

Captivating Kerala

7 days | Starts/Ends: Kochi



Uncover the delights of tropical Kerala in India's deep south. Visit historic Fort Kochi, the picturesque hill station of Munnar with its verdant tea plantations and spend a night aboard a houseboat, gliding along the tranquil, palm fringed backwaters.

HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

Trip Highlights

- Kerala Backwaters – cruise along the famous backwaters on a deluxe rice boat, past lush forests and local villages
- Kumarakom – enjoy two days relaxing at leisure and visit the biodiverse Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary
- Kochi – tour the winding streets of the Fort Kochi neighbourhood and enjoy a Kathakali dance show
- Munnar – stroll through a tea plantation on a guided walk and explore the beautiful surroundings independently

What's Included

- 6 breakfasts, 1 lunch, 2 dinners
- 5 nights 3 - 4 star and heritage hotels, 1 night deluxe houseboat
- Houseboat cruise along the Keralan backwaters

- Guided touring of Kochi, Fort Kochi and Munnar tea plantation
- Traditional Kathakali Dance Show in Kochi, (entrance fee excl)
- Airport arrival and departure transfers on day 1 and day 7
- Services of English-speaking Indian specialist guides at some sites
- Escorted by an English-speaking Indian tour guide (for groups of 6 or more)
- All relevant transfers and transportation in private A/C vehicles

What's Not Included

- Tipping Kitty: USD\$25-35pp, paid in local currency
- Entrance Fees: USD\$15-25pp, paid in local currency
- International flights and visas
- Tip for your tour guide. We recommend you allow \$3 - 7 USD per day per traveller. Tipping your tour guide is an entirely personal gesture

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1 : Kochi

Saturday. Welcome to India. You'll be met at Kochi airport and transferred to your hotel. Long famed in the history books, Kochi (formerly known as Cochin) offered refuge to Jews more than 2,500 years ago. The Portuguese founded the first European colony

in Kochi in the 16th century, then the Dutch quickly followed and eventually, the British. The cosmopolitan mix of cultures makes the city truly fascinating. This evening we watch a Kathakali performance. Kathakali is the fascinating traditional dance form of Kerala

Overnight - Kochi

Days 2-3 : Kochi sightseeing & Munnar



Kochi - Munnar - breakfast. On the morning of day 2 we enjoy a guided tour of historic Fort Kochi. We see the elegant Chinese fishing nets and explore the winding streets of the old town, visiting St Francis' Church, Parsi Synagogue (exterior only) and a Dutch palace.

After our sightseeing in Kochi we drive east to Munnar - a picturesque hill station nestled on the verdant slopes of tea plantations. Located at a lofty height of 1600m, Munnar in South India offers breathtaking views of the surrounding hills carpeted with tea plantations. From many locations in Munnar,

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one can view Anamudi (2695m), South India's highest peak. The rest of the afternoon is free to relax or explore the area.

On day 3 we'll take a stroll through one of the many tea plantations with our guide, who will give us a brief explanation about the different varieties of tea and how they are processed. Then we'll visit a local market before heading back to our hotel. The rest of the day is free for you to spend at your own leisure. **Overnight - Munnar (B:2, D:2)**

Day 4 : Kerala backwaters



Munnar - Alleppey - Keralan backwaters. Early this morning we set off on a scenic 4 - 5 hour drive to Alleppey. Upon arrival, we board a simply furnished private rice-boat for a journey through the lush backwaters. Our rice-boat takes us sedately along the enchanting palm-fringed backwaters, covering a distance of some 20 kms, during which time the boat glides past local villages and fascinating scenes of everyday rural life. Watch a beautiful sunset over the backwaters and enjoy tasty meals (starting with lunch) prepared by the on-board chef using fresh local produce. **Overnight - Deluxe rice boat (B, L, D)**

Days 5-6 : Kumarakom



Keralan Backwaters - Kumarakom. After breakfast on day 5 we disembark the houseboat at Kumarakom. Perched sleepily amongst a tangle of lush tropical

waterways known as the Keralan backwaters, Kumarakom is technically a cluster of islands on Lake Vembanad - one of Asia's largest freshwater lakes. This is an ideal place to relax for the next two days and enjoy the beautiful scenery. There is also a wonderful bird sanctuary spread across 14 acres, which is a favoured haunt of migratory birds and certainly worthy of a visit. **Overnight - Kumarakom (B:2)**

Day 7 : Kochi

Alleppey - Kochi - Today marks the end of our memorable journey. After breakfast we travel back to Kochi and transfer to the airport.

Please Note: Your flight from Kochi on day 7 should not depart any earlier than 2pm. If your flight leaves late afternoon/evening, a day room at a hotel in Kochi can be arranged for an additional fee (payable locally). We are also able to book post tour accommodation upon request. Please contact us for further details.(B)

HOTELS

Highlighted below are some of the hotels which we frequently use on this tour, though we reserve the right to substitute these hotels to ones of a similar standard.

Please refer to your Tour Voucher for your confirmed arrival hotel and further arrival information.

Casino Hotel

Casino Hotel is a modern hotel located on Willingdon island, set in tropical gardens it is a beautiful blend of art deco and colonial Indian architectural styles. With a large pool and and spacious comfortable rooms this hotel offers a fantastic experience when in Kochi. Casino Hotel boasts 2 restaurants, a 24-hour health club as well as free wifi in public areas.



Clouds Valley Leisure Hotel

Set in the valley of the Kennan Devan Hills, the Clouds Valley Leisure Hotel is a contemporary accommodation. Guest rooms are bright and spacious with beautiful views of the surrounding mountains. Rooms are also all en suite, have modern amenities and comfortable beds. The hotel benefits from an onsite restaurant that serves up a tasty selection of both Indian and South Indian food as well as Chinese and European dishes.



Deluxe Houseboat

There are few things as serene and tranquil as floating along the Keralan backwaters in the comfort of a luxurious houseboat. Deluxe houseboats are elegantly furnished, with up to four bedrooms, equipped with modern en suites, an open lounge, dining area and a deck to relax and admire the beautiful views of the lush green palms and rice paddies. Air conditioning operates in the bedrooms between 9pm to 6am only. The cruises are full board, with tasty meals freshly prepared by the onboard chef.



Eastend Lakesong

Nestled among the serene backwaters of Kumarakom, Eastend Lakesong comprises of 8 acres of facility packed leisure land. Guests sleep in villas and cottages, which are all well furnished with colourful interiors and comfortable beds. The onsite restaurants offer an excellent selection of local and international cuisine. Why not treat yourself to a relaxing massage at the Ayurveda on site Spa? It is the perfect way to unwind after

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a long day of exploring in the fierce Indian heat.



Kerala Houseboats

Our itinerary includes one night on board a deluxe house boat in Kerala. Deluxe houseboats have a lounge and dining area in addition to comfortable en suite cabins. Air Conditioning is available from 9pm until 6am.

If you wish to stay on a boat with air conditioning 24 hours a day there is the option to upgrade to a premium houseboat for a small supplement. Contact our reservations team to upgrade.

Guides & Groups

Our longest group tour in India is our Passage to India tour – 14 day tour. All other group tours that we offer are sectors of this larger tour. As such on your holiday you may have travellers join you part way through your tour or end their holiday when you continue on. Whenever there is 6 persons or more on your holiday you will have a tour guide escorting/ travelling along with you. Your guide will conduct the sightseeing arrangements, or accompany you where the local law dictates that a local guide must conduct the sightseeing in this region. Where the group number is less than 6 persons you will travel from place to place with a driver and meet a local guide at each new destination that will conduct your sightseeing arrangements in this location.

Alcohol In Kerala

If you fancy a tippie after a great day of sightseeing, you may wish to purchase duty free alcohol prior to your arrival as many of the hotels in South India do not sell alcohol. Below is a list of hotels frequently used on your tour and the beverages they serve: Casino Hotel, Kochi – serves alcohol, House boats - serve wine, beer and soft drinks, Travancore Court and Eastend Munnar - do not serve alcohol,

Eastend Lake song - serves wine and beer, Backwater Ripples - sells beer only.

Kathakali Performance

Kathakali is a stage drama of the region that dates from the 17th century and is very entertaining to watch. Singers and musicians tell the story whilst the Kathakali performers portray good and evil, courage and weakness, prosperity and poverty, all part of the classic 30 odd stories that have survived through the years.

Ayurvedic Medicine

Kochi is the place to shop for Ayurvedic medicines as the plants used are grown in the Western Ghats region. Over 2000 plants are described in Ayurveda and the most common and frequently used of these are readily available. You could also pamper yourself and have an Ayurvedic massage.

Extra Sightseeing

Kochi sites are closed on the following days, Parsi Synagogue - closed Friday afternoon from 1pm and closed all day Saturday, Dutch Palace - closed Friday. This in no way affects our tour, should you wish to visit independently please plan your time accordingly.

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

Entrance Fees

On our India group tours, selected entry fees are included, however all others must be budgeted for by you. The total cost of the entrance fees which need to be paid locally, as noted under 'Exclusions' on the first page of this document. Entrance fee amounts can change and as such upon arrival to India your tour leader will highlight the exact total entrance fee cost for your tour. PLEASE NOTE: Entrance fees are to be paid in INDIAN RUPEES (INR) and they will be collected on day 2 of your tour.

If travelling on our Railways of the Raj tour, entrance fees will not be collected and are payable by you at each site. If travelling to Sri Lanka on our Delhi to Colombo tour, entrance fees for that section of your tour will

be collected by your guide in Sri Lanka and payable in Sri Lankan Rupees (LKR).

Language

While English is not the first language in India, it is the most important language for national, political, and commercial communication. Hindi is the national language and primary tongue of 30% of the people and there are 22 official languages in addition to Hindi, including: Bengali, Telugu, Marathi, Tamil, Urdu, Gujarati, Malayalam, Kannada, Oriya, Punjabi, Assamese, Kashmiri, Sindhi, Sanskrit Dogri, Santali, Bodo, Maithali, Manipuri, Nepali and Konkani. Hindustani is a popular variant of Hindi/Urdu spoken widely throughout northern India but is not an official language.

Taxis & Rickshaws

Taxis are cheap and readily available in most of the bigger towns in India. Most of them possess metres, although taxi drivers who use their metre are rare! Try and get an idea of the likely fare before you leave your hotel. The front desk staff or your tour guide should be able to assist you. Then negotiate with the driver before departure.

Motorised three-wheel rickshaws are available for hire throughout the country. Powered by a 2-stroke motorcycle engine with a driver upfront and seating for 2 - 3 at the rear, with no doors and a canvas roof, these rickshaws weave their way speedily through oncoming traffic. The ride will be fast, efficient and certainly an experience! Always negotiate the price you want to pay before setting off. Offering around 50% of the asking price is the general rule of thumb, though you'll always pay more than the going rate for a local!

A cycle rickshaw is a 3-wheeler bicycle with a seat for passengers behind the rider. Although not often seen in big cities, you'll find them in Old Delhi and all the smaller towns, where they are a common mode of transport. Again, negotiate the fare before departure.

Begging

With more than 350 million people in India living on less than USD\$2 per day, inevitably you will come across many people begging for money. Begging has a legitimate place

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in Indian society. Even poor people give to beggars or charities to earn religious merit. The Indian government, however, would like to regulate begging more stringently. Though begging is common, you are not under obligation to give money. If you choose to give money to beggars, we advise you to do this from the vehicle and not on the street. Alternatively, consider donating pencils, pens or modest educational supplies to village schools.

Religion

More than 80% of the country practice Hinduism. The remaining 20% comprise followers of Islam (12%), Christianity, Sikhism, Jainism, Buddhism and other minority beliefs.

System of Government

India is a constitutional democracy. There are 29 states and 7 union territories. Parliament is bicameral; the lower house is known as the Lok Sabha (House of the People) and the upper house is known as the Rajya Sabha (Council of States).

Not like Home

Travelling to far-flung corners of the earth often involves encountering lifestyles and conditions that are very different from what you are used to back home. As such it is important to come prepared for unusual situations, local inadequacies and unpredictable events as and when they occur. Foreign travel is definitely not suitable for people who expect or demand everything to go exactly as planned, as things can and do change in foreign countries.

The people, customs, creed and languages of India are different from one region to the next. It is as vast as it is crowded, and as opulent as it is squalid. India is exciting, intense and diverse - an all-embracing experience, a veritable assault on the senses. Sometimes the poverty will get you down, Indian bureaucracy can test your patience and facing another traffic jam will seem almost too much to bear. Yet, it's all worthwhile. While India is far from the easiest country in the world to travel around, On The Go will try their best to make your tour as seamless as possible. Our holidays combine comfortable transportation,

comprehensive sightseeing and good hotels, allowing you to concentrate on getting the most out of your stay.

India is a country of unparalleled contrasts, a destination where you'll be afforded plenty of unique encounters, and if you can travel with an open mind you will have a wonderful time here. In return, please remember to demonstrate sensitivity and respect for local customs.

Tipping Kitty

Tipping is not a natural part of many Western cultures and many of us feel uncomfortable, or unsure about when or how much to tip. However, in India tipping makes up a significant part of many people's wages so it's important that we get it right. For this reason, we've developed a very simple system to take all the hassle out of tipping.

With our 'tipping made easy' policy, a nominal pre-determined amount is collected from all group tour participants to cover tips en route. This then saves you the hassle of when and how much to tip bellhops, luggage handlers, local guides and other support staff through the tour. The tipping kitty amount is noted under 'Exclusions' on the first page of these Trip Notes. PLEASE NOTE: The tipping kitty is to be paid in INDIAN RUPEES (INR) and it will be collected on day 2 of your tour.

If travelling onto Sri Lanka on our Delhi to Colombo tour, the tipping kitty for that section of your tour will be collected by your guide in Sri Lanka and payable in Sri Lankan Rupees (SLR). If travelling on our Railways of the Raj tour, a tip kitty will not be collected and we ask that you independently manage tipping along the way.

Our 'Tip Kitty' doesn't include a tip for your group tour guide, where we suggest an amount of approx USD\$3 - 7 per day multiplied by the duration of your tour. Naturally though, the amount is up to you. The tip for your guide is an entirely personal gesture.

If travelling on a group tour with less than 6 participants or on a tailor-made holiday, in place of 'tipping made easy' we recommend

the following amounts per person per day be allocated to cover tips paid directly by you to - bellhops, luggage handlers, your driver and local guides - USD \$9 if the day includes a local guide & sightseeing and USD \$4 if the day excludes a local guide and sightseeing.

Visas

All foreign nationals must obtain a visa for a visit to India and it is essential the visa be procured prior to travel.

UK, Australian, New Zealand, Canadian and USA passport holders can take advantage of India's online visa service (subject to eligibility). Information about the e-Tourist Visa (eTV) process can be found at: <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html>

The online application should be submitted a minimum of 4 working days and a maximum of 120 days in advance of proposed date of arrival. Entry to India must be within 120 days of the eTV approval date and the visa is valid for 60 days from arrival. Please visit the website noted above for more info.

The e-Tourist Visas are 60 day, double-entry visas. You cannot obtain an e-Tourist Visa if you plan to stay in India for more than 60 days or if you require more than 2 entries. A six month multiple entry visa can be obtained from the embassy in advance of travel.

If you're a resident of the UK and would like someone to handle your visa application for you then we recommend CIBTvisas. Please visit <http://www.cibtvisas.co.uk/onthego> for more details on how to start your visa application with them.

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 Tours. Please also ensure that your passport is valid for at least 6 months from your planned date of return from India.

Currency

The currency of India is the Indian Rupee.

Pound Sterling, US Dollars or other major currencies can be exchanged only in India, as the Rupee is presently exchangeable only in destination. The Rupee is non-exportable,

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so spend it all before you leave! Exchange facilities are available at major airports and bureau de changes and to a lesser degree, ATMs/cash machines exist in larger towns. It's advisable to request bank notes in smaller denominations, as it can sometimes be hard to get change from large notes and smaller notes are handy for smaller purchases and gratuities. Traveller's Cheques are not recommended as they're often difficult to exchange and incur high fees.

Domestic Flights - Baggage Allowance

If your tour includes a domestic flight or you have independently booked domestic flights separate to that of your international flights, please be mindful that that free baggage allowance for **Economy Class travel on flights within India is near always 15kg, with 5 - 7kg for hand luggage.** Additional weight is charged per kilo and is payable by you directly to the airline at check-in. If you will be travelling with more than 15kg on a flight included within our tour, please contact us so we can confirm the exact luggage allowance for your flight and give you the per kilo cost for any additional weight.

ATMs & Credit Cards

Exchange facilities are available at various bureau de changes, banks and at most hotels. Bring clean, unmarked cash in US Dollars (not USD 100 bills as these are hard to change), Euro or Pound Sterling. Commission charges vary from place to place and bank to bank. ATMs are available in all major towns and cities. We recommend you take a mixture of cash and credit/debit cards (for ATM usage). Please avoid bringing Travellers Cheques as they can sometimes be difficult to change. Credit cards are an acceptable means of payment in most major tourist centres, including larger shops and businesses.

TOP TIP: Before leaving home inform your bank that you will be travelling to India, as otherwise your bank may think that your transaction made in India is fraudulent and withhold funds until you contact them.

Train Travel In India

Travelling by train in India is an unforgettable local experience where you will get to meet Indian people and experience daily life as they do. The Indian Railway system is the world's second largest, with over 108,706 km of track, connecting more than 7000 stations. Every day, more than 7000 trains run, carrying some 14 million passengers, including us. Several of our group tours and add-ons include train journeys, some by day and others overnight. If your tour does include train travel, we have noted within the itinerary the coach/class of travel that will be booked. Below is some further information that may assist you in planning for your journey.

AC CHAIR CAR

If travelling on a daytime journey, you will travel in an air-conditioned seated carriage (called AC chair car), similar to that of a standard city trains in most western countries. When travelling to loftier destinations where the weather is cooler, air-conditioning may not be provided.

2nd AC COACH/SLEEPER

If travelling overnight, we accommodate passengers in the 2nd class sleeper air-conditioned category (unless otherwise indicated at a higher level). 2nd class sleeper air-conditioned cabins consist of 2 upper and 2 lower bunks, plus a double-decker set of bunk beds on the opposite side of the cabin shared by you and other Indian travellers. You can sit up on your bench seat during the day and simply lie down once you are ready to go to sleep.

All cabins are mixed sex. Your cabin is not self-contained as such. 'Cabins' are separated from the carriage corridor by curtains, serving as an artificial barrier that can be drawn at night. Luggage, including hand luggage should be locked (as you would do when travelling on any overnight train anywhere in the world) and can be stored underneath the lower bunks or on the floor. The carriage is manned by an attendant who will distribute linen, free of charge. Dependent upon the service, a variety of snacks and drinks or full dinner service can be ordered at an additional cost (except for the Shatabdi Express and

Rajdhani Express where meals are included within your fare). Food aboard the Shatabdi Express train is most often exceptionally good, though on many other train services it is probably best to buy snacks, fresh fruit that can be peeled or meals prior to the start of your journey. In addition, there are WC facilities (European and 'squat-style') at each end of the carriage. Cleanliness varies, so be prepared and take your own anti-bacterial hand wipes and toilet paper.

1st AC COACH/ SLEEPER

All Indian trains offer 2nd and 3rd AC coaches, but only a handful of trains offer 1st AC coaches, which can accommodate a tiny total of 18 people. 1st AC coach/ sleepers only have berths on one side of the train hence making the cabin more spacious. The cabin may have 2 berths or 4 which seat/sleep 2 or 4 persons. You can sit up on a bench seat during the day, which is folded into bunk beds at night. The 1st AC coach also has a door making it fully closed and lockable for 2 or 4 persons. Beds are a tad wider and mattresses more cushioned. Each cabin has a 'bell' switch, which when pressed summons the attendant of the coach.

3rd AC COACH/ SLEEPER

We do not include 3rd AC coach travel within any of our tours, though if you were considering it for personal arrangements a description can be given as follows. 3rd AC coach is very similar to 2nd AC coach with the only difference being that there is a middle berth ie not just a 2 bunk bed but a triple bunk bed, hence making it possible for 6 people to be accommodated within the space. Like the 2nd AC coach there is also another set of bunk beds on the opposite side ie running parallel with the length of the train. Like 2nd AC, there's no door just curtains and again you sit up on your bunk bed during the day and lie down to sleep.

Health Requirements

You should seek medical advice before travelling to India from your local health practitioner and ensure that you receive all the appropriate vaccinations. As a guide Tetanus, Typhoid, Hepatitis A and Polio are strongly

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recommended. You are also advised to take anti-Malarial medication.

Water

As tap water is not safe to drink in India, only drink bottled mineral water which is readily available in hotels, shops and restaurants. You should also avoid salads which may be washed in unhygienic water.

Climate

India has a three-season year known as the hot, the wet and the cool. The best time to visit is between 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 September. Although the weather is humid, the days are punctuated by intermittent rainfall and the monsoon in India is actually quite spectacular and refreshing.

Time & Voltage

India is 5 hours 30 mins ahead of GMT. Standard voltage is 230-240V (usually 240V). Pack a universal travel adaptor that will allow you to use a hairdryer, electric shaver, charge a mobile phone and other electrical items. Take care with your choice of adaptor. Be sure that it is suitable for India, as Indian sockets accept round 3 pin plugs that are similar but not identical to European plugs.

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 mosquitos
- Spare camera batteries/memory card
- Consider packing some pencils, pens or modest educational supplies that can be given to village schools or street children
- Buy some Indian Rupees at the airport on arrival

- Keep a supply of small notes for local transactions

Arrival Transfers

If your tour or short stay includes an airport arrival transfer (as indicated in the 'Inclusions' section of these Trip Notes) 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 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. Please do not leave the airport or go to the hotel on your own. Call our emergency contact number and follow the advice given by our local team.

If travelling on our Captivating Kerala tour (with arrival via Kochi Airport), Railways of the Raj tour (with arrival via Kolkata) 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.

Pre-Tour Accommodation

If arriving on day 1 of a holiday that includes an airport arrival transfer (as indicated in the 'Inclusions' section of these Trip Notes) 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) consider purchasing a night of pre-tour accommodation to save you waiting until hotel check in time, which is generally 2pm.

Shopping

India is a virtual Aladdin's Cave. At the many bazaars known as 'chowks', the cardinal rule is to bargain hard. State run craft emporiums that stock the best of what a state has to offer can give you a reasonable idea of what is acceptable in terms of price and quality. You'll find carpets of quality equal to those of Persian origin, Rajasthani pottery and metalwork, embellished slippers known as jootis, jewellery in breathtaking designs. Likewise, leatherwork, silks and saris in spectacularly colourful designs, paintings and clothing make excellent souvenirs.

IMPORTANT: Set your budget and don't be swayed, remember the caveat – 'Let the buyer beware'. Any purchases made whilst on holiday with us, irrespective of whether the store is recommended by us or other, are at your own discretion. Please make sure that you are completely happy with the product you are purchasing and the delivery arrangements (we would recommend you take away with you any purchases rather than rely on shipping services). On The Go cannot be held responsible or accountable for items bought in country or shipping arrangements. We will not become involved later in your holiday or once you return home should your purchase not live up to your expectations. Proceed with caution.

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 Indian 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. 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

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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!

Street Food

Street food, although tasty and fabulous looking, cannot always be relied upon to have been safely and hygienically prepared, so to this end, we suggest you sample 'street style' food from an established restaurant or from somewhere recommended by your tour leader.

Western Food

If Indian food becomes too much and you wish to escape to something familiar, Western-style food is available. Many menus in hotels and restaurants will feature dishes loosely based on Western recipes with perhaps just a hint of curry flavouring or spice. Indians like to experiment with other cuisine as well. Chinese cuisine in India is often very good. In the bigger cities, you'll find restaurants specialising in international cuisine, not to mention American fast food chains.

Change For Children

On many of our Group Tours we stop at one of two Village Schools where we operate our 'Change for Children' programme. If travelling via Karauli you will meet the children at Nishabd local school (supporting deaf and blind children), and if via Bharatpur, Adarsh Vidya Mandir local school. If you have bought any educational items with you to hand out to children, this would be the time to do so. You can also make a donation to the school if you choose via our Change For Children Project. Your guide will hand out envelopes to those interested.

All schools are closed from mid May through till the start of July for the Summer Vacation and then in December for Winter Vacation. Additionally, they may be closed throughout the year during festival weeks such as Holi, Diwali and others - including teacher training days which only tend to be announced a day

or two prior. Accordingly, it will not be possible to visit the school during these times and should you have bought along items for the school, your guide will be happy to pass them on to the school when it re-opens on your behalf.

Some suggestions of what you may like to bring are:

- Wall charts – map of the world, numbers, letters, multiplication tables.
- Any visual teaching resources, coloured cardboard, junior scissors, rulers, sharpeners, lead pencils
- Reading books – suitable for any age between 4 – 12 yrs
- Sporting equipment – cricket bat, tennis balls, soft balls, skipping ropes, elastics
- Toothbrushes, toothpaste, liquid soap for washrooms

Captivating Kerala - 7 days

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