

Kerala Homestay

8 days | Starts/Ends: Kochi



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

HIGHLIGHTS AND INCLUSIONS

Trip Highlights

- Kochi - The beautiful St Francis' Church, the white washed Dutch Palace, Fort Kochi and the iconic Chinese fishing nets on the waterfront
- Coastal Alleppey - Gateway to the relaxing palm fringed backwaters
- Kottamangalam - Spice plantation and elephant rescue centre
- Kerala - Famous tropical backwaters
- Thykattusserry - Picturesque rural village

What's Included

- Breakfast daily, 2 lunches and 2 dinners
- 6 nights STANDARD properties and 1 night traditional rice-boat. SUPERIOR and DELUXE hotel options are also available upon request. Accommodation rating – See Trip Notes for details

- Touring and excursions as per itinerary
- Guided sightseeing in Kochi
- Entrance fees for all included sightseeing
- Services of English-speaking Indian specialist guides for all included sightseeing
- All relevant transfer and transportation in private modern Chauffeur driven air-conditioned vehicles

What's Not Included

- International flights and visas
- Tipping - An entirely personal gesture

DETAILED ITINERARY

Day 1 : Welcome to Kochi

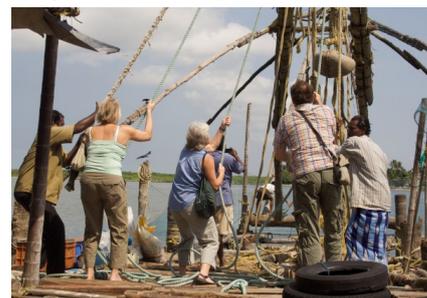
Welcome to India and the start of your holiday! Arrive Kochi and transfer to your hotel, about a one hour drive from the airport. Free time to relax.

This evening we 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 : Tour of the Kochi



Kochi. Formerly a princely state, Kochi is also fondly referred to as "The Queen of the Arabian Sea". This morning we partake in 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

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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 arts and you can see these demonstrations daily. **Overnight - Kochi (B)**

Day 3 : Thykattusserry

Kochi - Thykattusserry. This morning we drive to a small rural village called Thykattusserry, being midway between Kochi and Alleppey. Worlds 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)**

Day 4 : Houseboat on the backwaters



Thykattusserry - Backwaters - Kothamangalam. This morning, we board a simply furnished private rice-boat for our 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 : Kothamangalam

Disembarking from the rice-boat at Alleppey, we drive to Kothamangalam and transfer to our plantation homestay (approximately 2 hour drive). Here, we relax, unwind and learn about spices like vanilla, pepper, nutmeg, cloves and more. **Overnight - Kothamangalam (B)**

Day 6 : Free time



A day of relaxation in the cool ambience of the homestay. **Overnight - Kothamangalam (B)**

Day 7 : Optional visit to Bird Sanctuary

Spend your day at leisure or there is 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 (book locally). **Overnight - Kothamangalam (B)**

Day 8 : Kochi

Kottayam - Kochi. We drive back to Kochi and onward transfer to your hotel or to the airport to meet your onward flight.(B)

Tipping

Tipping is an essential part of the culture. For a job well done, we would suggest for your tour guide and boat crew: USD\$4-7 per traveller, for each day of sightseeing.

For your driver and On The Go Representative we'd recommend USD\$2-3 per traveller for each day of service. Tipping is an entirely personal gesture and ultimately the amount is up to you.

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 in National Parks. It's illegal in India's parks and sanctuaries, and to import the hide of an endangered species is also illegal

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- Take all personal litter with you or dispose appropriately
- Toilet paper and tissue should be disposed of in a bin, to avoid blocking 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.

Accommodation ratings

On our Private trips, you can often choose your style of accommodation. The price quoted on our website is reflective of the included accommodation, please see the "included" section on the first page of this document for details. Should you opt for an alternative hotel category, this will be confirmed in writing with the respective price on your invoice.

For further details about the indicative hotels, please see the "hotels" tab on our website. Here we rank hotel's in their respective country (REGIONAL CATEGORY) - but we also tell you how it ranks by Western standards (OUR CATEGORY).

STANDARD - Equates to a Western 3-star standard, always featuring en-suite rooms and usually a restaurant.

SUPERIOR - Equates to a Western 4-star standard, featuring en-suite rooms and usually a restaurant and often a swimming pool and/or a fitness centre.

DELUXE - Equates to a Western 5-star standard, usually featuring spacious, en-suite

rooms, a restaurant, swimming pool and fitness centre and an array of amenities, excellent service and customer care.

LUXURY - Equates to a Western 5-star plus standard - the creme de la creme. Featuring spacious, en-suite rooms, a restaurant, swimming pool and fitness centre and an array of amenities, this accommodation is a cut above the rest. Sheer opulence!

KNOW BEFORE YOU GO

India Country Guide

Welcome to India - Arrival transfer

If your holiday includes a complimentary airport arrival transfer (as indicated in the 'Inclusions' section of these Trip Notes on page 1) 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 is delayed, please call or send a text message (standard text message, not Messenger or WhatsApp) to 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 other India holidays that don't arrive into Delhi Airport (with arrival via Kochi, Cochin, Goa, Mumbai, Chennai, Trivandrum, Kolkata and Dimapur Airport), the procedure for meeting you at the airport is the same as those detailed above.

Pre and post tour accommodation can be arranged upon request, please contact us for

rates. If you are arriving early and book pre tour accommodation with us then you will still qualify for our complimentary airport arrival transfer.

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.

Visas & passports

Visa requirements are subject to change and visa procurement is the responsibility of the traveller and not On The Go Tours. Please also ensure that your passport is valid for at least 6 months from your planned date of departure from India.

After booking your holiday, please provide us with your passport details as soon as possible so that we can proceed to book all services. Please be advised visa requirements are subject to change, therefore it is essential that you check current visa requirements with the embassy before travel. For information about visas, head to www.onthegotours.com/India/Visas

Health requirements

You should seek medical advice for vaccinations and about medications before travelling.

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.

Essential packing

Please check local temperatures so you can pack accordingly. Visit www.worldclimate.com

- A small daypack for your day-to-day needs
- Tour Voucher and a copy of your travel insurance policy, spare passport photos and a photocopy of your passport
- Universal travel adaptor
- Insect repellent to guard against mosquitos
- Spare camera batteries and memory cards

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- 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 and keep a supply of small notes for local transactions

Domestic flights - Baggage allowance

If your holiday 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 allowance for hand luggage.** Additional weight is charged per kilo and is payable by you directly to the airline at check-in. If travelling with more than 15kg on a flight included within your holiday, please contact us so we can confirm the exact luggage allowance for your flight and give you the current per kilo cost for additional weight.

What to expect

Please visit www.onthegotours.com/India/Travel-tips-and-useful-info for local customs, currency, WiFi and other helpful information to prepare you for an enjoyable holiday.

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 our holidays include train journeys, some by day and others overnight. If your holiday 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 a on 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 - 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.

Travel Operators for Tigers

Travel Operators for Tigers (TOFT), is a UK based campaign, set up to encourage sustainable wildlife tourism in tiger reserves and national parks. Funds generated through TOFT will be used to fund tiger conservation initiatives and local community development, through their two partner conservation organisations - Global Tiger Patrol and the Environmental Investigation Agency. On The Go Tours are members of TOFT and we happily pledge a USD\$20 contribution to TOFT for each of our clients that choose to travel on a wildlife tour to India with us.

Not like home... & begging

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, food and languages of India are different from one region to the next. It is as vast as it is

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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 utmost to make your holiday 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.

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 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.

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.

In the tourism industry it's common practice for commission to be offered in exchange for recommending particular shops or suppliers. This can become an issue when clients feel obliged to purchase goods. We do our best to avoid this by monitoring all shopping experiences offered.

All shopping experiences on your tour have been noted in the itinerary and they have been carefully selected based upon positive feedback from On The Go travellers. You are under no obligation to partake in a listed shopping experience and you are most welcome to wait inside or outside the premises.

Although we only visit reputable retailers, please note that we cannot explicitly guarantee the quality of their products. All purchases made whilst on holiday with us are at your own discretion. Please make sure that you are completely happy with your purchase. On The Go cannot be held responsible for any items that you buy if they fail to meet expectation, or any shipping arrangements. Proceed with caution.

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