climb to Lion Rock's ancient fortress and relax on quiet beaches in Sri Lanka, and spend idyllic days filled with snorkelling, swimming and relaxing on deck or visiting traditional fishing villages and meeting the inhabitants of the beautiful Maldives.

What's included?



Included meals

- Breakfast: 22
- Lunch: 9
- Dinner: 9



Transport

- Bus
- 4WD
- Boat
- Flight



Trip staff

- Explore Tour Leader
- Boat Crew
- Driver(s)
- Naturalist(s)



Accommodation

- 7 nights simple boat
- 2 nights simple homestay
- 5 nights premium hotel
- 8 nights standard hotel

Trip information

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

+5

Plugs

3 Pin Round

Religion

Catholicism, Hindu, Islam and Sikhism

Language

Hindi and English.

Budgeting and packing

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 are required for the nature walk in Periyar and sandals are recommended for the rest of the trip.

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 £25 for tipping. Your tour leader will account to you for any organised tipping.

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

£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, 4WD, Boat, Flight

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.

India

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.

Sri Lanka

Traditional Sri Lankan cuisine is excellent, and although it can be very spicy there are many dishes that feature cooling coconut milk or have a spicy sambhar on the side to allow you to adjust the meal to your taste. There isn't a culture of eating out in Sri Lanka, most locals will eat at home, and as such there are very few restaurants around, and those that exist tend to be in hotels. As tourism develops a few independent restaurants are beginning to appear, mainly in Colombo but also in Kandy, Galle and in the coastal resorts. During the tour we will endeavour to eat out at local restaurants wherever possible but for many nights, at this point in time, the hotel restaurants are the only option available.

Maldives

We work with a local operator who owns a number of different Dhonis; all of which are different sizes with different layouts. The boats we are most likely to be using are 6-10 berth Dhonis and we will either use one or two boats depending on the group size and make-up. All Dhonis that we use are fitted with diesel engines, which are used most of the time that we are travelling. Some of the boats still have sails but these are used very infrequently.

All Dhonis are inspected annually in order to retain their license. They carry enough lifejackets for all clients and crew plus buoyancy aids and a dinghy with small outboard engine. All boats have a CB radio, and for most of the voyage the boat is in mobile phone range of the islands. Full fire fighting equipment is also carried on every boat. There will be a minimum of 4 or 5 crew on board including the captain and cook - depending on the number of people on the boat. Most of the cabins offer couchette accommodation on a twin share basis with all bedding provided. The cabins are small and simple but adequate for sleeping and changing. In most of the cabins there will be bunk beds and so the person on the top will need to be prepared to climb up to their bed. Facilities are shared, and each boat has 3 or 4 toilets and 2 or 3 showers on board. There are plugs available in each cabin with electricity available when the boat's generator is running (when the boat is moving or the crew are cooking meals) so it is possible to charge cameras and phones during the tour. Good quality snorkelling equipment including mask, snorkel, flippers and swim noodles are provided (we will ask for your shoe/flipper size before you travel!). You are free to bring your own equipment should you wish. No scuba diving equipment will be carried on board. All meals and a bottle of drinking water each day are provided on board the Dhonis.

Food and drink

Sri Lanka

Traditional Sri Lankan cuisine is excellent, and although it can be very spicy there are many dishes that feature cooling coconut milk or have a spicy sambhar on the side to allow you to adjust the meal to your taste. There isn't a culture of eating out in Sri Lanka, most locals will eat at home, and as such there are very few restaurants around, and those that exist tend to be in hotels. As tourism develops a few independent restaurants are beginning to appear, mainly in Colombo but also in Kandy, Galle and in the coastal resorts. During the tour we will endeavour to eat out at local restaurants wherever possible but for many nights, at this point in time, the hotel restaurants are the only option available.

Maldives

All meals and a bottle of drinking water each day are provided on board the Dhonis. There is a bar for any additional soft and alcoholic drinks you may wish to buy, a dining area and a sundeck to relax and sunbathe throughout the day.

It should be noted that it is not permitted for tourists to bring alcohol in to the country and it will be confiscated at the airport if you attempt to do so.

People requiring a gluten free diet may struggle a little in the Maldives. Breakfasts are often mashuni - a tuna and coconut combination which is served with roti style bread or a more western start to the day with eggs and toast. Most lunches and dinners will have a pasta element and during the afternoons the boat crew will often bake a cake. Whilst plenty of fresh veg, meat and fruit is also provided if you do follow a gluten free diet you may wish to take some snacks with you to supplement the diet on board the dhoni.

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.

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

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 £30 + 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.

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 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.

Sri Lanka: All foreign nationals who intend to visit Sri Lanka for a short stay of up to six months must apply for travel authorization online prior to travel to the country. If your return flight requires you to transit in Sri Lanka then you will not be required to obtain a second Sri Lankan visa if your transit time is less than 48hrs. To obtain an Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) you must visit <http://www.eta.gov.lk> to apply for it prior to travel. It is strongly recommended that you print and bring a copy of the ETA approval notice with you. The Sri Lankan authorities require that your passport must be valid for at least 6 months after departure from Sri Lanka.

Maldives: Citizens of the UK, Australia, New Zealand, US and Canada are given a free 30 day permit on arrival. Other nationalities should consult the relevant consulate.

All visa information is subject to change. You should confirm all visa related questions with the relevant Embassy prior to departure.

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 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 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, 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.

Non refundable permits

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.
