



INSIDER-TOURS
re-connecting people, places and culture

KERALA BACKWATERS

Kerala backwaters real insiders tour – described by Rough Guide as “The most original, hands-on and ethical itineraries on the market”. If you prefer staying in homestays and meeting local people to anonymous hotels, this is the Kerala backwaters tour for you – inexpensive and adventurous, with a hint of luxury. (If you want total luxury, see 'Kerala Culture Tour').

Sample Kerala backwaters tour: 16 days/15 nights **Kerala: Cochin, Periyar, Allepey, houseboat.**

Cost: from £1278 per person (based on twin share) for 16 days/15 nights, excluding international flights. Prices depend on season and your requirements. All our Kerala backwaters 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 for the Kerala backwaters tour is for full board (except at Kochi and Periyar), A/C car/driver (up until the backwaters, with local transfer to the rest of the places which are in close proximity, and drop back to the airport), 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, Dewalokam and Emerald Isle are not included in the cost (the price depends on what you choose to do).

This is a sample Kerala backwaters tour, 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: **Kochi**

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 you on our backstreet tour of the city by foot and three-wheelers, visiting the spice market, the fishing harbour and, in the evening, the city's Kathakali dance show.

Overnight (2 nights): Killians Boutique Hotel, Fort Cochin.



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Day three, four and five

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 guinea 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 six, seven and eight

Periyar Nature Reserve

We'll take the 4 hour drive to Periyar Nature Reserve and the adjacent - and wonderfully manic town of Kumily. Periyar is a 777 sq km forested wildlife reserve - home to bison, antelopes, sambar, wild boar, langur, elephants and tigers. It is home also to the indigenous Mannan tribe, 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 - trekking, bamboo rafting, night treks and plantation visits. Over the next few days, we'll participate in these activities, and spend time with the Mannan people, visiting their homes and village.

Overnight: (3 nights), Wildernest hotel

Spacious rooms, friendly staff and monkeys all around to entertain. Previous guests have recommended an early visit to the forest to hear 'the sounds of the forest waking up'. Kumily is also the best place for buying souvenirs as well as spices

(note that there are entry fee charges to Periyar Reserve and extra charges for other programmes such as: Bamboo rafting, border hiking - approximately £20.00 each).

Day nine, ten and eleven

Emerald Isle, Kerala Backwaters

We'll make our way to the Pulincunnu area by car (around 2 hours drive) and then to the boatyard and here we will be met by the 100 year-old wooden canoe (called a 'country boat') owned by Vinod and taken to his family home



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stay on Emerald Isle, an island of 400 homes. You can take it easy over the next few days - reading in the hammock, dangling your toes in the water, taking massages, and trying out the local tea shop.

Or - if you're feeling more active - you can take a motorboat to visit the fruit and vegetable market, the ancient Bhagawati temple or the local pottery factory; go cycling through the necklace of villages of Kuttanad; take evening walks or go bird watching through the paddy fields and homesteads; take fishing lessons; and learn to cook in the family kitchens.

Overnight: (3 nights), Emerald Isle homestay - warm family hospitality, courtyard gardens, hammock and nearby chai shop. The rice, pepper, coconut are all from Vinod's family farm. A quick count on our fingers, and we estimate that a stay at Emerald Isle directly supports the livelihood of over 15 families.

Day twelve

Houseboat, Kerala backwaters

From Emerald Isle we'll make our way to the house boat, one of Kerala's most luxurious forms of accommodation. Reclining on cushions and drifting through quiet canals, you'll pass through paddy fields grazed by ducks, floating markets, local toddy shops, temples and churches. Lunch, dinner and overnight stay is possible on board.

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

Day thirteen, fourteen and fifteen

Arakkal

We'll make our way to Arakkal homestay - just 300 meters from the sea. Arakkal is in a fishing village. You won't get luxury: the beaches are quiet and the rooms are small. But if you're craving authenticity, you will love it. At night, you can hear the waves on the beach when you sleep (it was raining when we were there and we slept outside under the porch listening to the rain and waves). On your way to the beach, you pass the boats and homes of local fishermen, and there's the opportunity to take fairly chaotic cycle rides through the village (though half the village may join you). Abbi and Mini are superb hosts and cooks. If you're lucky, you may be able to have an elephant ride.

Overnight: (3 nights), Arakkal homestay.

Note: *There are numerous options at Marari and if you want to upgrade to a more conventional beach resort, that also can be arranged.*



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Day sixteen

We'll take the two-hour drive to the airport for your departure back home.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Extension Trips

Mountain biking from Munnar to Periyar & Birding at Thattekkad while staying in a tented accommodation in the lowland forests.

Accommodation

If you're yearning authenticity, this is the tour for you. From the city of Kochi, to the mountains, backwaters and beaches, you'll stay in guest houses – such as Dewalokam, Emerald Isle and Arakkal – that are extensions of peoples' homes and farms. In such places the whole family – and many of the villagers - are involved in preparing home cooked food made specifically for you, or taking you on walks, boat rides, swimming, or village shopping expeditions.

It's not luxury – the beaches at the fishing village of Arakkal homestay are far from private or pristine. But you are immersed in the lives of Kerala fishermen and their families, and if you sleep under the porch at night, you will hear the waves crashing on the beach. There's the opportunity to take fairly chaotic cycle rides through the village (and half the village may join you) and Abbi and Mini are superb hosts and cooks. Welcome to the real Kerala

Seasons for Kerala backwaters

The best time to visit is from late October to April. 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.