



## Discover Kerala Dossier

### Immerse Yourself Tour | 13 Days | Active

Kochi - Muhamma - Alleppey - Thekkady - Munnar - Palakkad

Kerala's tropical landscapes range from golden beaches and mellow backwaters to jungle-clad hills and lush paddies. A long history of trade has made it culturally rich and diverse, full of colourful ritual and exuberant arts – all of which you'll explore.

#### TOUR HIGHLIGHTS:

- Stay with a local family
- Cruise Kerala's backwaters
- Bamboo rafting in Periyar
- Explore tea & spice plantations
- Hike the Letchmi Hills
- Learn traditional fortune telling



## Discover Kerala tour inclusions

- Return international flights, taxes and current fuel surcharges (unless a land only option is selected)
- All accommodation
- All meals
- All sightseeing and entrance fees
- All transportation and transfers
- English-speaking National Escort (If your group is 10 or more passengers)

*Personal expenditures e.g. drinks, optional excursions or shows, insurance of any kind, customary tipping, early check in or late checkout and other items not specified on the itinerary are at your own expense.*

## Immerse Yourself

Designed for those who wish to be further immersed in the authentic charm of India; our Immerse Yourself Tours include more cultural and active experiences. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escorts or Local Guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience. Our Immerse Yourself tours include:

- Cycling and walking through classic sites
- Unique cultural experiences and encounters
- Off the beaten track destinations
- More evenings at leisure for independent exploration

## Active

'Discover Kerala' is an **active** tour. This is one of the most demanding trips Wendy Wu Tours offers. As a whole this itinerary requires a high level of fitness.

- There will be sightseeing on foot for extended periods of time including some hiking up hill
- Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps, often without handrails
- Between some of the places on this tour there will be long journeys by coach
- You will be required to get on and off varying sizes of boat or bamboo raft, often without assistance
- This tour features a mixture of hotels and traditional homestays. Please be aware that homestay accommodation will be more basic than some hotels but rest assure that all accommodation has been chosen to enhance your experience in Kerala

Of course, our National Escort and Local Guides will always endeavour to provide the highest level of service and assistance; however, they cannot be expected to cater for customers who are unfit to complete the itinerary. If you require any more information about the pace of our Immerse Yourself Tours, please contact our reservations team who will be happy to answer your questions.

## Country Profile: India

India evokes images of colourful religious festivals, deserts lined with historic forts, tented camps nestled in sand dunes, delicious food and royal palaces. Abundant wildlife such as the Asian Elephant and the Royal Bengal Tiger are found in the numerous national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. All of these images of India may be experienced on our tours, but the most lasting memories that you will take away with you is of the happy, smiling people.

## Joining Your Tour

The tour is 13 days in duration including international flights.

Travellers booked on Land Only, the price includes visa fees and your arrival/ departure airport transfers if arriving/departing on the start and conclusion date of your tour. Please advise your international flight times to reservations. Join the tour on Day 1 in Kochi and end the tour on Day 12 in Kochi. Please refer to your final itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

## Itinerary Changes

It is our intention to adhere to the day-to-day itinerary as printed; however, the order of events or sightseeing may change as we look to improve our tours or as local conditions dictate. In these circumstances we will make the best possible arrangements maintaining the integrity of your trip.

## Important Information Regarding Itinerary Changes and Flight Delays

Due to unforeseen circumstances, flights can be delayed, and therefore connecting flights may be missed. If you find yourself in this situation, please contact our India office on **+91 98 1899 0222/+91 98 1048 8398** (outside India) or **98 1899 0222/98 1048 8398** (within India) to urgently advise your arrival details have changed. Please ensure you have your trip number, tour name (both included in your final documentation) and new arrival details (flight number and arrival time) handy to pass on to our local office in India. This will ensure your National Escort/Local Guide can be informed of your most up to date information and ensure someone is at the airport to meet you on arrival. There is also a dedicated duty officer available 24 hours a day at the international airport, who can be contacted on **+91 81 3039 1236** if required upon arrival in Delhi.

If we are not advised of late changes and missed connections, Wendy Wu Tours cannot guarantee someone will be able to meet you upon arrival in India as our local office will have no way of knowing which flight you will be arriving on. Wendy Wu Tours will not be responsible for providing reimbursement of transportation costs from the airport to your hotel in the event that our local office was not advised of changes.

## Discover Kerala Itinerary

### DAY 1: FLY TO KOCHI

Fly to Kochi. Your National Escort or Local Guide from Wendy Wu Tours will meet you at the Arrivals Hall. Together with other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will transfer approximately one and a half hours to your hotel and check-in.

#### Destination Information

**Kochi** - Also known as Cochin. Kochi is Kerala's most cosmopolitan city and its main trading centre for spices and seafood. Built around a saltwater lagoon of the Arabian Sea, Kochi is a collection of narrow islands and peninsulas.

### DAY 2: KOCHI

This morning a tour introduction will either be held in the hotel or on the coach. Have a full day's sightseeing, visiting the Dutch Palace, the Jewish Synagogue, St Francis Church and the Santa Cruz Basilica. Also see first-hand the 'Chinese fishing nets' introduced by Chinese traders in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Your tour ends in the Fort Kochi area where you can walk through the historical Dutch and Portuguese buildings. This evening, enjoy an Ayurvedic massage in your hotel. Today's sightseeing will involve about two to three hours on foot.

#### Destination Information

**St. Francis Church** - St. Francis Church is thought to be the first European church built in India, constructed by the Portuguese in 1503. The history of this church reflects the colonial struggle of European powers in India from the 15<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. It is said that the Portuguese trader, Vasco da Gama, was originally buried in St. Francis Church before being taken back to Portugal.

**Santa Cruz Basilica** - One of the eight basilicas in India. The Santa Cruz Basilica has an eventful history, which originates back to the arrival of the Portuguese in 1500.

**Cantilevered Chinese fishing nets** - A relic from the 14<sup>th</sup> century traders, the Chinese fishing nets are still in use today. Locally known as Cheenavala, they are used for a unique and unusual method of fishing and many fishermen earn a living by using these massive nets.

**Jewish Synagogue** - The prosperous Jewish trading community built the Jewish synagogue in 1568. It is the oldest synagogue in India but was partially destroyed in the war of 1662 and was rebuilt by the Dutch.

### **DAY 3: KOCHI TO MUHAMMA**

Today drive approximately one hour to your homestay hidden away in Muhamma, known as the Rice Bowl of Kerala. This evening you will learn about typical Kerala cuisine in a cooking demonstration and enjoy a home-cooked dinner.

#### **Destination Information**

**Keralan Cuisine** - Local dishes are made with traditional recipes passed down through generations; the hills of Kerala produce pepper, cloves, cardamom, nutmeg, cinnamon, all of which go into the flavors of this local food.

### **DAY 4: MUHAMMA TO ALLEPPEY**

Transfer 30 minutes to the jetty at Alleppey and board your kettuvallam, the local name for the houseboats that ply the backwaters. Sit back and relax as your boat cruises the beautiful jade water, meandering through canals, rivers and lakes, passing tiny villages, swaying palms, lush paddy fields and people going about their lives on the riverbanks. Dine on food cooked fresh onboard before retiring to your cabin for a night on the water.

***Please note:** While on the houseboats, electricity can be intermittent. There is a generator on board, so keep this in mind when charging phones, cameras or other electronic items. The cabins on board are all air conditioned, but the living areas and deck may be cooled with fans. If you are a light sleeper you may wish to bring ear plugs, as the generators may be loud at night.*

#### **Destination Information**

**Kerala Backwaters** – A stretch of waters parallel to the coast of the Arabian Sea traditionally used for transportation; nowadays the backwaters attract tourists to a unique experience travelling along a mixture of manmade and natural canals, lakes and rivers.

**Kettuvallam** - Houseboats, or 'Kettuvallams' have all the comforts of a good hotel including furnished bedrooms, modern toilets, cozy living rooms, a kitchen and even a balcony for angling. Parts of the curved roof of wood or plaited palm open out to provide shade and allow uninterrupted views.

### **DAY 5: ALLEPPEY TO THEKKADY**

This morning, disembark your houseboat at the jetty and transfer around five hours to Thekkady by road. This evening, witness a Kathakali dance performance.

#### **Destination Information**

**Thekkady** – The Thekkady region has a large number of local tribes, with unique customs and beliefs each of which

are distinctly different from the mainstream culture; it is also one of the most nature rich areas of Kerala.

**Kathakali** – A form of classical Indian dance, where performers communicate a story and wear colourful makeup and elaborate costumes.

### **DAY 6: THEKKADY**

Take to the water this morning on a bamboo raft on the lake at the heart of Periyar Tiger Reserve. From the water, you'll get beautiful views of the forested hills and may spot some wildlife, such as elephants, gaur and sambar on the banks of the lake. The rest of your day will be at leisure for you to relax or explore the local spice markets.

#### **Destination Information**

**Periyar National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary** - Periyar is South India's most popular wildlife sanctuary, encompassing an area of 777sq km and set on the attractive man-made Periyar Lake. Declared a Tiger Reserve in 1978, the sanctuary is a rare example of human interference having enhanced rather than damaged an ecosystem. Though the sanctuary was made a part of Project Tiger in 1973, it is better known for its elephants.

### **DAY 7: THEKKADY TO MUNNAR**

Journey four hours by road into the Western Ghats to the hill station of Munnar, stopping en route at spice plantations and organic spice gardens to see what they grow, how it's grown and how it is used in day to day life. Later, visit a tea plantation and museum where you can get involved in the processes of running the plantation, such as plucking and planting, and learn about the history of tea in the area.

#### **Destination Information**

**Munnar** - A hillstation with vast expanses of tea plantations, sitting at an altitude of 1,524m. Once a favoured summer resort for the British, Munnar features beautiful lush green hills and extensive tea estates.

### **DAY 8: MUNNAR**

Travel just out of town to the Letchmi hills, where your hike will begin. Strike out into tea plantations, climbing a hill to follow a beautiful ridge through grassland, passing more plantations and forest and absorbing spectacular views as you go. After a picnic lunch, wander through a Nature Zone, spotting exotic plants and birds that are endemic to the region. Return to Munnar where the rest of the day is at leisure. You will be walking today for approximately three to four hours, occasionally over steep and uneven ground.

## **DAY 9: MUNNAR TO PALAKKAD**

Journey approximately five hours to the city of Palakkad. Visit Kandath Tharavad, a 200-year-old Keralan architectural gem built from mud and teak, before exploring the city itself. Kerala as a whole has long been a crossroads of trade and therefore diverse in culture and religion - this is reflected in the sights you will visit today – a Jain temple, the Shiva and Snake temple, Kalpathy Brahmin village and Hyder Ali's Fort.

### **Destination Information**

**Religion in Kerala** - Kerala has ancient links with the major religions of the world. Christianity is believed to have come to Kerala's shores much before it reached Rome, via St. Thomas. Islam came early too, because of the Arab traders. Judaism sprung up when, according to legend, merchants came here as part of King Solomon's fleet, besides the vibrant Buddhist period and flourishing Jain communities. Despite so many religions, faith has always been a purely personal affair.

## **DAY 10: PALAKKAD**

Start the day with an invigorating yoga class before an easy walk through the rice paddies and enjoy a tumbler of tea in a local tea shop. Climb aboard a bullock-drawn cart to travel through winding country lanes to visit some of the area's cottage industries. Meet the artisans of a potter's and basket weaver's colony and see the technique of toddy tapping. This afternoon, prepare for something mystical! Learn about various methods of fortune telling that are popular in the Palakkad area, and have your own fortune read.

### **Destination Information**

**Astrology in Palakkad** – There are 3 main types of astrology that you will learn about: "Kaviddi Astrology", the calculation and fortune predictions which are based on 27 sea shells empowered with divine positive energy. "Tambul Prasna" in which fortunes are predicted through the positioning, shape, marks and cuts of betel leaf which the devotee is carrying, and "Thatha Shastra" which uses cards to represent 'Karma'.

## **DAY 11: PALAKKAD TO KOCHI**

Travel from Palakkad back to Kochi, stopping en route at the old port town of Kodungalloor. Visits include the 52 AD Kottakavu Church, Cheraman Masjid, India's first mosque and Chenamangalam synagogue. Arrive in Kochi where there is an option to take a sunset cruise along the beautiful Malabar Coast (payable locally).

### **Destination Information**

**Kodungalloor** - The town is considered the cradle of several world religions in India – Christians, Jews, Muslim and Hindus all settled here centuries ago, creating the perfect microcosm of Kerala's, and India's, diversity.

## **DAYS 12-13: KOCHI TO AUSTRALIA**

Any time before your flight will be at leisure.

You will be transferred to the airport according to the departure time of your flight, arriving home the same of following day.

## DISCOVER KERALA TRAVEL INFORMATION

### Visas

Entry visas are required by all visitors to India and Wendy Wu Tours Visa Department can assist you with the process of obtaining a visa. Please be advised that your passport must have at least six months validity left on it when you arrive back into Australia.

**Please be advised that all Visa Applications for India must be completed on-line at the VFS website: [www.vfsglobal.com/india/australia](http://www.vfsglobal.com/india/australia)** - Wendy Wu Tours will assist you with instructions. Once the form is completed, the application and passport must be sent to Wendy Wu Tours. Visas are valid for six months from the date of issue and allow you to stay in the country for up to six months. Visa application forms and all relevant documentation are due in our office 75 days prior to departure. Applications will not be accepted within 50 days of departure. Passports will be returned with your final documentation two to three weeks prior to your group tour's scheduled departure. If you require your passport to be returned earlier, a \$15AUD courier fee will apply.

### Insurance

We strongly encourage all customers to take a copy of their travel insurance documents (especially relevant international contact numbers) with them while on tour. We advise that you check the inclusions and procedures for lodging claims prior to your departure. These documents should be stored separately from the originals.

### Eating in India

Indian cuisine is one of the most influential, diverse and flavoursome culinary styles in the world. Indian dishes incorporate many spices and seasoning to create an explosion of flavours. Though Indian cuisine can vary greatly from the Indian food we get in Australia, it is important to keep an open mind and be adventurous. Meals shown on the above itinerary (excluding drinks) are included in our group tour. Please be aware that dishes selected for your meals reflect the cooking styles and signature dishes of the local area you are in.

Dishes served in restaurants on our group tours are varied. Some will be vegetable-based, vegetable based with meat mixed in, and a few will be solely meat-based. Our restaurants are well aware of the western palate – there are plenty of non-spiced options.

When eating meals on group tours, you will be seated around a circular table with other tour members. Dishes will be served in the traditional 'family style'; meaning that various dishes will be laid out in the centre of the table top. These dishes are intended to be shared amongst the group – there is always more than enough to feed everybody.

Please read your travel guide which you will receive with your final documents for more information about eating in India. We recommend that when it comes to Indian food, you stay open minded and try to be adventurous!

### Accommodation

All group tour hotels have private western bathroom facilities, air conditioning, TV and a telephone. Plumbing and electricity supplies can be erratic and quite often the power in hotel rooms is turned off while guests are out of the room. If you experience any difficulty, please speak to your National Escort/Local Guide.

Your accommodation has been selected for convenience of location, comfort or character, and can range from a business hotel in one city to a family-run guesthouse in a smaller town or a heritage-type hotel. In remote areas, accommodation may be of a lower standard and may not have western amenities. Hotels are generally rated as local three to four-star standard, but do please note that there is no international classification system for hotels and differences in facilities and quality do exist between Australia and India. Rest assured that all hotels used by Wendy Wu Tours are regularly inspected by our staff and our partners to ensure that standards are met. Please note double bed requests can be made at time of booking but cannot be guaranteed.

**Alternative Accommodation** - In Kerala, you will be staying overnight on board a traditional style houseboat called a kettuvallams

### Early Check-In/Late Check-out

Early check-in and late check out is not included in our Indian group tours. If you wish to add this to your booking, please contact our reservations department who can confirm additional pricing and make this arrangement for you, subject to availability at the hotel.

### Transport

**Coaches:** Coaches with air conditioning are used on our group tours for city sightseeing, short excursions to the countryside and longer transfers where necessary. Due to Indian government regulations the use of curtains/tinted glass windows is prohibited in coaches/buses & taxis across India. Main and inner city roads in India have a reputation for being very congested. For this reason, it may not always be possible to return to your hotel after sightseeing to freshen up before going to the restaurant for dinner. Roads in India have generally been improved over recent years, but traffic and/or weather conditions may extend driving times. Road construction work usually covers an enormous section of road - not just one or two kilometres as you may be used to. For this reason, the timings listed in the sections below are approximations only.

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**Air:** Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines. Pre-flight seat allocation is not available on international and internal flight sectors.

### Development in India

Although India is developing quickly, they still lack the international standards of civil infrastructure and tourist facilities. Concepts of personal responsibility are also different to those in Australia. Consequently, tourist and public facilities may not uphold the same safety standards as in Australia; for example, you may see a hole in the road without a warning sign or safety barricade. All of our suppliers meet local safety standards as a minimum. We want you to have an enjoyable holiday so we ask that you take extra care, use your common sense, refer to notices and follow advice from your National Escort/Local Guides.

### Public Holidays in India

If you are travelling within the below Indian Public Holidays please note that celebrations can last a couple of days and during these times some businesses will be closed and coach, air and train travel may be affected. Tourist attractions will be open, but may be crowded. India Republic Day is on 26<sup>th</sup> January, the Holi Festival 1<sup>st</sup> - 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2018 (The Hindu 'Festival of Colours' can include locals smearing coloured powder on one another. Every effort will be made to minimise the effect on passengers whilst touring). Diwali Festival is on 7<sup>th</sup> November 2018.

### Souvenirs

We want to be able to give you an opportunity to buy souvenirs so we include some stops at museums or exhibitions which demonstrates a craft or product unique to that region with pieces available to buy. We understand that souvenir hunting is not for everyone so we aim to take you to places which hold local interest. We trust you will enjoy these opportunities to learn about local arts and crafts and understand their historical and cultural importance.

## Group Size

Most of our groups consist of 10 travellers or more and will be accompanied by both a National Escort/Local Guides. There will usually be no more than 15 travellers in each group although you may encounter other Wendy Wu tour groups while you are travelling.

All our departures are guaranteed to operate with a minimum of 8 travellers booked (unless cancelled due to factors beyond our control). However, at our discretion we may operate departures with a smaller group size as we try to operate advertised departures wherever it is viable to do so. For groups with fewer than 10 travellers, departures will operate with Local Guides only.

## Tipping Policy

Local tipping is customary in Asia. However, this can often lead to awkwardness in knowing when it is appropriate to tip and how much, as well as ensuring you have a suitable amount of change available at the time. For your convenience, with years of experiences in providing the best customer service, Wendy Wu Tours operates a kitty system on our Group Tours so your National Escort will look after this aspect of your trip for you. It also ensures that the amounts paid are reasonable for you but still fair for the local people. The amount is stated on each Group Tour page will be advised again on your final documentation. Tipping is in US Dollars and will be collected by your National Escort on arrival and distributed throughout the tour on your behalf. Any additional tipping on any of our tours is welcomed at your discretion. Further guidance for tipping contributions will be outlined in your final documentation.

## Packing List and Climate

You will find a complete packing list and a helpful climate chart in the 'Suggested Packing List', which will be included in the pre-departure information link sent within your deposit documentation. Seasonal weather patterns can be quite unpredictable. Up to the minute information on worldwide weather can be found on [www.weather.com](http://www.weather.com)

## Luggage

All travellers are limited to two items of luggage each; a suitcase with a maximum weight of 15kg and one piece of hand luggage with a maximum weight of five kilograms. It is essential that your luggage is lockable. Please note that authorities will only allow bottles onto the aircraft if they have been checked in as main baggage. Bottles in hand luggage may be confiscated.

## Exchanging Cash

It is highly recommended that when travelling to cities outside of Delhi and other main cities that extra care and attention is paid when exchanging money. US Dollars are easily exchanged throughout India however, other currencies such as Australian Dollars can generally be exchanged in hotels and airports provided notes are new and undamaged. We suggest exchanging your money before travelling to remote areas and smaller towns, as exchange facilities can be limited. Your National Escort/Local Guide will remind you to do this before departure.

## Personal Expenses & Optional Tours

**Personal Expense** - You will need to take some extra money to cover drinks, laundry and souvenirs, plus any additional sightseeing that may be offered to you. Based on the advice of previous customers an approximate amount of AUD\$250 per person, per week should be sufficient; however for those that can't resist a bargain or may wish to participate in all of the optional excursions, consider allocating a higher amount.

**Optional Tours** - May be offered in each city you visit during your tour. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits and if seats are available. In your Final Documentation an Optional Excursion Sheet will be included outlining the activities available in each city and local cost associated. Please ensure you have additional funds available if you feel you may wish to participate in any extra activities. Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide, participation and tipping for optional excursions is completely at your discretion.



## Climbing Steps

Sightseeing at nearly all of the palaces, fortresses and some temples involves climbing quite a number of steps. These palaces were built to provide defense against potential invaders so nearly all of them stand on top of a hill, while the interiors have layers of narrow hallways and steps to slow down the advance of enemies once they were inside. The steps tend to be quite large, not level and sometimes without handrails. Hindu and Buddhist temples or pagodas also tend to be built at an elevation, as this is the most auspicious position according to ancient beliefs. This means you sometimes need to walk from the bus park to the entrance, and/or need to climb some steps inside.

People with knee or hip injuries, who have poor balance or are otherwise unable to complete these activities independently should consider the suitability of this itinerary carefully.

## Cultural Difference

India has many religions, cultures and histories. Foreign tourists, particularly female travellers, may be stared at as Indian women in some areas generally do not go out without their father or husband. Please be considerate of this, the local beliefs and customs and dress with consideration and modesty.

## Appropriate Dress

When visiting temples or mosques, both men and women should dress in conservative, non-revealing clothing. Full-length trousers with a shirt or t-shirt for men; and pants or skirts well below the knee with a top that covers the shoulders and upper arms for women. Women might also consider carrying a 'modesty shawl' in their daypack – this could be a sarong or light scarf – which they can wear over their shoulders and heads to feel more comfortable while sightseeing at mosques. When visiting Jain temples, you must not wear or take in any leather items such as belts, watches, camera straps, purses and shoes.

Religious sites and homes throughout India – for Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Muslims or Buddhists to name a few – require all visitors to remove their shoes to enter. Even if you then need to walk outdoors, over hot or rough ground, you will not be allowed to wear shoes. You will often find shoe storage rooms near the entrance of a site where it is customary to leave your shoes near the entrance. Occasionally there are 'shoe minders' who will offer to keep your shoes safe for a 'tip' – this is not compulsory so each customer can choose to tip for this service or not. If you do not want to remove your shoes, you will have to remain outside.

We recommend shoes that easily slip on and off, and carry a pair of thick socks in your daypack, which you can wear to protect your feet from any rough or hot surfaces. The following itinerary will indicate when you need to consider this.

## Vaccinations and Your Health

We recommend that you contact either your GP or Travelvax (1300 360 164) for advice on vaccinations and travel health. Travelvax has a comprehensive website that you may also find useful [www.travelvax.com.au](http://www.travelvax.com.au)

## Before You Leave

We strongly recommend registering your travel plans with [www.smartraveller.gov.au](http://www.smartraveller.gov.au) as in the event of an emergency, Australian Consular assistance will be more readily available. You can also access the Australian Government's travel advisory service for up to date information about your destination on the same website.

## After Your Booking

Once you have booked with Wendy Wu Tours, you will receive a confirmation invoice with deposit documentation via email. This includes important information and links to access the visa application form and instructions sheet online (if applicable). Your final documentation pack will be sent to you approximately four weeks prior to departure.

**Updated: 13<sup>th</sup> October 2017**