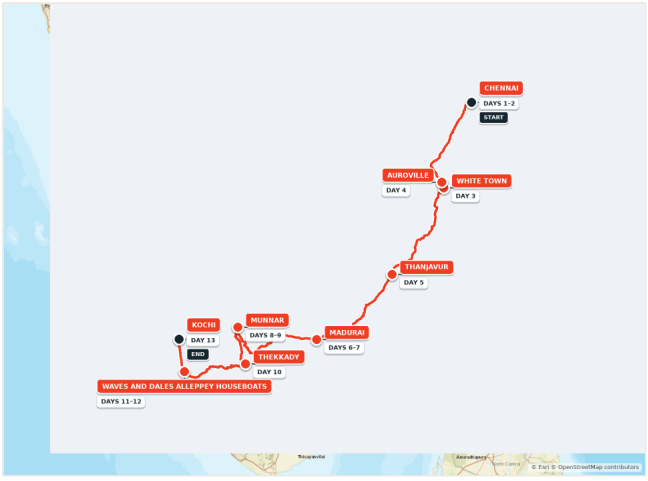
ENCOUNTERS TRAVEL

Your passport to adventure

Southern India Uncovered

COUNTRY(IES)	India
TOUR TYPE	Small Group
TRANSPORT	A/C minivan/minibus, houseboat
GROUP SIZE	Min: 2 | Max: 12
DURATION	13 days
STARTS	Chennai, India
ENDS	Kochi, India
MEALS	Breakfasts - 12, Lunches - 1, Dinners - 1

TOUR ROUTE MAP **13 Days**



ROUTE: **Chennai** (Start) → **White Town** → **Auroville** → **Thanjavur** → **Madurai** → **Munnar** → **Thekkady** → **Waves And Dales Alleppey Houseboats** → **Kochi** (End)

HIGHLIGHTS

Chennai, Mahabalipuram, Pondicherry French Quarter, Tanjore Brihadeshvara Temple, Ancient Madurai, Kochi, Tea Platations of Munnar, Town of Thekkady, Periyar NP, Kumarakom Backwaters, Houseboat stay

Itinerary

DAY 1 — Welcome to Chennai. Transfer to your hotel.

Land at Chennai Airport and travel to your hotel in the city. Once you have had time to settle in, attend a welcome briefing with the local team and receive useful information about the upcoming plans. Chennai's coastal location, busy streets and strong cultural identity provide the setting for the opening stage, while the briefing ensures you are prepared before travelling further through Tamil Nadu.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Chennai Airport to Chennai City Hotel**
  Meet your local representative on arrival and transfer from Chennai Airport to your hotel. Settle in and prepare for the start of your South India journey.
- **Welcome Briefing with Local Team in Chennai**
  Receive an introduction to your tour, covering the itinerary and practical information. This briefing helps you

settle into Chennai and understand what to expect in the coming days.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS	EXTRAS
Chennai hotel	None	Extra night in Chennai - pre-tour, Single room supplement (INSGTS)

DAY 2 Travel to Pondicherry via the UNESCO listed Mahabalipuram Temples

Travel from Chennai to Mahabalipuram and visit the town’s famous carved temples and monuments before continuing onwards to Pondicherry. The archaeological stop provides an introduction to Pallava history and South Indian stonework, while the later journey follows the coast into a very different urban setting. Once in Pondicherry, the remaining time is free for rest or independent exploration.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Chennai to Pondicherry via Mahabalipuram Temples**
  Travel south along the coastal road from Chennai toward Pondicherry. Enjoy changing scenery as you move from the city into quieter coastal landscapes.
- **Explore Mahabalipuram Temples**
  Explore the ancient rock-cut temples of Mahabalipuram, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Admire the Shore Temple, intricate carvings and remarkable monolithic structures shaped by Pallava artisans.
- **Free Time in Pondicherry**
  Arrive in Pondicherry and enjoy time at leisure to explore the town or relax at your hotel. The evening atmosphere makes a pleasant introduction to this coastal city.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Pondicherry hotel	Breakfast

DAY 3 Exploring picturesque Pondicherry

Spend time around Pondicherry’s French Quarter before visiting Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Manakula Vinayagar Temple. The combination provides insight into both the town’s colonial architecture and living religious traditions. Later, continue towards Promenade Beach and the waterfront, where the coastal setting offers a calmer finish after exploring the compact streets and sacred sites of central Pondicherry.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Pondicherry French Quarter (White Town)**
  Walk through the charming French Quarter, where tree-lined streets and colonial buildings create a distinctive ambience. This elegant district showcases Pondicherry's unique European influence.
- **Explore Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry**
  Visit the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, an important spiritual centre promoting mindful living and meditation. The

peaceful courtyard offers a serene environment to reflect and learn about its founders.

- **Explore Manakula Vinayagar Temple in Pondicherry**
  Discover this lively temple dedicated to Lord Ganesha, known for its colourful gopuram and active worship rituals. Observing the rhythm of local devotion provides insight into Tamil spiritual life.
- **Explore Promenade Beach in Pondicherry**
  Enjoy a coastal walk along Promenade Beach, a hub for evening life in Pondicherry. Take in sea views, fresh breezes and the iconic Gandhi Statue.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Pondicherry hotel	Breakfast

DAY 4 Learn about local culture and arts at the Mohanam Cultural Centre. Drive to Tanjore

Spend time at the Mohanam Cultural Centre near Auroville, where community-based cultural work provides an introduction to regional artistic traditions. Later, drive from Pondicherry to Tanjore, leaving the coast behind and travelling across the agricultural landscapes of Tamil Nadu. Arrival in Tanjore brings you into an area closely associated with Chola history, temples and classical South Indian culture.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Mohanam Cultural Centre in Auroville Region**
  Experience rural Tamil arts and cultural preservation at Mohanam Cultural Centre. Explore village traditions, creative workshops and enjoy a Tamil-style lunch served on banana leaves.
- **Drive from Pondicherry to Tanjore**
  Travel inland from Pondicherry to the historic city of Tanjore. The route passes through agricultural regions and traditional Tamil settlements.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Tanjore hotel	Breakfast

DAY 5 Visit the Brihadeeswarar Temple in Tanjore. Afternoon drive to Madurai

Spend time at Brihadeeswarar Temple before continuing by road from Tanjore to Madurai. The temple visit provides the main sightseeing focus and introduces important aspects of Chola architecture and devotional tradition. Once the visit is complete, travel south through Tamil Nadu and reach Madurai, where the next stage of the itinerary continues within one of the region’s major historic cities.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Brihadeeswarar Temple in Tanjore**
  Visit the monumental Brihadeeswarar Temple, a masterpiece of the Chola Empire. Its towering vimana,

precision stonework and immense Nandi statue reflect extraordinary craftsmanship.

- **Drive from Tanjore to Madurai**
  Continue south to Madurai, one of India's oldest continuously inhabited cities. Arrive and settle in before discovering its rich cultural background the next day.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Madurai hotel	Breakfast

DAY 6 Visiting the Old City of Madurai, Thirumalai Nayakkar Palace and spiritual aarti ceremony

Explore central Madurai on foot before visiting Thirumalai Nayakkar Palace and the Meenakshi Amman Temple. The old city provides context to daily life and long-standing commercial traditions, while the palace introduces the city’s royal history. The evening aarti at Meenakshi adds a living religious element and brings the day to a close within one of Tamil Nadu’s most important temple complexes.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Old City of Madurai**
  Explore Madurai's Old City, where narrow streets bustle with markets, flower stalls and traditional homes. The vibrant atmosphere offers a glimpse into daily Tamil life.
- **Explore Thirumalai Nayakkar Palace in Madurai**
  Admire the Indo-Saracenic architecture of Thirumalai Nayakkar Palace. Its grand courtyard and ornate pillars showcase the artistic sophistication of the Nayakkar dynasty.
- **Visit Meenakshi Amman Temple and Aarti Ceremony – Madurai**
  Visit the iconic Meenakshi Amman Temple, famed for its colourful gopurams and sacred chambers. In the evening, witness the aarti ceremony, an atmospheric ritual central to temple worship.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Madurai hotel	Breakfast

DAY 7 Head in to Kerala state and the tea growing region of Munnar

The drive from Madurai climbs through forested slopes and tea-growing country into the cooler highlands of Munnar in Kerala's Western Ghats. The change in elevation brings a noticeable shift in climate and scenery. Free time on arrival offers an opportunity to rest or explore the plantation town independently, providing a relaxed introduction to this distinctive hill-country setting.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Madurai to Munnar**
  Leave Tamil Nadu and travel into Kerala, climbing into the hills towards Munnar. The journey reveals changing

scenery as you move from plains to misty, tea-covered slopes.

- **Free Time in Munnar**
  Arrive in Munnar, a cool hill station surrounded by tea plantations. Enjoy free time to relax in the mountain air or take a gentle stroll near your hotel.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Munnar hotel	Breakfast

DAY 8 Exploring the markets and tea plantations of Munnar

Visit Munnar’s local market and see a more everyday side of the hill town before continuing to a tea estate and factory. The plantation visit provides a detailed look at cultivation and processing, while the surrounding terraced slopes show the scale of tea production across the region. Moving between the market and estate offers two complementary perspectives on Munnar’s community life and long-established agricultural identity.

ACTIVITIES

- **Explore Munnar Local Market**
  Explore Munnar's bustling local market filled with spices, produce and handicrafts. Enjoy free time to browse colorful stalls and shop for local goods.
- **Visit Munnar Tea Plantation and Factory Tour**
  Visit a tea plantation to see the neatly trimmed tea bushes covering the hills. Observe tea pickers at work among the vibrant green landscape.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Munnar hotel	Breakfast

DAY 9 Continue to Thekkady and take a boat ride in Periyar NP

The road from Munnar descends through the highlands into the forested landscapes around Thekkady and Periyar National Park. A boat ride on Lake Periyar provides an opportunity to experience the reserve from the water and look for wildlife along the shoreline. Free time afterwards allows for independent exploration of Thekkady and its relaxed, green surroundings.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Munnar to Thekkady**
  Drive from the cool tea hills of Munnar to Thekkady. Pass through small towns and scenic farmland along the way.
- **Boat Ride on Lake Periyar, Periyar National Park**
  Enjoy a boat ride on Lake Periyar surrounded by jungle-clad hills. Watch for wildlife including elephants, deer and water birds along the shoreline.

- **Free Time in Thekkady**
  Spend free time exploring Thekkady town and its spice shops. Enjoy the relaxed pace of this gateway to Periyar National Park.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Thekkady hotel	Breakfast

DAY 10

Craft and backwaters of Kumarakom

Travel from Thekkady to Kumarakom and move from upland scenery into Kerala’s backwater environment. After arrival, join a shikara ride through the canals before taking part in a village craft activity. The organised elements provide views of both the waterways and local traditions, while the remaining time is free, allowing you to rest or explore independently within the calm lakeside setting.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Thekkady to Kumarakom**
  Travel from Thekkady to the serene backwaters of Kumarakom. Arrive among palm-fringed waterways and tranquil lakeside scenery.
- **Shikara Boat Ride on Kumarakom Backwaters**
  Glide through narrow canals on a traditional Shikara boat. Enjoy close-up views of village life, coconut groves and calm backwater landscapes.
- **Village Craft Experience in Kumarakom**
  Visit local workshops to learn about coir making, mat weaving and toddy tapping. Discover the traditional crafts that support village livelihoods.
- **Free Time in Kumarakom**
  Relax among Kumarakom's peaceful backwaters or try an Ayurvedic treatment. The area is ideal for unwinding in nature.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Kumarakom hotel	Breakfast

DAY 11

Board a houseboat and explore the Keralan Backwaters.

Spend the day travelling through Kerala’s backwaters aboard a traditional houseboat, moving slowly past villages, farmland and palm-lined waterways. The cruise offers continuous views of local life along the banks and provides a calm contrast to road-based travel. Time on board is centred on the scenery and the character of the waterways, giving you an unhurried introduction to one of southern India’s most distinctive environments.

ACTIVITIES

- **Boarding Houseboat – Kerala Backwaters**
  Check in to a traditional Kettuvallam houseboat for an overnight backwater journey. Enjoy a slow-paced cruise through lagoons, canals and rivers.
- **Backwaters Cruise on Houseboat Experience**
  Cruise through Kerala's iconic waterways, observing birdlife and village life along the banks. Enjoy peaceful views and a spectacular backwater sunset.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Deluxe AC Houseboat	Breakfast,Lunch,Dinner

DAY 12 — Disembark and enjoy the Keralan beaches

Leave the houseboat and travel overland towards Kochi Beach, moving from inland waterways and village landscapes to the Arabian Sea coast. Once you reach the beach hotel, the remaining time is free with no organised activities. You can rest after the journey or explore the shoreline independently, making this a straightforward transfer followed by a relaxed period beside the sea.

ACTIVITIES

- **Disembarkation in Houseboat – Kerala Backwaters Jetty**
  After breakfast, disembark your houseboat at a local jetty. Say goodbye to the backwaters before driving back towards Kochi's coast.
- **Drive from Backwaters Jetty to Kochi Beach Hotel**
  Transfer from the backwaters jetty to your beach hotel near Kochi. Arrive at the seaside and get ready for a relaxed final evening.
- **Free Time in Kochi Beach**
  Enjoy leisure time at a coastal resort near Kochi. Unwind on the beach or explore the local area before your final day.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS
Kochi beach hotel	Breakfast

DAY 13 — Bon Voyage! Transfer to Kochi Airport for departure.

Transfer directly from your Kochi hotel to the airport and conclude the organised portion of your travels in Kerala. The drive provides a straightforward connection to your departure point without additional stops or activities. Once you reach the terminal, the tour comes to an end and you can proceed with your onward flight arrangements independently.

ACTIVITIES

- **Drive from Kochi Hotel to Kochi Airport**
  Transfer from your Kochi hotel to the airport for departure. Prepare for your onward journey after your Kerala adventure.
- **Tour Ends in Kochi**
  The tour concludes in Kochi after your airport transfer. Extra nights can be arranged if you wish to extend your stay.

OVERNIGHT	MEALS	EXTRAS
N/A	Breakfast	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
- The incredible Mahabalipuram shore temple
- Pondicherry French Quarter, Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Manakula Vinayagar Temple and Pondicherry beach
- Learn about the culture and arts of the region at the Mohanam Cultural Center
- Tanjore's awe-inspiring Brihadeeswarar Temple
- Ancient Madurai, Old Town tour, Meenakshi Amman Temple, Aarti Ceremony
- Explore the markets and tea plantastions 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, get a quote here)
- 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:

- **Temples and Spices** - follows the same itinerary but excludes the Kerala section of the tour. Instead, you will travel from Madurai to Chennai by train where the tour will come to an end.
- **Kerala Backwaters and Hill Stations** - this option excludes the first week in Tamil Nadu and starts/ends in Kochi, Kerala with the addition of 2 nights in Kochi and a city tour here.

Tour Options

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 - 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.

Extra night in Chennai - 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.

Kochi Sightseeing Tour

Min numbers: 1

If you'd like to explore the city of Kochi at the the end of your time in Southern India, you can opt for our Kochi City Tour.

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 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.

Note Pricing for this option is based on a minimum of 2 passengers travelling together. Should only 1 passenger select this option, single person rates will apply.

Important Notes

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.

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.

3 Transfers

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

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 5 or more, a guide will accompany you for the duration of the tour, for groups of 2 to 4, 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.

5 Entrance Fees

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

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.

7 Health and Vaccinations

You should ensure you are fully insured for medical emergencies including emergency evacuation and repatriation.

Recommended vaccinations and other health protection measures vary according to the country you are visiting and where you are travelling from. We recommend you contact your GP/medical practitioner or a travel clinic for current information on vaccinations needed for your destination. You should ensure that you are up to date with vaccines and boosters recommended for your normal life at home, including for example, vaccines required for occupational risk of exposure, lifestyle risks and underlying medical conditions. In addition, additional courses or boosters normally recommended for the countries in this region are:

India: Additional vaccinations: Diptheria, Hepatitis A, Tetanus, Typhoid. Malaria map. Yellow Fever certificate: Yellow fever rules for India are quite complicated and lengthy. Please read the WHO guidance.

Malaria: Vaccinations are not available against Malaria, which is a disease transmitted by mosquitoes that can be very serious and sometimes fatal. You should avoid mosquito bites by covering up bare skin with clothing such as long sleeves and long trousers and applying insect repellents to exposed skin. When necessary, sleep under a mosquito net. Mosquitoes are most active during and after sunset. You should consult with your GP/medical practitioner/travel clinic about the most appropriate malaria prophylactic medication to take for the regions you are visiting. In general the north eastern regions of India including Assam and Orissa are considered high risk,while the rest of India is generally considered low enough risk that anti-malarial tablets are not necessary for most travellers doing relatively short tours.

Yellow Fever: This disease is spread by infected mosquitoes that bite during the day. A Yellow Fever Certificate of vacinnation may be required as a condition of entry depending on which country you are arriving from, or that you have travelled or transitted through recently (including connecting flights with stopovers of over 12 hours). You can view this US CDC information about where the virus is present and follow the links to further information detailing which countries need you to have a Yellow Fever vaccination as part of their entry requirements. Please ensure you have this certificate with you and to hand if necessary.

Please inform us of any pre-existing conditions such as diabetes or asthma and any prescription medicine you may be taking. We also need to know about any food allergies or physical disabilities that you may have.

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8 What to take

Luggage: Suitcases are fine, though you may find rucksacks or large bags are more practical. You should also bring a small daypack/bag to take out during the day. Your main luggage will be left in the hotel during your sightseeing trips - you will not need to carry it far, and there are nearly always porters to assist.

Luggage allowances: Most international airlines restrict you to between 20kg and 23kg per person of luggage to go in the hold of the plane. Domestic flights often have smaller allowances around 15kg. As airline rules vary we recommend that you take no more than 20kg of luggage if your tour just includes international flights, and no more than 15kg if there are any domestic flights included in your itinerary. Please ask us for details if you are unsure about luggage allowances on your tour. Any excess baggage fees will be your responsibility to cover. Most airlines allow between 5kg and 10kg for hand luggage so we suggest that you take no more than 5kg unless you have confirmed that your airline(s) will allow more than this.

Clothing: The weather is mainly hot most of the year with significant variations from region to region. The coolest

weather lasts from around the end of November to the beginning of March, with fresh mornings and evenings, and mostly sunny days. The really hot weather, when it is dry, dusty and unpleasant, is between March and June. Monsoon rains occur in most regions in summer anywhere between June and early October.

NOTE: India is very traditional and some heads will turn if you dress provocatively in public. Short tops, short skirts / shorts, tight or body revealing clothes etc should be avoided. You might invite unwanted attention from certain men who stare and pass comments at women to amuse themselves. More detailed climate information is available on the India Country Guide page on our website.

Suggested List: This is a guide only - there's no problem if you bring more or less with you. Cheap comfortable clothing is also readily available in India and laundry is inexpensive. It is also worth having some smarter clothes for going out. Towels are provided and laundry services are available in all the hotels we use.

Men: Lightweight trousers, shorts, light shirts & t-shirts, Swimwear

Women: Light cotton skirts/dressers, loose-fitting trousers, light shirts or t-shirts, loose shorts, Swimwear

Men & Women: Jumper/sweatshirt/fleece, Long sleeved shirt(s) (for cool nights, protection from the sun & mosquitoes, and visits to religious sites etc), Handkerchiefs, socks & underwear, Comfortable trainers/sandals for daily wear, Other shoes/sandals for evening wear, Sunhat or headscarf (headscarfs come in handy for some sights which require women to cover their heard)

First Aid: Although First Aid and medication is readily available in India, it may be very different to what you are used to so individuals should consider bringing along their own personal kit. Your personal kit might include: Sunscreen, sunblock & aftersun, Insect repellent/relief, Antiseptic cream/spray, Plasters and a bandage, Lomotil or Imodium against diarrhea, Pills against nausea, Aspirin for heat-stroke (or hangovers) Your kit should also include your brief medical history, including allergies, blood group, drug vaccinations etc. We suggest bringing copies of prescriptions if you will be carrying medicines on board your flight.

Toiletries: Razor, soap & box, shampoo, Toothpaste, toothbrush & container, Sanitary items
Note: If you wear contact lenses, you should consider taking or wearing glasses instead, as lenses can be uncomfortable and/or cause infections in hot and humid climates.

Other useful items: Sunglasses, Small Torch, Money belt, Camera and equipment, Toilet paper (this is not always provided in public toilets so it is a good idea to carry some spare tissues in your bag. It should be placed in the basket beside the toilet, not flushed away, for you might block the pipes).

IMPORTANT: As it can get extremely hot in India, and the sun can burn very quickly, it is very important to ensure you are protected from the sun with sun-cream & sun-hats, and do not get dehydrated.

9 Money

Rupee (INR; symbol Rs) = 100 paise. Notes are in denominations of Rs 2,000, 1000, 500, 200, 50, 20, 10 and 1 Coins are in denominations of Rs 10, 5, 2 and 1, and 50 paise (Rs 0.5). Note: The import and export of local currency is prohibited. Sometimes smaller vendors will not take bills larger than Rs 500. It is best to carry a range of rupee notes if you are shopping at bazaars and local markets.

Note: You must present your passport whenever you change currency or travellers cheques. Commission for foreign exchange is becoming increasingly rare; if it is charged, the fee is nominal.

Credit cards: In major cities, the full cadre of banks cards are generally accepted including debit cards, American Express, Diners Club, MasterCard and Visa. However, in smaller towns and villages, choice is generally narrowed to cash or MasterCard and Visa.

ATM: 24 hour ATM machines can be found in all the major cities and most large towns. Visa, MasterCard, Cirrus, Maestro and Plus are amongst the most commonly accepted cards.

Travellers cheques: These are gradually getting less accepted but may still be changed at larger banks and some larger hotels. The most widely accepted currencies include US Dollars and Pounds Sterling. Some banks may refuse to change certain brands of traveller's cheques whilst others may exchange quite happily.

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10 Booking & Payment

If you would like to book a place on this tour, please complete the online reservation form on our website (via the Dates & Prices tab on the tour page). You may make a deposit or full payment online, or just hold a reservation if you prefer (full payments are due 8 weeks before departure). We will then contact you with more details about how to complete your booking. Payments may be made by debit or credit card (subject to a card processing fee), or by making a bank transfer, or posting us a cheque/bank draft. Full details will be provided in your booking confirmation email. Please contact us if you would like any more information or have any questions before making a booking.

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11 Financial Security

We are a UK registered company and are committed to providing our customers with financial protection to provide peace of mind and to allow you to book with confidence.
We have therefore partnered with Trust My Travel Ltd., which provides financial protection services to over 2000 partners around the world. Funds paid to us by our customers are protected via an Insurance policy held by Trust My Travel. Each traveller and the description of services sold is declared against Trust My Travel’s insurance policy directly against our financial failure. In the event of our insolvency, you will be refunded for any unfulfilled products and/or repatriation to the UK (where applicable). Please see our website or booking conditions for more information.

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12 Responsible Tourism

It is impossible not to have an impact on the local environment, cultures and eco-systems when you travel. However, it is very possible to try and ensure that these impacts are as limited, or positive as possible. We are committed to ensuring that we try to leave our host countries in a better state than we found them and encourage and assist our travellers to help us with this.

The following are a few simple tips that require very little effort on your part but which will help ensure that any effect you have on the locations you visit is positive rather than negative.

- Don't prejudge: Things in different countries will almost certainly be different. That doesn't make them worse or inferior, just different.
- Communicate: Don't expect locals to speak your language. Take the trouble to learn a few words or phrases of the local language. Don't worry about sounding silly. Most locals are patient and accommodating and appreciate you making the effort to communicate in their language.
- Conserve energy: Be careful not to waste valuable resources. Use local resources sparingly. Switch off lights, air-conditioning and fans when you leave the hotel room and don't waste water. Remove superfluous packaging. Many countries have far less efficient waste disposal systems than ours. Remove packaging from newly acquired items before leaving home.
- Don't litter: No matter how untidy or dirty the country you're travelling in may look to you, avoid littering, as there is no need to add to the environment's stress. Many of the countries we visit have a tough challenge dealing with rubbish and waste. Please consider taking home as much plastic waste as you can (e.g. water bottles).
- Choose environmentally friendly products: By using environmentally friendly (bio degradable) sun creams, shampoos and detergents you can help reduce pollution.
- Respect local customs and traditions: As you are a guest in these countries, you should also comply with the local customs. If you are friendly and well mannered, the locals will reciprocate and it will only enhance your experience. It's important to follow dress and behaviour guidelines especially when visiting religious or sacred sites (your tour leader will advise you how best to do this).
- If a client commits an illegal act the client may be excluded from the tour and Encounters Travel shall cease to have responsibility to/for them. No refund will be given for any unused services.

All porters are employed and equipped following guidelines set by the International Porter Protection Group (IPPG).

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13 Follow Us Online

You can stay in touch with us online by following us on Facebook and Twitter. We post updates on relevant travel news in our destination countries, special offers and discounts and other interesting travel related news and information.

www.facebook.com/encounterstravel

https://x.com/encounterstravl (yes, without the 'e')

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14 Travel Insurance

Travel insurance is compulsory on all of our tours and needs to cover personal accident & liability, medical expenses and repatriation, travel delay & abandonment. We also strongly recommend that you take out cover against cancellation and lost/stolen baggage. Personal medical insurance does not normally provide sufficient cover and is generally not suitable for travel on our tours. You will not be able to join your tour if you have not provided us with details of your insurance or if you arrive without cover in place (no refunds will be due in this event).

Considering travel insurance for your trip? World Nomads Travel Insurance offers coverage for more than 150 adventure activities as well as emergency medical, lost luggage, trip cancellation and more.

If your tour includes car hire, or if you plan to arrange a hot air balloon flight locally or do some scuba diving during your tour, you should check the small print in your policy to make sure these are covered (these are covered in our policy). Please also check the maximum altitude that you will be reaching and that full cover including emergency evacuation is provided up to this altitude.

If you are taking expensive camera gear or other electronic equipment with you then please check the coverage and the fine print of your policy to ensure that you have sufficient cover.

IMPORTANT: We must have your travel insurance details (policy number and type of insurance) before you depart or you may not be allowed to join the tour. If you haven't told us already, please let us know the details when you can. You should take a paper copy of your insurance policy with you as you may be asked to show this at the start of the tour.

Covid-19

Before purchasing any travel insurance, please check the coverage provided for situations related to Covid-19, and for the rules about government travel advice. Your normal policy may not be suitable.

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15 Before you travel

It is important when considering and preparing to travel anywhere in the world that you have a good understanding of the country you are visiting, its laws and customs, and the possible risks and situations that may occur. This includes specific risks related to your itinerary (eg. does it involve water & can you swim, are you fit enough for the activities included), as well as more general risks such as terrorism and natural disasters.

General details and links to more information about health risks, visa requirements, money, and travel insurance are given in these tour notes. We recommend that you re-read all these before your departure as well as the small print of your travel insurance policy so you know exactly what is covered and what is not.

You should take copies of your important travel documents with you and ideally also store them online securely as a backup. Make sure that you have given us your emergency contact details and told that person where and when you are travelling. Ensure you take enough money with you and that you have access to emergency funds.

Finally, you should read through and stay updated with the current official government travel advice for your destination. We are registered partners with the UK Foreign Office's 'Travel Aware' campaign which provides further useful and invaluable information.

travel aware
gov.uk/travelaware

16 Reduce Plastic Waste with Water-to-Go Filter bottles

Traveling responsibly means minimizing plastic waste, but staying hydrated on the go is essential. At Encounters Travel we are committed to reducing single-use plastics, which is why we've partnered with Water-to-Go. Their portable filtration system removes over 99.9% of contaminants from any non-saltwater source, turning even questionable water sources into safe drinking water.

Given that tap water is un-safe to drink in many of the countries in which we operate, we recommend purchasing a Water-to-Go bottle prior to departure. This will help you avoid the use of single use plastic bottles and keep you hydrated on the go.

Save big! Get a huge 25% off your Water-to-Go bottle and other Water-to-Go products (such as filters, lids, and carriers). Use code **ENCOUNTERS25** at checkout (valid in the UK, USA and Canada).

How Water-to-Go Technology works:

- Their reusable, BPA free water bottles contain their own unique 3-in-1 filtration technology effectively providing clean safe drinking water from any non-salt water source around the world.
- Three different (1 traditional and 2 nano) technologies are combined in one filter cartridge to remove up to 99.9999% of microbiological contaminants in water.

The three technologies used in a Water-to-Go filter are:

- Mechanical filtration – A tiny pore size, so small contaminants can’t fit through.
- Electrical – A positive charge reduces the pore size even further and attracts contaminants like a magnet, trapping them inside the filter.
- Activated Carbon – Unlike most carbon based filters, instead of using adhesives to glue the carbon particles together, (which vastly reduces the carbon’s efficiency) it is contained within the membrane, helping to reduce contaminants whilst eliminating bad tastes and odours. Try filtering water from your tap at home and taste the difference!

Water-to-Go filter bottles deliver safe, healthy water worldwide

- Water-to-Go filters remove bacteria, viruses, waterborne disease, protozoa, heavy metals such as lead as well as harmful chemicals.
- Their filters remove Chlorine and Fluoride from tap water.
- The filter will eliminate harmful contaminants from the water but allow beneficial minerals such as sodium and magnesium to pass through leaving you with the healthiest water possible.
- Water-to-Go filters have been independently tested against internationally recognised standards by industry specialists including The London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine (UK), BCS Laboratories (USA), Bangalore Test House (India) and IMI (China).

Use Water-to-Go products and you'll be healthier, wealthier and helping to make the world a better place!

- Depending on filter size, each Water-to-Go filter is able to replace 260 or 400 single-use plastic water bottles!
- They ensure you have access to safe water anywhere in the world without ever having to buy environmentally damaging bottled water.
- Their water bottles deliver safe, clean drinking water at just 5p per litre.
- The filter membrane is biodegradable and the shrouds are recyclable.
- The water bottles are used and approved by everyone from backpackers to commuters, gym users to expecting mums. Perfect for everyday, outdoor and travel.

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17 Private & Tailor-made Tours

While our group departures offer a fantastic way to explore with like-minded travellers, we understand that some guests prefer a more exclusive experience. Most of our group tours can be booked on a private basis, allowing you to enjoy the same expert-led routes with your own dedicated party. The primary advantage of choosing a private arrangement is the flexibility it provides; we can easily customise the itinerary to include your preferred style of accommodation or adjust the pace to suit your needs. Private tours can be run on the same start days as our group tours, or on other dates. However, some activities within our trips are restricted to particular days of the week - we will advise you on anything like this that we need to work around. Pricing will be based on the number of travellers in your party, and any customisations you may like to make.

For those seeking something truly unique, our specialist sales team is available to collaborate with you on a completely tailor-made tour, designed from the ground up to match your specific interests, accommodation level and requirements.

To request a quotation for a private or tailor-made tour, please contact us.

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18 International Flights

We want to give you as much flexibility as possible when it comes to booking your holiday with us. So, to take account of people with varying travel plans, we don't include your international flights in the main tour price. We are however very happy to suggest flights to go with the tour. Please contact us with your preferred dates and departure airport and we'll give you a selection of airlines, times and fares to choose from.

Your airport arrival & departure transfers are included on the first and last days of the tour. Most of our Indian tours start and finish at Delhi airport (DEL).

We do also sometimes advertise flight inclusive packages from selected airports. Where these are shown on our website, prices are correct at the time of quoting, but are subject to continued availability of the fare used. Prices will be reconfirmed at the time of booking, and we will also provide the flight times and airline details before tickets are issued.

Flight inclusive prices are based on the cheapest Economy ticket class available which is generally non-refundable and non-changeable unless the flight is cancelled for reasons such as Covid-19, in which case the airlines are more

flexible. More flexible ticket options, as well as Premium Economy and Business Class tickets are available on request for an additional supplement. Any changes made to flight inclusive bookings will be subject to the airline rules on your ticket.

Flight CO2 Emissions:

Traveling by air is an amazing way to explore the world, but flights also contribute to carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions that impact the environment. By considering the airline's CO2 emissions when you choose your flight, you can help minimize your travel footprint.

When selecting your international flights and airline, we do therefore recommend that you try and also take into account the flight CO2 emissions. Some airlines and flight search websites (eg. Google Flights, Skyscanner) do publish this information, so you can compare between your flight options and make an informed decision. Thankfully, many airlines are working towards sustainability efforts, and choosing a greener option allows you to contribute to positive change while still enjoying your incredible adventure.

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19 Tipping - India

Haggling is a traditional necessity, so its wise not to pay too much regard to initial prices. Instead fix an items value in your mind then negotiate towards it unhurriedly and don't be afraid to simply walk away if the price isn't right. Once you have offered a price though, you should be prepared to pay it as you may cause offence if you then back out.

While an accepted part of the culture and customs in India, tipping is always optional, and the amounts paid should reflect excellent service. We are often asked for advice on common amounts, and for assistance with tipping. Some suggested guidelines are given below.

Restaurants and taxis: Local markets and basic restaurants - leave the loose change. More up-market restaurants we suggest 5% to 10% of your bill.

Local guides: Throughout your trip you may at times have a local guide in addition to your tour guide. We suggest USD 5-10 per person per day for local guides.

Drivers: You may have a range of private drivers on your trip. Some may be with you for a short journey while others may be with you for several days. We would suggest a higher tip for those more involved with the group, for example if you don't have an extra accompanying guide. However USD 3-6 per person per day is generally appropriate.

Tour Guides: To answer your next question. . . as a guideline for tour guides who accompany you on the entire tour, we suggest you allow around USD 5-10 per person per day, but ultimately, as with all the tipping descrbed above, its up to your satisfaction with their service and your personal budget. You should not feel pressured to tip any particular amount.

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20 Passports and Visas - India

Your passport expiry date must be at least 6 months after your time in India finishes. Do not bring a full or almost expired passport. You must also have a machine-readable passport or you may be denied entry. If you have an old-

style manually issued passport you will need to replace this with a new machine-readable passport before you travel.

Most nationalities (including UK, USA, European, Australian, Canadian) will need to arrange their Indian tourist visa in advance. A new online e-visa system is available which makes the process more straightforward than before. You can make your application online at indiavisaonline.

Visa requirements for India can and do change regularly and we suggest that you arrange your Indian visa early and re-check your specific visa requirements prior to travel for any changes.

21 Voltage

In Nepal, India and Sri Lanka, sockets are mainly two round pronged and 230 volts (Type C,D,M). In Bhutan a range of different sockets can be found, including two and three round pronged and three flat pronged (Type D,F,G).

Universal adaptors are available in most airport shops if you don't have one already. Standard UK-European adapters will work fine, though sometimes they may feel a little loose in the sockets. All hotel rooms have electrical sockets where you can re-charge cameras, phones etc. Hair dryers are sometimes available on request from the hotel reception if not in your room already but cannot be guaranteed.
If you have US appliances (110 volts) you will need a voltage converter as well as a plug adapter.

22 Time

The time in India and Sri Lanka is GMT plus 5 1/2 hours.

The time in Nepal is GMT plus 5 3/4 hours.

The time in Bhutan is GMT plus 6 hours.

The time in Tibet is GMT plus 8 hours.

Daylight saving adjustments are not applied.