



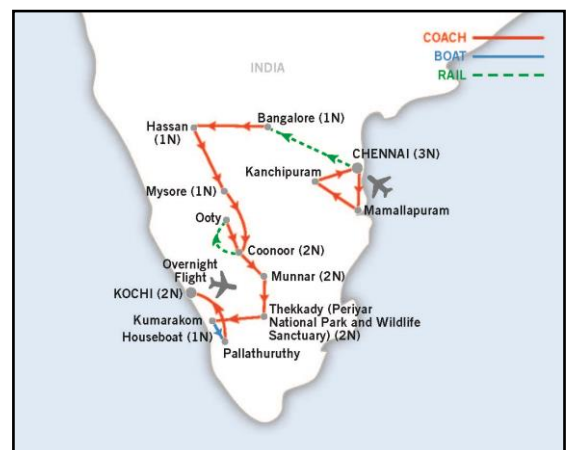
## Kerala & the Southern Highlights Tour Dossier

Classic Tour | 17 Days | Moderate

This fascinating tour will entice even the most widely travelled individual. Southern India is very different from the north, providing stark contrasts between spices, food, cultures and climate.

### Tour Highlights:

- **Chennai** - Previously known as Madras and the former British trading post with distinctive colonial influence
- **Bangalore** - Often referred to as south India's 'garden city'
- **Hassan** - Gateway to the impressive Temples of Belur, Halebid and Shravanabelagola
- **Mysore** - Famous for production of incense and sandalwood
- **Coonoor and Ooty** - Beautiful hill stations of the Nilgiri Hills
- **Munnar** - Home to impressive mountain backdrops and tea cultivation
- **Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary** - South India's most renowned wildlife sanctuary and home to many exotic animals
- **Pallathuruthy/Alleppey** - Experience cruising the backwaters on a kettuwallam, a traditional houseboat
- **Kumarakom** - Relaxing backwaters of the Vembanad Lake
- **Kochi** - Kerala's most vibrant city, formerly known as 'Cochin'



## Kerala & the Southern Highlights tour inclusions

- Return international economy 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)
- Visa fees for Australian passport holders

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

## Classic Tours

These tours are designed for those who wish to see the iconic sites and magnificent treasures of India on an excellent value group tour whilst travelling with like-minded people. The tours are on a fully-inclusive basis so you'll travel with the assurance that all your arrangements are taken care of. You will be accompanied by our dedicated and professional National Escort or local guides, whose unparalleled knowledge will turn your holiday into an unforgettable experience.

## Moderate

'Kerala & the Southern Highlights' is a **moderate** tour. Moderate tours require a higher level of fitness and may include standard activities and longer periods of sightseeing. Easy walking, high altitude and overnight train journeys may feature.

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.

## 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 17 days in duration including international flights. Travellers booked on 'Land Only' arrangements should make their own way to the starting point. Join the tour on Day 1 in Chennai and end the tour on Day 16 in Kochi. Please refer to your Final Itinerary for more specific meeting instructions pertaining to your departure.

## Itinerary Changes

1. 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 whilst maintaining the integrity of your trip.
2. The domestic airlines in this region have frequent schedule changes. For this reason we have indicated morning, afternoon or evening flights only in the following section. Your Local Guide or National Escort will inform you of any schedule.
3. To enhance your time in southern India, a night in Kumarakom has been replaced by a night an additional night in Munnar.

## Important Information Regarding 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 to arrival time.

## Kerala & the Southern Highlights Itinerary

### DAY 1: AUSTRALIA TO CHENNAI

Fly with Singapore Airlines to Chennai for a two-night stay. Your National Escort/Local Guide from Wendy Wu Tours will meet you at the arrivals hall tonight. Together with other group members who may be arriving at a similar time, you will transfer (30 minute drive) to your hotel and check-in. *In the event of flight delays or changes to arrival times, please see the details above as to what to do in this circumstance.*

#### **Destination Information**

**Chennai** - Originally known as Madras, Chennai is India's fourth largest city. It was developed as a British trading post and as such, most of its attractions have a distinct colonial influence. In the last few years, Chennai has become a major commercial, cultural, economic and educational centre in southern India. A major part of India's automobile industry is based in Chennai, as well as computer technology, hardware manufacturing and healthcare sectors.

### DAY 2: CHENNAI

This morning a tour introduction will either be held in the hotel or on the coach. Food and drinks will not be served at this meeting. It is simply an opportunity for your group to meet and learn more about travelling in India. This morning you will meet at 10 am to tour Chennai.

Sightseeing today begins with a visit to Marina Beach *(Please note that parking is not allowed at Marina Beach so you will not be able to disembark here, just drive past it)* before heading to Fort St. George to explore. Later head to the Kapaleeswarar Temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva who is

the most powerful god of the Hindu religion. Today's sightseeing involves approximately 4-5 hours on foot.

#### **Destination Information**

**Marina Beach** - The second longest beach in the world Marina Beach stretches over 13km, from Fort St. George in the north to Besant Nagar in the south.

**Fort St. George** - Built by the British East India Company in 1653, Fort St. George was one of the first bastions of British power in India. The fort is presently used as the offices of the Tamil Nadu Secretariat and the Legislative Assembly. Also visit St. Mary's Church, often described as the Westminster Abbey of the East and India's oldest surviving British church, built in 1680.

**Kapaleeswarar Temple** - Dedicated to Lord Shiva. Situated at Mylapore, it is over 350 years old and is considered by Hindus to be one of the most sacred sites in southern India.

### DAY 3: CHENNAI – KANCHIPURAM & MAMALLAPURAM

This morning drive 1.5 hours (72km) south to Kanchipuram and visit a number of temples and the Shreenivas Silk House. Continue another 1.5 hours (66km) to the coastal town of Mamallapuram, also called Mahabalipuram, to see the rock-cut temples. At the rock-cut temples, sightseeing involves approximately two hours on foot. Please note at the temples there is little to no sun protection or shade. Please remember to bring a hat and sunscreen with you. The streets surrounding the temples are filled with markets and locals selling crafts, jewellery and snacks. If you do not wish to purchase anything, please be polite and firmly decline and keep walking along with the group.

In the afternoon drive 1 hour and 45 minutes (55km) back to Chennai.

#### **Destination Information**

**Kanchipuram** - The ancient capital of the Pallavas. Kanchipuram is one of the seven sacred cities of India and attracts a large number of visitors. Dating back to the 2nd century, the region originally had 1,000 unique temples, of which about 200 still exist.

**Temples of Kanchipuram** - The 7th century Kailasnatha Temple is the oldest and also considered the most beautiful of the town's temples. The Varadaraja Temple was built by Vijayanagara Kings in the 16th century. The main shrine is on an elephant shaped rock. Other temples include the Ekambaresvara Temple and the Vaikunth Perumal Temple.

**Mamallapuram** - Once the major seaport for the ancient Pallava kingdom, Mamallapuram was named after the cruel mythical King Mahabali who was slayed by Lord Vishnu. Mamallapuram is well-known for its UNESCO World Heritage listed temples and carvings.

**Rock Carvings** - An archaeologists dream, Mamallapuram boasts a large number of stone carvings made on uncut rocks dating from the 7th and 8th centuries. Visit the Shore Temple, the Panch Pandava Rathas and Varaha Cave

#### **DAY 4: CHENNAI TO BANGALORE**

Rise early this morning (usually 0430) to catch the Shatabdi Express train to Bangalore (approximately 4.5 hours). You will be given a simple, light breakfast as well as beverages while on the train. However if you require additional food, please purchase it the day prior.

Upon arrival, proceed to your hotel for an overnight stay. In the afternoon tour the city, beginning with the Bull Temple, before continuing to Tipu Sultan's Palace and Vidhana Soudha.

**Please note** - Our train is a day train and our seats will be in an air-conditioned chair car. There will be local travelers in the same carriages. Please keep an eye on your belongings at all times.

#### **Destination Information**

**Bangalore** - The capital of the state of Karnataka, Bangalore is known as the 'Garden City' because of its countless parks and avenues of Jacaranda, Gulmohur and Cassia. It is also home to an expanding IT industry.

**Bull Temple** - One of Bangalore's oldest temples, the Bull Temple is dedicated to Nandi Bull, the vehicle of Lord Shiva. Located inside the temple is a huge idol of Nandi Bull, said to be cut from a single rock.

**Tipu Sultan's Palace** - Construction began on the summer residence of the Mysorean ruler Tipu Sultan in 1781 by Hyder Ali and was completed in 1791 during the reign of Tipu Sultan. Made almost entirely of teak, the palace is finely embellished with balconies, pillars and arches.

**Vidhana Soudha** - Located over Cubbon Park, Vidhana Soudha is a magnificent white granite building which houses the State Legislature and the Secretariat of Karnataka. Built between 1951 and 1956 in Dravidian-style architecture, it is the largest civic structure in India.

#### **DAY 5: BANGALORE TO HASSAN**

This morning change to a smaller coach and depart Bangalore. Drive approximately 4.5 hours (163km) to Shravanabelagola Jain pilgrimage centre, where you will have the opportunity to climb to the top to visit the magnificent statue of Sri Gomatswara. You will need to climb some steps that are not necessarily steep, but are uneven and sometimes slippery; there are also sections without handrails. This is quite a long walk in the open, with little shade available, however you will still be required to remove your shoes. Bring a pair of old, thick socks to protect your feet, drinking water and sun protection. There are sedan chairs\* that you can take one or both ways (at own expense).

Continue driving approximately 1 hour and 15 minutes (50km) to Hassan and visit the 12th century temples of Belur and Halebid.

\*A chair set on two poles carried by two or four people.

#### **Destination Information**

**Shravanabelagola** - One of the most revered Jain pilgrimage centres. Climb the 650 steps to the top of the temple where the great statue of Sri Gomatswara, also known as Lord Bahubali, stands as the tallest free-standing statue in the world.

**Temple of Belur** - Belur is located on the banks of the River Yagachi and is well known for its temples. The Chennakeshava Temple of Belur is one of the finest examples of Hoysala architecture. The temple was built in 1117AD and is filled with intricately carved sculptures and friezes.

**Temple of Halebid** - One of the largest temples dedicated to Lord Shiva in South India. The Hoysaleswara Temple is breathtaking for its fantastic sculptural details. The walls of the temple are covered with an endless variety of gods and goddesses, animals, birds and dancing girls. Despite 86 years of labour, the temple was never completed.

#### **DAY 6: HASSAN TO MYSORE**

Mysore altitude - 770 to 850m

Drive approximately 3.5 hours (130km) south to Mysore today, stopping to view Srirangapatnam Fort en route. This afternoon explore the Maharaja's Palace, the Art Gallery and drive to Chamundi Hills to see the Sri Chamundeshwari Temple. Today's sightseeing involves approximately 3 hours of easy walking and there is a temple and mosque inside the complex – refer to **Appropriate Dress** section below.

Return to your hotel stopping to discover the Nandi Bull statue, carved out of solid rock in 1659. Later, enjoy a traditional cooking demonstration hosted by a local family

#### **Destination Information**

**Srirangapatnam Fort** - This fort was the stronghold of Tipu Sultan, son of Hyder Ali. Here at the fort, Tipu made a last minute ditch defence against the British in 1799 before surrendering his Kingdom upon his death. Among the many fort buildings still intact are Tipu's airy summer palace and his tomb at the Darya Daulat Bagh (a garden). Also located here is the celebrated Sri Ranganathswamy Temple.

**Mysore** - Mysore, known as the 'City of Palaces', is well known for its splendid royal history and the magnificent buildings. Once the administrative capital of the Wodeyar Dynasty, Mysore still retains old world charm with its small alleys, temples, glorious palaces and sprawling gardens.

**Maharaja's Palace** - Located in the heart of the city, Maharaja's Palace is one of the grandest of India's royal buildings. The original palace was destroyed by fire in 1897, the current palace now standing was built between 1911 and 1912 in Indo-Saracenic style and blends together Hindu, Muslim, Rajput, and Gothic styles of architecture.

**Chamundi Hills and Sri Chamundeshwari Temple** - Visible from almost anywhere in Mysore, Chamundi Hills stands at 1,062m-high and is one of the prime landmarks in Mysore. Drive to the top to see the 12th century Sri Chamundeshwari Temple. The temple is dedicated to the Hindu Goddess Durga, and offers a panoramic view of Mysore city.

#### **Day 7: MYSORE TO COONOR**

Coonoor altitude - 1,850m

Head to the hills today as you drive 5-6 hours (149km) to the beautiful hill station of Coonoor. This evening is leisure to take an optional walk around the hill station or enjoy some free time.

#### **Destination Information**

**Coonoor** - Located on the Western Ghats at the height of 1,839m, Coonoor is the second largest hill station in the Nilgiri hills in the state of Tamil Nadu and is famous for its tea plantations and the variety of wildflowers and birds.

#### **DAY 8: COONOR – OOTY**

Ooty altitude - 2,240m

Transfer a short distance to the station this morning to catch the miniature, narrow gauge Toy Train from Coonoor to Ooty, another Nilgiri hill station (approximately 1 hour 20 minutes). Tour the hill station, visiting the stone churches, private schools, the Ooty Club and the terraced botanical gardens. Later there is an optional short walk to a local village, situated above the botanical gardens, where you can gain an insight into the lives of the local people while enjoying the amazing view over Ooty. Return to Coonoor by coach.

Please note that the train timetable is subject to change - your National Escort/Local Guide will inform you of changes as they are made aware of them.

#### **Destination Information**

**Ooty** - Known as the 'Queen of Hill Stations', Ooty sits at an altitude of 2,240m and was established by the British in the early 19th century to serve as the summer headquarters of the Madras (now Chennai) Government. Until about two decades ago, Ooty resembled an unlikely combination of southern England and Australia, with single-storey stone cottages, fenced flower gardens, leafy, winding lanes and tall eucalyptus trees.

**Botanical Gardens** - Created in 1847, the botanical gardens are home to many species of trees, including a 20 million-year-old fossilized tree.

#### **DAY 9: COONOR TO MUNNAR**

Munnar altitude - 1,524m

Today is a long day of driving (249km) as you continue the descent from the highlands and head to Munnar. As you drive to Munnar, you cross the border into Kerala, one of the smallest states in the Republic of India. Formed in 1956, it has an area of 38,864sq km, about one percent of the total land area of India. The state stretches for about 579

km along the Malabar Coast on the western side of the Indian peninsula. The drive is approximately 9 hours (249km) to Munnar - the first hour is a steep and winding descent from the highlands, a stretch of even road and then a steep ascent again to Munnar.

Upon arrival in Munnar proceed to the hotel and check in for overnight stay. Located on the side of a mountain, it offers breathtaking views over the valley.

#### **Destination Information**

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

#### **DAY 10: MUNNAR**

This morning travel 30 mins (13km) to Mattupetty Dam where you will enjoy a leisurely-paced walk around the lakeside area.

In the afternoon, enjoy more light sightseeing with a visit to a local tea plantation and the Tata Tea Museum to learn about the timeless cultivation of tea. Depending on the time of year, you may enjoy a walking tour in the Eravikulam National Park.

**Please note:** Eravikulam National Park is closed from February to April for Nilgiri Tahr mating season. If the park is closed during your visit, touring will be substituted with a walking tour of Munnar.

#### **Destination Information**

**Mattupetty Dam** - A storage concrete gravity dam constructed in the late 1940s. Built for the purposes of water construction and power generation, the dam is now a vital source of electricity for Munnar and a water source for many animals and birds.

**The Tata Tea Museum** - The museum houses photographs and machinery, each depict a turning point that contributed to the flourishing tea industry that is evident today.

**Eravikulam National Park** - Situated along the crest of the Western Ghats in the high ranges of Idukki district, the park is approximately 97sq km in size. The park holds the largest viable population of the endangered Nilgiri Tahr, a small stocky goat. Apart from the Nilgiri Tahrs, the national park is home to other animals such as Nilgiri Marten, ruddy mongoose, small-clawed otter and dusky striped squirrel.

#### **DAY 11: MUNNAR TO THEKKADY**

Depart Munnar and begin the 5 hour (130 km) drive to Thekkady, where Periyar National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary is located. In the afternoon visit a local village and spice market.

#### **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. The construction of the Mullaperiyar Dam across the Periyar River at Thekkady in 1895 submerged large tracts of land and created a huge lake covering an area of 26sq km. Years later in 1935, the then Maharaja of Travancore declared 600sq km of forest surrounding the lake a wildlife sanctuary.

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 12: THEKKADY**

Rise early this morning to begin at 0700 a walk through the park, searching for wildlife such as elephants, wild dog, barking deer, mouse deer and the rarely seen spotted tiger. There is a variety of walks on offer, generally 4-7 km in length. Your local guide will provide you with leech protection socks to wear during nature walks. If you do not wish to join the walk, please notify your National Escort/Local Guide for alternative arrangements.

Enjoy the afternoon at leisure before viewing a Kalaripayattu performance this evening.

#### **Destination Information**

**Wildlife in Periyar** - Periyar is home to 62 species of mammals, 320 species of birds, 45 species of reptiles, 27 species of amphibians, 38 species of fish and 160 butterfly species.

**Kalaripayattu performance** - A traditional form of martial arts that started in southern India. Kalaripayattu martial arts incorporate kicks, strikes, grappling and weaponry in their movements.

#### **DAY 13: THEKKADY TO KUMARAKOM**

Depart Thekkady and drive for 4.5 hours (126km) to Kumarakom, where you will board your overnight houseboat, a converted rice barge known as a 'Kettuvallam'.

As you cruise along the backwaters, you will witness the village life of those that live along the banks. What is truly magical about a houseboat ride is the breathtaking view of the untouched and otherwise inaccessible rural Kerala. An unhurried backwater cruise on a traditional houseboat is the best way to discover Kerala's exceptional scenic beauty. Enjoy dinner onboard.

#### **Destination Information**

**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.

**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.

#### **DAY 14: HOUSEBOAT TO KOCHI**

After breakfast on board, disembark your houseboat and drive to Kochi. Stop en route at a local market in Alleppey and a coir factory. Upon arrival in Kochi proceed to your hotel and check into your hotel for a two-night stay. After lunch drive 1 hour (20km) to visit Kumbalangi Integrated Tourism Village.

#### **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.

**The Kumbalangi Integrated Tourism Village** - Located 20km outside Kochi, Kumbalangi Integrated Tourism Village is a unique program which transformed a tiny island into a model fishing village and tourism spot.

#### **DAY 15: KOCHI**

Today tour the sites of Kochi, visiting sites such as St. Francis Church and the Santa Cruz Basilica. From the basilica view the unique cantilevered Chinese fishing nets,

the only place outside China that they are used. Explore the Jewish synagogue, located in the heart of the Jewish Quarter and enjoy a Kathakali dance performance this evening. Today's sightseeing will involve about 2-3 hours on foot and a total of 4-5 hours of touring.

#### **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 15th to 20th 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 14th 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 16: DEPART KOCHI**

Enjoy the day at your leisure to relax. Lunch with the group is included today and your guide will advise you when to meet. However, if you decide to have lunch on your own please let your National Escort know; it will be at your own expense if you choose to do this. After a late check-out (1800hrs) and farewell dinner, you will be transferred approximately 1 hour to the airport to board the overnight flight home.

#### **DAY 17: ARRIVE AUSTRALIA**

Arrive home today.



## KERALA & THE SOUTHERN HIGHLIGHTS 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 6 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 6 months from the date of issue and allow you to stay in the country for up to 6 months. Visa application forms and all relevant documentation are due in our office 70 days prior to departure. Applications will not be accepted within 50 days of departure. Passports will be returned with your final documentation 2-3 weeks prior to your group tour's scheduled departure. If you require your passport to be returned earlier, a \$15 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 flavorful culinary styles in the world. Indian dishes incorporate many spices and seasoning to create an explosion of flavors. 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. All meals (excluding drinks) are included in our fully inclusive Golden Triangle group tour, from the groups' arrival until the groups' day of departure. 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 with meat mixed in, and a few will be 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. Refer to your *Travel Guide* for further information.

### Early Check-In/Late Check-Out

Early check-in is not included in our Indian group tours. If you wish to add early check-in 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. Late check-out until 1800hrs is included in this group tour for passengers travelling on our fully inclusive package in the last hotel of stay.

### 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. 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 above are approximations only.

Please note that seatbelts are not compulsory by law in India and therefore people largely choose not to wear them. For this reason some vehicles may not be fitted with seatbelts or they may be hidden underneath protective seat covers. It is recommended that where seatbelts are available customers must use them and remain seated at all times while the vehicle is moving. If you have any concerns, please notify your National Escort/Local Guides.

**Planes:** Internal flights are based on economy class, with reputable airlines.

### Development in India

Although India is developing quickly, it still lacks 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.

### 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; for example, in Agra you will be able to see local artists creating stunning marble pieces, similar to what is used on the Taj Mahal. 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 a National Escort. There will usually be no more than 29 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**

Tipping while on holiday is a firm and expected element in the tourism industry and India is no exception. To remove the uncertainty and stress of not knowing how much is appropriate to tip or to whom, Wendy Wu Tours operates a tipping policy for our group tours where a nominated tipping amount is paid upon commencement of the programme by each tour member. This amount is stated in all group pricing, however it is not collected in your final payment received by Wendy Wu Tours.

This nominated tipping amount is to be given to your National Escort at the beginning of your tour, who will then distribute it amongst your main service providers – guides, drivers and coach attendants – on your behalf during the tour. Any other tipping, such as tips for camera and video fees, bathroom attendants or hotel porters that are taking luggage to your room, is at your discretion as are gratuities for additional requested special services. We encourage passengers to have a supply of small denominations of local currency to distribute for personal tipping.

The tipping amount is determined based on the total number of passengers travelling in the group. The amount is designed to be at a reasonable level for travellers while being fair to the local people and includes a gratuity for the National Escort. The final tipping amount will be outlined in your final documentation, which is distributed 2 weeks prior to your tours departure.

## **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 7kgs. It is essential that your luggage is lockable. Please note that Indian 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**

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 AU\$250 per week should be sufficient; however for those that cannot resist a bargain, consider allocating a higher amount.

Optional tours may be offered in each city you visit during your tour at an additional cost. These are not included in the standard itinerary and will only be available if time permits. Each option will be arranged locally by your National Escort/Local Guide.

## 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 Differences

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, old 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 2 weeks prior to departure.

**Updated: 17 March 2017**