

Kerala Homestay - 8 days

go guide

don't leave home without it



Combining historic Kochi, the virgin hills of the Western Ghats amongst rubber, pepper and coconut plantations, Alleppey and the lush Keralan Backwaters. In eight sun-filled days feast upon the amazing natural wonders, wildlife, beauty and diversity of stunning Kerala - God's own country.

WHAT YOU SEE AND WHAT YOU GET

Trip Highlights

- Kochi - Parsi Synagogue, Dutch Palace, St Francis Church, Fort Cochin
- Coastal Alleppey
- Kottamangalam - spice plantation
- Cruising the palm fringed Kerala backwaters
- Thykattusserry - rural village

What's Included

- 6 nights homestay at a colonial plantation bungalow and 1 night - traditional rice-boat
- 7 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 2 dinners
- Guided sightseeing in Kochi
- Return transfer from Kochi
- Touring and excursions as per itinerary in chauffeur driven vehicle
- Local English speaking specialist guides at local sights
- Entrance fees to all sites included in the itinerary

What's Not Included

- International flights and visas
- Laundry, drinks, items of a personal nature
- Tipping - an entirely personal gesture

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1 : Kochi

Welcome to India and the start of your holiday! Arrive Kochi. Transfer to your hotel, about a one hour drive from the airport. Free time to relax.

In the evening enjoy a Kathakali dance performance, the traditional dance-form of Kerala. It is best to arrive early to see make-up being put on by the artists. The most popular and sacred dance-drama of Kerala, Kathakali evolved across the last 400 years. This classical dance requires lengthy and rigorous training to attain complete control of the body and sensitivity to emotion so as to be able to render all its nuances through facial expressions and hand gestures. Themes centre on the two great Indian epics - the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. **Overnight - Kochi**

Day 2 : Kochi



Kochi. Formerly a princely state, Kochi is also fondly referred to as "The Queen of the Arabian Sea". This morning enjoy a sightseeing tour of the town. Its beautiful lagoons, lakes and greenery offer a lovely setting for your stay. Long famed in the history books, Kochi (formerly known as Cochin) offered refuge to Jews more than 2,500 years ago. Be on the lookout for the Pardesi Synagogue built in 1568 and street signs indicating Jew Town (Descendants of those Jews remain in the region). Jew Town is home to a number of craft and antique stores.

The Portuguese founded the first European colony in Kochi in the 16th century, and their influence can still be detected. The Dutch quickly followed

and eventually, the British. The cosmopolitan mix of cultures makes the city fascinating. See the tombstone marking the original burial place of Vasco da Gama (his remains were later sent to Portugal) at St. Francis Church, and visit some of the city's other churches, temples and mosques. Two academies teach and give demonstrations of Kalaripayattu, believed to be one of the oldest martial art and you can see these demonstrations daily.

The afternoon is at leisure. If interested in shopping for rosewood, shell handicrafts or spices, go to Mahatma Gandhi Road. This evening enjoy a sunset cruise to see Chinese fishing nets. At the entrance of Cochin Harbour, Chinese fishing nets are a fascinating sight. Built of teakwood, these nets were erected between 1350 and 1450 AD. They are mainly used at high tide, requiring at least four men to operate their system of counterweights. The nets are lowered into the water by the crane like structure and raised a few minutes later. **Overnight - Kochi (B)**

Day 3 : Thykattusserry

Kochi - Thykattusserry. This morning drive to a small rural village called Thykattusserry being midway between Kochi and Alleppey. World's apart from the hustle and bustle of India's larger towns and cities, this charming village provides a fascinating insight into rural Indian life. The population comprises of people from different communities who live in harmony doing their daily chores like fishing and farming. At the homestay you'll be guaranteed a warm welcome, as you're showered with hospitality by the owners and made to feel like one of the family and in the kitchen you can learn about local cuisine. **Overnight - Thykattusserry (in the Alleppey District) (B, L, D)**

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Day 4 : Houseboat on the backwaters



Thykatusserry - Backwaters - Kottamangalam. This morning, board a simply furnished private rice-boat for a journey through the backwaters in and around Alleppey. There are 29 major lakes in the backwater system but this area is being reduced dramatically by land reclamation. Water hyacinth is clogging up a number of canals and a combination of pollution and destructive fishing is responsible for the extinction of mangroves, crocodiles and migratory fish.

Similar to punting in Cambridge, the crew propel the boat through the water using tall bamboo poles! The rice-boat is a simply furnished craft and consists of a thatched covered lounge cum dining area, sleeping accommodation (with mosquito net) and a bathroom with a WC and washbasin. In the evening the boat is lit by hurricane lamps. Thatched awning on both sides of the boat allows the breeze and views to flow in. There is a small service area at the rear of the craft where the cook prepares simple meals using as many fresh provisions as can be plucked, caught or bought in the backwaters. A distance of some 20 kms will be covered, during which time the boat will glide past colourful local villages.

Chugging slowly on rice-boats through the shallow, palm-fringed waters visitors see a part of Kerala society that revolves around fishing and the processing of coir (coconut fibre), copra (dried coconut meat) and cashews. Families live on impossibly narrow strips of land, somehow managing to raise cows, pigs, chickens and ducks and cultivate small vegetable gardens. Residents paddle rapier thin canoes hewn from trunks of the jackfruit tree across the water to sell groceries and deliver rice hay. **Overnight - Houseboat (B, L, D)**

Day 5 : Kottamangalam

Disembark from the rice-boat at Alleppey then drive to Kottamangalam and transfer to a plantation homestay (approximately 2 hour drive). Relax, unwind and find out about spices - vanilla, pepper, nutmeg, cloves and more. **Overnight - Kottamangalam (B)**

Day 6 : Kottamangalam



Relax in the cool ambience of the homestay or join us for an optional tour to visit the Kodanad elephant rescue centre. **Overnight - Kottamangalam (B)**

Day 7 : Optional visit to Dr. Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary

Spend your day at leisure or there is also an optional tour to Dr. Salim Ali Bird Sanctuary, one of the best in Asia. More than 80% of birds found in Kerala can be seen here. **Overnight - Kottamangalam (B)**

Day 8 : Kochi

Kottayam - Kochi. Drive back to Kochi and onward transfer to the airport for your international flight. (B)

Tipping

Tipping is much a part of Indian Culture. For a job well done we would suggest that you reserve the following amount per person per day to cover tips along the way.

- INR400 (USD\$8.50) if the day includes local guide & sightseeing
- INR200 (USD\$4.50) if the day excludes local guide & sightseeing

Fabulous Food

India's vast range of climates, cultures and peoples has produced a very diverse culinary repertoire. Curry is the word that springs to mind when people think of India food. Believe it or not, there is no such thing as 'curry' in India. It's an English invention, an all-purpose term to cover the whole gamut of Indian spicing. Although all Indian food is certainly not curry, this is the basis of Indian cuisine. Curry doesn't have to be that hot it'll blow your head, although it can be made that way, if you ask! Rather, for the most part Indian food is very, very aromatic, since the spices used by Indian chefs and cooks in India don't arrive in the cooking pot via a pre-packed tub of spice.

Indian chefs and cooks have about 25 spices on their regular list and it is from these that they produce the curry flavour.

Normally spices are freshly ground with a pestle and mortar, and blended in certain combinations to produce varying flavours and heat. It is the freshness of the spices that transform the dish. Curries can be vegetable, meat-lamb, mutton or chicken in content, though never beef. The cow is

sacred to the Hindu people and India in general, so it is extremely rare to see beef on any menu across the country. Lamb also substitutes beef at McDonalds in India. Ask for a Maharajah Mac!

Thalis

Thalis are an all-purpose Indian dish offering a variety of curried vegetable dishes, relishes, poppadams, puris or chapatis and a mountain of rice. Often served on a metal tray with a number of small bowls known as katoris holding each dish or just small indentations moulded into the metal tray, Thalis are consistently tasty and cheap.

Our Environment

Preserving the natural state and beauty of the areas we pass through is essential. In helping to preserve the historical and religious legacy of India; it's coastlines and waterways, local cultures, flora and fauna, please read on and see how you can do your bit. Please respect the following;

- Take no relic from historical sites with you, be it a small chunk of fluted marble, stonework or carving.
- Dress appropriately if entering a place of worship such as a Hindu temple. Show respect for the sacred beliefs of others.
- Stick to designated paths. Erosion is a problem on hill and mountainsides, especially at high altitudes.
- Avoid removing or disturbing any plant life that keeps topsoils in place.
- Do not engage in hunting or the purchase of trophies of endangered species. It's illegal in India's parks and sanctuaries, and to import the

hide of an endangered species is also illegal.

- Take all personal litter with you.
- Toilet Paper and tissue should be disposed of in a bin, to avoid blocking sometimes temperamental plumbing systems.
- If needing to perform your ablutions beyond the confines of a WC, be sure to bury any waste.

on the go promotes the recruitment, training and employment of local people in tourism. As well as benefiting the local people, on the go believes this fosters national pride in India's illustrious history. Understanding today ensures the preservation of India for tomorrow.

If looking to offer donations or gifts to local people – in particular children, please do so discreetly and without show. Despite generous acts of goodwill, people still like to retain their dignity. Useful gifts to consider include educational items such as English language books (English is taught in many schools), chalks, pens, paper, balls and small items reflecting where you are from.

Secular India

India, despite being a secular state, harbours arguably the world's richest heritage of spirituality and religious experience. India's major religion, Hinduism is practised by more than 80% of the population. In numbers, that translates to in excess of 700 million people.



No definition of Hinduism truly justifies the true meaning and significance of Hinduism. Hinduism has many layers. Hinduism is not just a religion but a complex body of social, cultural, religious beliefs and practises evolved in and largely confined to the Indian subcontinent. Hinduism is marked by a caste system, an outlook tending to view all forms and theories as aspects of one eternal being and truth, and the practice of the way of works, the way of knowledge, or the way of devotion as a means of release from the round of rebirths. It is not based upon a single scripture or the teachings of one prophet. It has no founder, central authority or hierarchy. You can't be converted; to be a Hindu you must be born one. The strictly orthodox maintain only a person born in India of Hindu parents can truly claim to be Hindu.

Hinduism has the largest number of adherents of any religion in Asia. Along with Buddhism, Jainism and Zoroastrianism, it is one of the oldest extant religions with roots extending back to 1000BC. Buddhism and Jainism arose around the same time as one another in the 6th century BC at a time of social and religious discontent. Both were reactions against the strictures of Brahminical Hinduism. Although more recent, Sikhism too has its roots in a protest movement in the late 15th century, the bhakti (devotional tradition) that started in southern India as a reaction against the caste system and Brahmin domination of ritual. It was conceived at a time of great social upheaval and was an attempt to fuse the best of Islam and Hinduism.

Today, there are some 16 million Sikhs in India, mostly from Punjab. The Golden Temple in Amritsar is the holiest shrine of Sikhism. Islam was introduced to the north by invading armies (in the 16th century the Mughal empire controlled much of India) and to the south by Arab traders.

Today, Islam is the largest minority religion in the country with in excess of 100 million adherents. Christianity arrived in southern India not with the first Europeans but with Syrian immigrants in the 4th century. A sect of the Syrian Orthodox church was established and still survives today, along with other eastern Orthodox sects. Catholicism arrived with the Portuguese and Protestantism with the English and Dutch. Today, India has around 18 million Christians, of who around 75% are South Indian.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Climate

India has a three-season year known as the hot, the wet and the cool. The best time to visit is between late September and April when temperatures are cooler and therefore ideal for sightseeing. In the summer months of May to July it is less crowded and conditions are perfect for sightseeing and photography, although parts of India are extremely hot. July signals the start of the monsoon or wet season that continues until early or mid September. Although the weather is humid, the days are punctuated by intermittent rainfall and the monsoon

is India is actually quite spectacular and quite refreshing.

Health Requirements

It is recommended that you be vaccinated for Tetanus and Polio, if you haven't had a booster in the last ten years. Food and waterborne diseases are more common, so we recommend vaccinations for Typhoid (valid 3 years) and Hepatitis A (validity varies). You are also advised to take anti-Malarial medication.

Currency

The Indian Rupees (INR) is non-exportable and only available in India. Pounds Sterling, US Dollars and Euros are easily exchanged upon arrival at any major bank or your hotel. ATM's are also available in all major towns and cities.

If planning on using your ATM card whilst in India, please let your bank know of your travel plans prior to departure to avoid your bank assuming that the transaction is fraudulent and blocking your card. Exchange rates are subject to fluctuation.

USD 1 = INR 45
GBP 1 = INR 75
EURO 1 = INR 65
AUD 1 = INR 47

Time

India is 5 hours 30 mins ahead of GMT.

Essential Packing

- A small daypack for your day-to-day needs.
- A photocopy of your passport data pages.
- The voltage in India is 230-240V. Most outlets in India accept round 3 pin plugs (not a UK, European or USA plugs). You should pack a Universal Adaptor and check that it is suitable for India.
- Insect repellent to guard against pesky mosquitos
- Spare camera batteries/memory card so you can go snap happy.
- Consider packing some pencils, pens or modest educational supplies that can be given to village schools or street children.
- If you fancy a tippie, take advantage of Duty Free buys.
- Buy some Indian Rupees at the airport on arrival.
- Buy a phrasebook and practice your holiday Hindi.
- Keep a supply of small notes for local transactions.

Holiday Money

Funds collected in India for entrance fees and tip kitty (if applicable to your holiday) or optional excursion that you may wish to participate in are payable in local currency (INR).

Pre-Tour Accommodation

If arriving on day 1 of a holiday, that includes an airport arrival transfer (as indicated in the 'What you Get' section of this Go Guide) we will be at the airport, ready to transfer you to your hotel. Further

if you are booking pre-tour accommodation with us an airport arrival transfer will also be provided. If arriving prior to 9am on day 1 (essentially on a flight that arrives very, very early in the morning) you will need to purchase a night of pre-tour accommodation to save you waiting until standard hotel check in time, which is generally 2pm.

Arrival Transfers

If your tour or short stay includes an airport arrival transfer (as indicated in the 'What you Get' section of this Go Guide) from Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, our arrival procedure is as follows:

Arrive to Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport, where after you have attended to customs and immigration formalities, please proceed to the arrival hall. Please have your tour voucher handy and make it available to our representative who will be waiting for you in the arrivals hall, holding a prominent on the go tours logo signboard, ready to escort you to our awaiting transportation and onward to your tour start hotel

If, for any reason you have trouble locating our representative (after waiting 20 minutes in the arrival hall) or your flight to India is delayed please call the emergency contact number as stated on your tour voucher and our local office who will then advise on the best course of action.

If travelling on our Captivating Kerala tour (with arrival via Kochi Airport) or one of our 'Short Stays' where an airport arrival transfer is included in your holiday, the procedure for meeting you at the airport is the same as those detailed above.

Visas

All foreign nationals must obtain a visa for a visit to India and it is essential the visa be procured prior to travel. A 6 month single entry visa (valid from the date of issue) is issued for most nationals planning to visit India. If you are planning to visit a neighbouring country such as Nepal, Bhutan or Sri Lanka and return to India you will require a multiple entry visa which must be procured in advance of travel. In order to obtain this, you will need to provide the embassy with a detailed itinerary and full flight information, showing the dates and ports of exit and re-entry to India.

If you are a resident in the UK we offer a visa service to save you the inconvenience of having to queue at the embassy, please visit our website or contact us for further information.

Visa requirements are subject to change and that visa procurement prior to departure is solely the responsibility of the traveller and not of on the go. Please also ensure that your passport is valid for at least 6 months from your planned date of return from India.