



KERALA CULTURE TOUR: LUXURY

If you are looking for extra luxury, this is the tour for you. Highlights include: dance and temple festivals; walking in the hill stations; train journey; over night houseboat on the backwaters; bamboo rafting; small elegant hotels; forest bungalows and homestays in beautiful colonial houses.

Sample Kerala culture tour: 16 days/15 nights

Kerala: (Cochin) Kochi, Munnar, houseboat, Periyar, Alleppey, Kochi.

Cost: £2400 per person (based on twin share) excluding international flights. Prices depend on season and your requirements. All our tours are private - you won't be part of a group.

There will be a peak season surcharge from December 20th until 10th January. The price quoted is for full board, except at Old Harbour Hotel and Marari Beach Hotel, an English speaking Indian driver, local hosts/guides and other travel costs. Some activities are included, such as sight seeing and Kathakali dance in Kochi, other activities – such as those in Periyar, Philip Kutty's Farm and Marari are not included in the cost (the price depends on what you choose to do).

This is a sample tour to Kerala. We can mix and match according to the dates and places you would like to visit, although we encourage guests to stay in areas and accommodations that we feel match our ethos.

Day one and two

Is your arrival in the City of Kochi. Set on a cluster of islands and narrow peninsulas, Kochi is a city of cultural diversity - winding streets, shady trees, Kathakali dance, modern Indian art, 500-year old Portuguese houses, mosques, a tiny Jewish community with ancient roots - and ferry boats scuttling backwards and forwards.

Once you are settled into your hotel, we can take strolls or three-wheelers to explore the city. You may also want to watch the city's Kathakali dance show.

Overnight: (2 nights) Old Harbour Hotel, Fort Cochin: a 300 year-old building that was home to employees of English tea-brokering firms, until it was left empty and then carefully restored. Built in the Dutch style of architecture with hints of



Portuguese influences, it has 13 spacious rooms and suites overlooking the courtyard and gardens.

Day three, four and five

We'll make our way to Munnar. The hill town of Munnar is set amidst dramatic mountain scenery: craggy peaks, tall red wood trees, high altitude rain forests and some of the world's highest tea plantations.

Accommodation: Overnight: (3 nights) Windermere Estate. Located within vast swathes of tea and cardamom plantations, and with spectacular views, the estate has 18 comfortable rooms. Most have private balconies or verandas. The owner lives near-by and keeps a close eye on the staff. From here we can visit the village of the indigenous Muduvans, visit the tea museum and the tea factory, and go trekking.

Day six, seven and eight

We'll take the 5 hour drive to Periyar Nature Reserve. En-route we can visit Rajamala for viewing the endangered NilgiriTahr and take a peek at the Tea Museum, where the history of tea in South India is vividly captured. We will also stop over at ChellarKoil for a view of the spectacular plains of Tamil Nadu below.

Periyar is a 777 sq km forested wildlife reserve - home to bison, sambar, wild boar, Nilgirilangur, elephants and tigers. Run under the imaginative supervision of the Kerala Forest Department, it is also home to the indigenous Mannan community, who help conserve the reserve in exchange for income from eco-tourism. Living in the outskirts of the reserve, they run many of the activities that we can do - trekking, bamboo rafting, night treks, elephant rides and plantation visits.

Overnight: (3 nights) Aanavilasam. Described by one of our guests as "the most luxurious place we have ever stayed in", this plantation retreat is known for its good food and first class hospitality by the host. Here you can take an early morning 3 hour trek in Periyar Reserve, visit a spice garden, go on the bullock cart ride, and take a boat ride on the lake. Expect to see elephants.

Day nine, ten and eleven

Dewalokam, Thodupuzha

After breakfast, we'll make our way to Dewalokam (around 2 to 3 hours drive). Professor Jose and his family live on the premises – an organic farm with goats, cows, buffalo, pigs, chickens, ducks and guineas fowls. Delicious Keralan dishes



are prepared for guests using the farm produce. From the patio of your room you can see the Sahyadris mountains (the local name for the Western Ghats), beyond the river and forest. There is a herbal and spice garden near the homestay. Here you can go for village and forest walks, have traditional ayurveda massage, do yoga and join the host cooking. You can explore the small spice growing village around Dewalokam, take a picnic basket to the cascading 'Thomas Falls', learn how rubber is produced, or make a 'guest' appearance in the local school

Overnight: (3 nights), Dewalokam Organic Farm, Thodupuzha.

Day twelve

We'll make our way to the house boat. One of Kerala's most luxurious forms of accommodation, the houseboat is a converted rice-barge. Reclining on cushions, you'll travel through the rivers and a labyrinth of man-made canals that flow through island paddy fields. The life of the people who live here is centered on these backwaters - here women pound their washing, families brush teeth, men linger at the local 'chai' shop, and canoes and ferry boats scurry by.

Overnight: (1 night) on-board the house boat. Lunch and dinner on board.

Day thirteen, fourteen and fifteen

We'll make our way to Marari Beach Resort. Here you can stroll along the beach, go swimming and take cycle rides. This is closer to a conventional resort than most of our accommodation, but it is owned locally, and offers a good clean beach, swimming pools, and plenty of entertainment: ayurvedic and yoga centres, ball sports, martial arts, nature walks, organic cookery and traditional dance demonstrations. The owners are careful about environmental issues, with rainwater harvesting, and solar heat for hot water. No trees were cut down to create the resort and only local materials were used during its construction.

Overnight: (3 nights) at Marari Beach Resort.

Day sixteen

After taking you for a farewell meal, we'll take you the airport for your return journey home.



GENERAL INFORMATION

Other things to do in the Kerala culture tour

Farm walks, a visit to Kalamandalam dance school, a visit to the elephant training center at Kodanad.

SEASONS FOR KERALA CULTURE TOUR

Late October until the following April are the best months for visiting. June, July and August are the monsoon months. You can still travel during monsoon season if you can put up with the rain. On the second Saturday of August each year is the famous regatta on Vembanad Lake. Scores of long 'snake boats' fill the lake, each boat crewed by up to 100 rowers. The annual event celebrates the seafaring and martial traditions of ancient Kerala.