

incredible indian tours southern sojourn

trip-validity: 1/1/11–31/12/12

Welcome to Incredible Indian Tour's Southern Sojourn. This is an amazing trip that encompasses many of the diverse and stunningly beautiful experiences Kerala has to offer. We visit beaches and backwaters, tea, coffee and spice plantations, Project Tiger parks and wildlife sanctuaries. We see the Chinese fishing nets at work in Cochin, experience traditional life in the Keralan backwaters and trek by foot through a wildlife sanctuary. We also visit Bangalore and Mysore - modern and ancient capitals of Karnataka and the Wodeyar Dynasty. See the Mysore Palace illuminations and experience the bustling city of Bangalore - India's Silicon Valley.



highlights

- o enjoy the fashionable garden city of **Bangalore**
- o smell the **sandalwood** in the **Palace City** of **Mysore**
- o be on the lookout for wild elephants in **Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary**
- o relax on a near-deserted **golden tropical beach** near **Kannur**
- o help the local fisherman bring in a catch in their Chinese fishing nets in **Cochin**
- o wander through verdant manicured tea plantations around **Munnar**
- o **Trek** through the jungle on foot in **Periyar Tiger Reserve**
- o spend a night on a **traditional houseboat** in the backwaters near **Alleppey**
- o enjoy the hospitality of a local family during a **homestay** in the Keralan **Backwaters**

itinerary disclaimer

The itinerary attached is correct at time of printing. It may differ slightly during the tour. Occasionally itineraries need to change as we travel to allow for on the ground problems with transportation, Indian booking issues and travelers desires.

itinerary (15 nights/16 days)

Day 1 Bangalore

We meet up at 6pm for a short tour briefing before heading out for dinner at one of Bangalore's modern restaurants. After dinner why not head out to the pubs and clubs for a drink and mingle with the IT fraternity that help make Bangalore the Silicon Valley of India.

Days 2-3 Mysore



Mysore Palace

A 2-hour train ride this morning on the super-fast Shatabdi takes us to Mysore, the old capital of the Wodeyar Dynasty, known as the city of Palaces. We enjoy the splendour and majesty of the Mysore palace, one of the largest of its kind in India. Built in 1912 in the Indo-Saracenic style, this palace exudes a grandeur that is unmatched. On the evening of day 2 we enjoy the spectacular palace illuminations. Whilst in Mysore, we visit Chaumundi Hill with the 3rd largest Nandi Bull statue in India and the colourful Devaraja Market. We also drive out to the small village of Somnathpur to see the remarkably well preserved 13th century Keshava Temple built by the Hoysala rulers. The drive out to Somnath takes us past silk farms, jaggery factories and some of the most idyllic rural parts of Karnataka.

Day 4 Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary

Travelling by private vehicles, today we drive for 3 hours through national parks to the Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary. We stay in a simple guesthouse situated right at the gates to the park and take an afternoon jeep excursion into the sanctuary, home to many species of wild and endangered animals including elephant, spotted deer, bison, tiger, cheetah, and boar.

If you are keen to spot more wild animals why not take a night-time jeep ride, or head out into the sanctuary again in the morning - often the best time to see some of the more reclusive creatures.



Wild Elephants in Wayanad

Days 5-6 Kannur

A 4 hour drive today to the Keralan Coast and to the almost deserted beautiful beaches of Kannur. We stay in simple homestay-style accommodation right near Kadalayi Beach, about 10km south of Kannur.

Kannur is famous for *theyyam*, a popular art form of North Kerala which is a rare combination of dance and music and reflects important features of tribal culture. Most nights of the year, somewhere around Kannur there is a Theyyam program and hopefully we will get the opportunity to witness this fascinating show. Kannur (previously known as Cannanore) has a history that dates back over a millennium. The Portuguese/British Fort of St Angelo makes a worthwhile excursion, but then so too do the stunning beaches at our doorstep.



Kadalayi Beach—Kannur

Days 7-8 Cochin



Kathakali Dancer

A six and a half hour train journey takes us to Cochin, the oldest European settlement in India. Known as the Queen of the Arabian sea, Cochin's charms are manifold. From the Chinese fishing nets and heritage buildings of Fort Cochin to the markets of Mattancherry and Jew Town and the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Ernakulam, buzzing with hotels, shops and restaurants, Cochin is a fascinating combination of laid back, charming, historic and bustling modern.

We wander the streets and lanes of Fort Cochin, visit the Mattancherry Palace and Jewish Synagogue, ride local ferries around the harbour and watch a world famous Kathakali dance-drama program including the extraordinarily makeup application beforehand.

Days 9-10 Munnar

This hill station, situated 1600m above sea level was originally the summer resort for the British administration in South India. Now overrun with tea plantations, Munnar retains its old colonial charm. With sprawling estates, rolling hills, sparkling waterfalls, picture-postcard hamlets and undulating valleys, Munnar offers gentle walks, amazing photography options, trekking and boating.

A drive up to Top Station gives us amazing views along the way and once there of the ghats looking east to Tamil Nadu. On day 10 we have a full day trek through the hills to get in and amongst the highest tea estates in the world.



Anaiyirankal Dam - Munnar

Days 11-12 Periyar Tiger Reserve



Cardamom country

A spectacular drive through the Cardomom hills—lined with tea, cocoa, tapioca, bamboo, coconut, banana and spice plantations takes us to Thekkady gateway to Periyar Tiger Reserve. Periyar was declared a Project Tiger park in 1978, and the Periyar river was dammed to form a lake in the park. The park covers 777 sq km. There are currently around 900 elephants and some 40 tigers in the park.

Here in Kumily we visit a tea factory, a spice plantation and make a couple of visits inside the park, once by boat and once on foot, which is a great way to get up close to the animals. There is also plenty of time to relax, shop for spices or handicrafts in the town or get an Ayurvedic massage.

Day 13 Alleppey

We have a beautiful 4 hour drive today through rubber, tea, coffee and pineapple plantations to Alleppey where we board our houseboat, made in the traditional ricebarge or Kettuvallam style. Luxuriously fitted out, each boat typically has a couple of bedrooms, a living room, open lounge and deck. An oarsman, cook and guide are on hand to look after our every need. We spend the day drifting along coconut lined canals, past small villages that laze on the myriad islands along the backwaters. We see green rice paddies spreading away into the distance and coconut groves with the occasional temple or church. We pass Chinese fishing nets, children waving from the banks, locals making coir, or toddy tapping. Life is carried on here at a pace that reminds us nothing much has changed here in centuries.



Traditional Kettuvallam (ricebarge)

Day 14 Chennamkary



Picturesque Backwaters

The Keralan backwaters are a chain of brackish lagoons and lakes lying parallel to the Arabian Sea coast. The network includes five large lakes linked by canals, both manmade and natural, fed by 38 rivers, and extending virtually half the length of Kerala. There are over 900 km of interconnected waterways, rivers, lakes and inlets that make up the Keralan backwaters. Our houseboat drops us in the heart of this picturesque region at the door of our next stop where our hosts welcome us to their simple yet stunningly located home.

Situated on a car-free island, the only way to get around is by foot, cycle or boat. We have the opportunity to do all three during our stay here as we are shown around the island, meet some of the locals and find out how life is lived here in the backwaters.

Day 15 Cochin

After a free morning to relax, swing in a hammock, walk the island or paddle a canoe, we return to Cochin today for our final night.

Day 16 Departure Day

There are no organized activities today. You are free to depart at any time.



Chinese Fishing Nets - Cochin

general tour information

group size

10 maximum

days

16 days 15 nights

starts in

Bangalore

finishes in

Cochin

price includes

Arrival and departure transfers

All accommodation as specified

All transportation between overnight stops and to and from included sightseeing

Entrance fees for all sites listed as part of the itinerary

Meals as specified

price does not include

Visa costs

Meals other than those listed

Drinks, meal tips, laundry and other items of a personal nature

International flights

accommodation

Hotels (10 nights), Guesthouse (3 nights), Homestay (1 night), Houseboat (1 night)

This tour uses a variety of accommodation. From simple guesthouses to 4 star or heritage hotels, we experience a wide range of accommodation styles. Most hotel rooms are twin share with private bathrooms with western style toilets. Although a few rooms may be air-conditioned, most will be fan-cooled. During our home-stay at Chennamkary, accommodation is in simple guesthouse rooms either with or without attached bathrooms.

single supplement

If you are a single traveller and do not wish to share accommodation, but would like your own room throughout the tour (not always available in homestay accommodation), a single supplement payment of AUD1690* will be payable. Please note that often, you might be the only single traveler, therefore automatically getting a room to yourself.

*Subject to exchange rate fluctuations

transport

Train, private vehicle, auto-rickshaw, cycle-rickshaw.

Train travel in India is essential considering it is such an efficient and extensive network, and is also such a part of India's culture and heritage. Train journeys give us an opportunity to experience Indian life by rubbing shoulders with the locals. Travelling locally is always exciting and fascinating – you never know who you will meet.

We will be taking private vehicles for most other journeys.

activities included

The following is a list of included activities on this trip. Other activities are optional and will be at your own expense.

Mysore Palace; Palace Illuminations; Chamundi Hill; Keshava Temple (Mysore)

Jeep Safari (Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary)

Theyyam Performance (Kannur)

Mattahcherry Palace; Jewish Synagogue; Ferry to Ernakulam;

Kathakali Dance (Cochin)

Day Trek (Munnar)

Spice Plantation; Tea Factory; Boat Ride on Periyar Lake;

Guided walk through Periyar Tiger Reserve (Periyar)

Village Walk; Canoe Ride; Cycle Ride (Alleppey)

meal inclusions

14 Breakfasts, 5 Lunches, 5 Dinners

meals

Traveling with Incredible Indian Tours we ensure that you will experience a vast array of the gustatory treats available in India. Generally, meals are not included in the trip price when there is a choice of eating options. This allows you to choose where, and what to eat. More often than not however we eat together as a group. Your leader will offer suggestions for favourite restaurants throughout the trip.

money exchange

As at Dec 2009

AUD1 = 41 INR

CAD1 = 44 INR

EUR1 = 67 INR

GBP1 = 74 INR

NZD1 = 33 INR

USD1 = 46 INR

There are many ATM machines (which accept both Cirrus/Maestro debit cards and Visa and MasterCard) throughout India. This is a safe and convenient way to access money in India, however we suggest that you bring some money as cash/travellers cheques in case there are times that ATMs are not available. The easiest currencies to exchange are USD or GBP, however AUD and other major currencies are no problem in general. Only bring Thomas Cook or Amex Travellers cheques. Black markets do not exist in India. Visa & MasterCard credit cards are accepted in major shops and restaurants in the bigger cities.

spending money

Although entrance fees to specified sites are included in the tour price, there are additional sights that you may like to visit. Many sites levy camera fees.

Spending money requirements will differ from one person to the next. You will need to take into consideration your spending habits when allowing for drinks, shopping, and optional activities.

You will need to allow enough money for the following:

Meals – AUD250 (or equivalent)

Optional Activities – AUD25 (or equivalent)

Money for drinks, shopping and incidentals.

Tipping is an integral part of Indian life and is essential to a smooth trip. To make things easier we will collect money to cover tips for hotel room boys, local guides and for drivers of private transport we use. This does NOT cover restaurant tips.

Tips—allow AUD35 (or equivalent)

physical rating



You may need to carry your bag/ pack up and down railway station

and hotel stairs. There will be plenty of walking around towns or sites, which due to the warm to hot weather in India at this time of year will make general sightseeing a little more strenuous.

culture shock rating



Conditions in India are not always as comfortable as in other countries.

You may need to occasionally deal with a squat toilet, cold showers or power failure.

travel insurance

Travel Insurance is highly recommended whilst traveling to India and is compulsory for any group tour with Incredible Indian Tours.

visas

All foreign nationals require a visa to enter India. They are not available at port of entry and must be obtained in advance. Be wary however of applying for your visa too early as they are valid from the date of issue, not date of entry into India.

For information, or assistance with obtaining a visa, check out the following websites.

<https://visalink.com.au/frontpage.aspx>

<http://www.travcour.com/>

health

We recommend that you consult your doctor for current medical travel information about before departure. Your leader will be carrying a basic first aid kit, but we suggest you bring along your own as well as any personal medical requirements .

The following websites have up-to-date information about health requirements.

<http://www.travelvax.com.au/>

<http://www.travelhealth.co.uk/>

communications

Internet cafes are commonplace and cheap throughout India. Finding a café is usually not a problem, but speed can be. Connection times are often painfully slow, although this does vary from place to place. Telephone shops are situated on nearly every street corner of India. Rates are reasonable and international lines are good. You can also purchase a local prepaid sim card relatively easily and inexpensively in India. Recommended are Airtel, Idea and Hutch. Be sure to bring extra passport photos for this.

your group leader

Your group leader is there to organise and streamline your travels and to help you have the best trip possible. Whilst they are not a guide per se, they will share their local knowledge, give you suggestions for your free time and manage the day to day running of the tour. They will introduce you to their local friends and recommend great local restaurants and experiences. They will have a broad general knowledge of India, so do feel free to tap into their wisdom. At some sites, local guides may be hired where we think more specific knowledge will add to the enjoyment of the places we are visiting.

responsible travel

We believe strongly in responsible travel. This includes being respectful to the local culture (ie dressing appropriately, and learning a few basic cultural do's and don'ts), being mindful of the environment, and leaving a positive image behind. Remember we are ambassadors for our country. Bringing a few photos of your family and home with you is a great way to interact with the locals by giving them a glimpse of your world whilst you visit theirs.

joining hotel

Casa Piccola

2 Clapham Road

Richmond Town (Behind Richmond Town Post Office)

Bangalore, Karnataka

Ph: +91 080 2299 0337

Fax: +91 080 4114 5887

transfer/joining instructions

Your airport transfer pickup will await you holding a sign with your name when you exit the baggage claim area of the arrivals hall. There may be large crowds here so please look carefully for your transfer.

arriving early

Casa Piccola is a restored 1915 Heritage Cottage located in the heart of the city. Run by an Indo/French couple, this is one of the oldest and friendliest hotels in Bangalore

early arrival information

If you are arriving earlier than day 1, extra accommodation in Bangalore is available at AUD95/105 (or equivalent) Single/Double occupancy per night per room. Please notify us as early as possible if you require extra accommodation as hotels in Bangalore tend to be heavily booked up well in advance. Flights from Mumbai or other cities can be arranged conveniently and inexpensively over the internet using one of India's regular or budget airlines:

Jet Lite www.jetlite.com

Kingfisher www.flykingfisher.com

Spice Jet www.spicejet.com

Go Air <http://www.goair.in>

Indigo: www.goindigo.in

finishing point

Fort Heritage Hotel

1/283 Napier Street

Fort Cochin 682 001 Kerala

Ph: +91 0484 221 5333

Fax: 0484 221 5455

staying on

If you are staying on in Cochin after the tour, extra accommodation is available at Fort Heritage Hotel at AUD160/175 (or equivalent) Single/Double occupancy per night per room.

what to take

We will be on the move a lot, so try to pack as lightly as possible. The smaller your bag in India the better, as the various modes of transport we use tend to have limited storage space.

India is very conservative and we ask that you dress accordingly. As a guideline, shoulders and knees should always be covered. The wearing of shorts is looked upon by locals as akin to wearing your underwear and will limit your entry into mosques, temples and other places of worship. Loose, lightweight, long clothing is both respectful and cool. Singlets, tank tops and shorts are not suitable attire for India.

laundry

Inexpensive laundry facilities are offered by most hotels we use.

weather

The weather during our journey should be great. Daytime temperatures will be warm to hot, in the range 23-35°C and humid. Bring an umbrella and also sun protection and a hat. You might like to bring a jacket for the cooler nights in the hills.

checklist

Travel documents: passport, visa, travel insurance (don't forget your emergency insurance contact details), air tickets.

Photocopy of above documents

Day pack

Health vaccinations/medication

First aid kit

Money: ATM card (widely available and easy to access); credit cards (widely accepted in big cities); cash and travellers cheques (for emergencies)

Money pouch

Alarm clock and torch/flashlight

Mosquito repellent

Ear plugs can be useful if you are a light sleeper

Lock for your back pack or bag

We recommend the use of a neck wallet or money belt to store your passport, air tickets, credit cards and cash. Avoid bringing valuable jewellery with you. Some hotels we use have safety deposit boxes. A lock and chain are useful for securing your luggage on overnight train journeys.

Updated on: 11/8/2010.