

## Kerala Backwaters & Hill Stations

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**Country(ies):** India

**Tour type:** Small Group

**Transport:** A/C minivan/minibus, Houseboat

**Group size:** Min: 2 | Max: 12

**Days:** 9 days

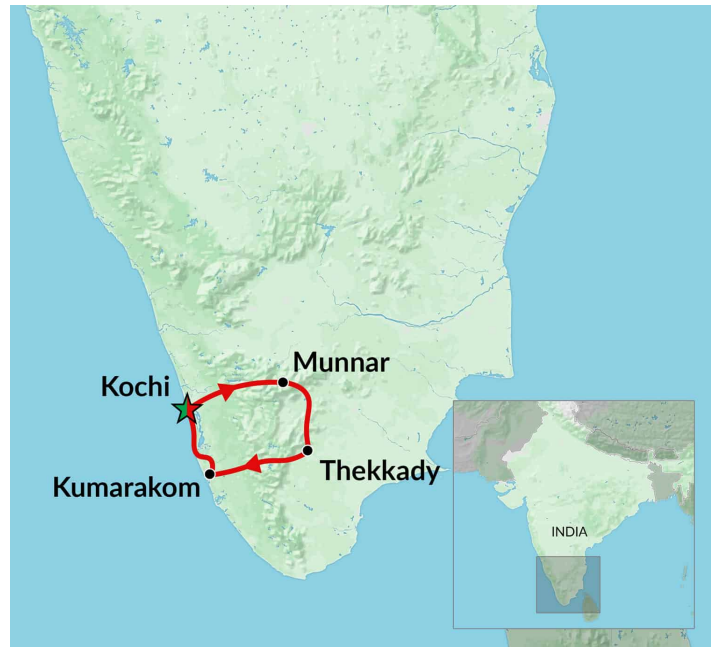
**Start Location:** Kochi, India

**End Location:** Kochi, India

**Meals:** Breakfasts - 8, Lunches - 1, Dinners - 1

**Highlights:**

Kochi, Tea Plantations of Munnar, Town of Thekkady, Periyar NP, Kumarakom Backwaters, Houseboat stay



# Itinerary

## Day 1: Welcome to Kochi. Transfer to your hotel.

Welcome to beautiful Kerala. You'll be met by a member of our local team, who will transfer you to your hotel. Once you're settled in, we'll run through the tour itinerary for the next few days, brief you on the local area and arrange a time to collect you and your fellow group members tomorrow.

**OVERNIGHT:** Kochi hotel

**MEALS:** None

**EXTRAS:** Extra day in Kochi - pre-tour Single room supplement (INSGKE)

## Day 2: Exploring captivating Kochi

Kochi (also known as Cochin) is a vibrant port city, with a fascinating blend of historic charm, modern energy, and coastal beauty which we'll explore today. On our tour of the city we'll make stops at the Synagogue, the spice market and the Dutch Palace which was built in 1555 by the Portuguese as a gift to the Raja of Kochi at the time. In 1663 the palace was captured by the Dutch but was later used as Royal Residence by the Rajas of Kochi for many more years. One sight which Kochi has become famous for are the scenes of the Chinese Fishing nets which add a unique charm to the Kochi waterfront. The origin of these nets being used in Kochi is still debated and whilst they are referred to as Chinese Fishing nets, there is actually no evidence of these nets having come from China. Some theories suggest these were introduced by the Portuguese.

Why not spend tonight at a Kathakali Dance performance. This is a unique art form, originating in Kerala which blends dance, drama, music and elaborate costumes to tell captivating stories.

**OVERNIGHT:** Kochi hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Kathakali Dance Performance - Kochi

## Day 3: Visit Pineapple and Rubber Plantations en-route to Munnar.

Our journey today takes us from the coastal city of Kochi to the beautiful hill-station of Munnar. While Munnar is known for tea plantations, the route between Kochi and Munnar takes us through a region known for the vast rubber plantations. You'll see row after row of tall, slender rubber trees and witness rubber tapping taking place, which involves making precise cuts into the tree's bark, allowing a milky white sap to drip into a collection cup. We'll also visit a pineapple plantation today.

In the winter months, when the rivers are full, we'll make a short de-tour to visit either Cheeyappara or Valara Waterfall.

We end our day in Munnar. Imagine rolling green hills covered in a perfect blanket of tea plants, crisp mountain air with a hint of spice, and mist swirling around the peaks – well that's Munnar. Munnar's cooler climate and scenic beauty have long made it a popular escape from the tropical heat of the lower regions.

**OVERNIGHT:** Munnar hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

## **EXTRAS:**

### **Day 4: Exploring the markets and tea plantations of Munnar**

Today is all about Munnar! We start exploring with a visit to the local market, located in the heart of town. As you enter the market you'll be greeted by a delightful mix of colors, aromas, and sounds. The air is thick with the scent of spices, fresh produce, and stalls selling vibrant fabrics. Your guide will give you a brief overview of the market and give you some free time to begin exploring at leisure. The market is known as being a treasure trove of fresh spices, but you'll also find stalls selling handicrafts, fruit/vegetables and even homemade chocolate - a Munnar speciality!

Next we'll visit one of the many tea-plantations which surround Munnar. You'll see vibrant green tea bushes, neatly trimmed into precise rows hugging the hillsides. You'll also likely see tea-pickers hard at work, moving swiftly between the tea-bushes, using their expert hands to pick the freshest of tea leaves. Next we'll learn about the processes involved in how these freshly picked leaves become the tea you're familiar with back at home. You'll see the trays on which the withering process takes place, before watching the rolling machines release the natural juices which aid the oxidation process which takes place next. Finally, you'll see the drying and packing where the leaves are sorted into different grades ready for sale. Our plantation visit ends with some tea tasting.

**OVERNIGHT:** Munnar hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

### **Day 5: Continue to Thekkady and take a boat ride in Periyar NP**

Leaving the green hills of Munnar, we'll drive to Periyar today. The route will take us through small towns and villages, past agricultural areas and of course, through the natural beauty which Kerala is famous for.

The town of Thekkady is known as the gateway to Periyar National Park which we'll see this afternoon as we take a boat ride on Lake Periyar, located in the heart of the national park. As the boat leaves the jetty area, you'll be rewarded with beautiful views of the immense lake, surrounded by lush green hillsides. The main reason for coming to Lake Periyar is for the wildlife which is in abundance in this area. An whilst we can't guarantee you'll see any specific animals, it's not uncommon to see Elephants along the lake shore, coming down for a drink or bathing in the water. Keep your binoculars on hand for sightings of water birds such as Herons, Egrets and Cormorants. Other mammals that can be found in the national park include Indian Bison, Deer, Wild Boar, Langurs and whilst it's rare, tigers have also been spotted on the lake shores. You have the remainder of the day free to explore the town of Thekkady.

**OVERNIGHT:** Thekkady hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

### **Day 6: Craft and backwaters of Kumarakom**

This morning we'll leave Periyar and head to the town of Kumarakom, synonymous with lush backwaters, a labyrinth of canals, lagoons, and lakes fringed by palm trees. This intricate, serene network of waterways is the heart of Kumarakom.

Once we reach Kumarakom we'll travel on the backwaters for around an hour, on board a Shikara. Shikaras are smaller, more traditional wooden boats, hand-paddled by skilled boatmen. With open sides and often a canopy for shade, they offer a closer, more intimate connection with the surrounding nature, before we board our larger houseboat tomorrow. We'll also explore the local village where we'll learn about some of the local crafts and industries which take place here, these include Coir Making (coir is the natural fibre extracted from coconut husks), Mat Weaving (often from the natural coir we've just learned about). We'll also learn about Toddy Tapping (this is process of extracting sap from specific types of palm trees to produce a mildly alcoholic drink called "toddy"), we'll also sample the cocount water which is often sold by the road. The remainder of the day is free, why not try a local Ayurvedic treatment which this region is famous for.

**OVERNIGHT:** Kumarakom hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## **Day 7: Board a houseboat and explore the Keralan Backwaters.**

A real highlight of any visit to Kerala is an overnight stay onboard one of the beautiful houseboats which this part of India has become known for. Kerala houseboats, known as Kettuvallams, are an incredible blend of tradition and modern comfort. Kettuvallams originally served as cargo boats, transporting rice and spices through the waterways. They were masterfully constructed without using a single nail, with planks of wood tied together using coir rope and coated with a protective resin made from cashew nut shells. Today's luxurious houseboats retain the traditional charm but incorporate modern amenities, transforming them into floating retreats.

Whilst the exact route the houseboat takes will be determined by local conditions at the time of your visit, a typical day onboard a houseboat is all about slow, peaceful rhythms and quiet immersion in nature. The captain will navigate the boat through the narrow waterways of the backwaters, keep your eyes peeled for vibrant kingfishers, graceful egrets, and water lilies blooming on the waters edge. We may make a stop at a local village which you can explore or you can try your hand at fishing with the rods which are available to hire onboard. As dusk approaches, the backwaters transform themselves into a painting of gold and orange. Find a perfect spot to witness the sun dip below the horizon, a truly unforgettable sight. You'll spend the night in your private en-suite cabin, lulled by the gentle symphony of crickets outside.

**OVERNIGHT:** Deluxe AC Houseboat

**MEALS:** Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

**EXTRAS:**

## **Day 8: Disembark and enjoy the Keralan beaches**

After a magical night on your houseboat, we'll enjoy breakfast onboard before returning to Kochi, where our Keralan adventure will come to an end tomorrow. We'll spend our final evening at a beach resort where you'll have time to relax after spending two exploring the best of India.

**OVERNIGHT:** Kochi beach hotel

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:**

## **Day 9: Bon Voyage! Transfer to Kochi Airport for departure.**

You have some free time to buy any gifts for your loved ones back home before we transfer you to the airport to catch your flight back home.

**OVERNIGHT:** N/A

**MEALS:** Breakfast

**EXTRAS:** Extra day in Kochi - post-tour

**Included:**

- All accommodation in mid-range hotels and heritage properties
- All transport and transfers in AC vehicles
- 24-hour airport arrival and departure transfer service
- Sightseeing tours and activities as per the itinerary
- See local industries with visits to Rubber, Pineapple and Tea Plantations
- Explore the markets and tea plantations of Munnar
- Take a boat ride on Lake Periyar and explore Thekkady Town
- See the local crafts and ride in a Shikara boat in Kumarakom
- Explore the beautiful backwaters of Kerala on a traditional houseboat
- Entrance Fees for included sightseeing
- Services of a local tour leader and specialist local guides
- Meals as indicated in the itinerary

**Excluded:**

- International flights (available on request)
- Visa fees
- Travel insurance (compulsory, available on request)
- Meals not indicated in the itinerary
- Drinks, snacks and other personal expenses (e.g. laundry)
- Tips for driver and/or tour guide
- Any other items not mentioned above

## Notes

**Similar tours:**

The following tours also feature this trip as part of an extended itinerary:

- [\*\*Best of India\*\*](#) - spends the first week exploring the famous Golden Triangle (Delhi, Agra and Jaipur) before flying south to Kerala
- [\*\*Southern India Uncovered\*\*](#) - spends 1 week exploring Tamil Nadu state, prior to heading to Kerala
- [\*\*Mumbai Express\*\*](#) - if you would also like to visit Mumbai, why not consider our Mumbai Express tour which can be booked to start on any date

# Options

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Our tours are designed to include all that you need to enjoy a really special time in the destination you're visiting. However, we do also offer some extra options to complement the tour and add some additional sightseeing or activities, or some extra time at either end of the tour.

All accommodation based options (e.g. Single supplements, extra nights, cruise upgrades) should be booked and paid for in advance so that we can make the appropriate arrangements. Other options may either be booked and paid for in advance or while you are on the tour, though we recommend booking in advance to ensure there are no issues with availability.

Many options are priced the same throughout the year, but some may incur single or high season supplements - full details are given on the tour reservation form or on request.

## Kathakali Dance Performance - Kochi

Min numbers: 1

Kathakali is a vibrant form of classical dance-drama that originated in Kerala, India, over 300 years ago. It's a captivating art form that combines storytelling, music, dance, elaborate costumes, and makeup to create a truly unique theatrical experience.

**Note:** Pricing for this option is based on a minimum of 2 travellers. Single traveller rates apply.

## Extra day in Kochi - pre-tour

Min numbers: 1

This option adds an extra day to the start of your tour, staying in the same hotel as the main tour itself (subject to availability). Your airport arrival transfer is still included. Prices shown are per person and based on two people sharing.

**Note:** Single room and peak season supplements apply.

## Extra day in Kochi - post-tour

Min numbers: 1

This option adds an extra day to the end of your tour, staying in the same hotel as the main tour itself (subject to availability). Your airport departure transfer is still included. Prices shown are per person and based on two people sharing.

**Note:** Single room and peak season supplements apply.

## Single room supplement (INSGKE)

Min numbers: 1

This tour is based on twin-share accommodation, with single bookers paired up with another traveller of the same sex in the group. If the final group make-up means that no room share is available, you do not need to pay this supplement. However, if you would like to guarantee yourself a single room throughout the tour, then please add this option to your booking.

**Note:** Single supplement prices may vary seasonally.

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## 1. Accommodation

We use good quality hotels rated at the Indian 3 to 5-star level on this tour along with a night onboard a traditional house boat. The houseboats we use on this tour are Deluxe Air Conditioned Houseboats with private en-suite cabins.

The specific hotels listed on our website are our preferred hotels for our small-group tours. However, these may be changed from time to time based on current availability and other logistics. In this event alternative hotels of a similar standard will be used. If you would like to guarantee any particular hotels for your trip, please contact us to request a tailor-made tour.

Accommodation is based on twin or double en-suite rooms with air conditioning. All couples will receive a private double room.

Please check the Single Room Supplement option for details on room sharing options and charges for solo travellers on this tour.

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## 2. Transport

Our trips feature a mix of different transport options. We want you to feel like you're really experiencing the country you're travelling through, but at the same time finish journeys refreshed enough to enjoy the next stage of the tour. Due to the somewhat chaotic nature of Indian roads, we only use private vehicles for all road journeys on this tour.

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## 3. Transfers

The tour price includes a 24-hour airport meet & assist service in Kochi airport, your arrival and departure airport-hotel transfers and all other transfers.

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## 4. Group Size/Tour Leaders/Guides

We are committed to being a small group operator, as we feel this gives everyone in the group the best chance to get to know their fellow travellers and to hear and make the most of their guide. There's no point in us providing great guides if you've got to peer over 30-40 shoulders to see them! So, we won't ever put you in a 50-seater coach with 49 other people and just one guide. Instead, we set our India small-group departures to have a maximum of 12 travellers. The minimum group size is 2.

In India we provide a fully trained, local English-speaking tour leader/driver to accompany our groups. On this tour they will accompany you throughout the whole loop from Kochi/Munnar/Thekkady/Kumarakom/Kochi. On groups of 4 or more, a guide will accompany you for the duration of the tour, for groups of 2 to 3, you will have a driver and local guides in each city.

At Encounters Travel we have a policy of aiming to use only local Indian guides and reps. We feel this gives you the best experience of the country and the sites you are seeing.

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## 5. Entrance Fees

The tour price includes the cost of entrance fees for all sightseeing included on this tour.

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## 6. Dates & Prices

We run small-group departures on our Indian tours throughout the year. All departures are guaranteed to run with a minimum of 2 travellers. Departure dates and prices are listed on our website (please check the website for up-to-date prices and special offers).

Private and tailor-made tours are available on any dates and may be adjusted to fit your personal requirements, available time and budget.

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**Note:** Please [download an up-to-date copy](#) of these tour notes shortly before you travel as itineraries and information does change from time to time.

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