EXPLORE!

TRIP NOTES

PRICE GUARANTEE 100% NO SURCHARGES

Kerala Backwaters (KB 2017)

CULTURAL DISCOVERY

TRIPDURATI
9
DAYS

Tour Style: Classic
Tour Pace: Moderate

Tour Type: Small Groups
Accommodation
Grade: Standard

Trip Code: KB

Trip Highlights - Kerala Backwaters

- ✓ Houseboat - Drift through the backwaters on a traditional houseboat
- ✓ Homestay - Enjoy a tasty homecooked curry whilst spending the night with a local family
- ✓ Hill stations - Head for hills and spend time in the cooler climate perfect for cultivating tea
- ✓ Kochi - Explore Kochi from the water, including Fort Kochi, St Francis Church and Mattancherry Palace

Trip Essentials

Accommodation:	4 nights Premium Hotel 1 night Standard Hotel 2 nights Simple Homestay 1 night Simple Boat
Included Meals:	8 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 3 dinners
Start Point:	Join trip: Kochi
End Point:	Trip ends: Kochi
Transport:	Bus, Boat
Countries:	India

Kerala Backwaters

Unwind with us on this relaxing exploration of Kerala, a corner of India known by its welcoming locals, as God's own country. We cruise tranquil backwaters by houseboat, trek in search of wildlife in Periyar National Park and visit hilltop tea and spice plantations. Along the way we discover colonial Kochi and spend a night in a family run homestay.

Why Book this trip

This tour will suit anyone looking for a relaxed introduction to south India. It offers a chance to fully experience life in Kerala's beautiful backwaters by spending two nights in a family home. With a slightly more relaxed vibe than India's northern states you can get a taste of Indian culture, and learn a little of the spices and tea that are exported from what is known as Gods own country.

Suitability

We've given each of our tours a comfort rating and a tour pace, walking or cycling grade to give you a general idea about the level of activity on each tour and the standard of accommodation you will be staying in at the end of your day's adventure.

Often you'll stay in different styles of accommodation during your tour; so we make an average rating across the entire tour. For more information on where you'll stay each night, please refer to the day by day tour itinerary.

Accommodation Grade: Standard

Our mid-range accommodation offers a good level of service often with other amenities such as a restaurant, bar, garden or swimming pool. Generally rooms will be comfortable with en-suite facilities.

Tour Style: Classic

Packed with adventure, these tours offer inspiring destinations and authentic travel experiences at a reasonable price. Using all kinds of transport and accommodation, we'll take you off the beaten track to discover the true heart of the people and places you visit.

Tour Pace: Moderate

These moderately paced tours provide some busy days with plenty of experiences to enjoy, as well as time to relax along the way.

Your trip itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

Your Tour Leader

A Tour Leader is an integral part of any Explore tour and your tour will be led by one of our experienced tour leaders who have been handpicked and expertly trained. We believe that our Tour Leaders are the key to the success of our tours; they are passionate travellers who are bursting with first-hand local knowledge which they love to share. Your tour Leader will also take care of all the planning and organisation throughout your journey. Their passionate approach will make this tour fun and inspiring, bringing the destination to life whether you're travelling alone or with others.

DAY 1 Join tour in Kochi

Our tour begins this afternoon in the coastal city of Kochi (Cochin).

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: None

DAY 2 Explore the fort and Jewish Quarter of Kochi

Kochi has been a gathering place of merchants since antiquity and is full of bustling traders. A half day tour by boat is planned for today. Fort Kochi is the oldest European settlement in India (1500), and has a mixture of English, Dutch and Portuguese influence. The Mattancherry Palace was built by the Portuguese in the 16th century, but extensive renovations by the Dutch some hundred years later earned it the name the Dutch Palace. It has some of the best murals in India, depicting scenes from the Ramayana and other great legends. On our tour we visit the Jew town synagogue where Kochi's surviving Jewish community come to worship. Nearby are the interesting cantilevered Chinese Fishing nets. In the early evening we see a performance of Kathakali, which is thought by some to be the very essence of the culture of Kerala. Its origins may have come from traditional temple rituals and from an art form known as Koodiyattam. It is the face make up which makes this dancing so unique. The dancers can take up to three hours painting their faces - the features are heavily emphasised as it is the facial expressions and co-ordinated eye movements which are important in the dance. The dances usually portray events from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, great Indian epics.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 3 Drive through spice and tea plantations to Munnar and enjoy free time in the town

This morning we drive to Munnar through an area of spice and tea plantations. Kerala has been renowned for its spices for at least 2000 years, the coast had been known by the Phoenicians, Romans, Arabs and Chinese for its sandalwood and spices. There was also a flourishing trade in 'black gold' - pepper - which, along with the spices, was sent to Europe by the Jewish and Arab traders. In return, copper, brass and gold coins came to Kerala. It was this trading link which brought Christianity and Islam into Kerala - the first place in India to host these two faiths. Munnar is a pleasant place to spend time, with its green tropical forests, fresh mountain air and neat tea plantations. It is hardly surprising it has become a favourite for Indian honeymooners. The afternoon is free to explore this beautiful town.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 4 Visit tea and spice plantations; drive to Thekkady

Our day starts with a fascinating visit to a tea museum where we can learn how it is processed. It is the women who usually pick the tea because of their nimble fingers, their brightly coloured clothes contrast sharply with the greenery of the plantations. Leaving the tea museum, we drive for around 4 hours to Thekkady where we'll take a nature walk through delightful countryside and visit a spice garden, learning about how the spices are grown and processed.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 5 Take a walk in Periyar National Park

Our route this morning takes us past rubber plantations and varied spice gardens to Periyar wildlife sanctuary, close to the border with Tamil Nadu. One of 16 tiger reserves in India, Periyar is it is perhaps better known for its elephants. There are about 40 tigers living in the 777 sq km park but, as they are solitary creatures, the chances of seeing them are very slim. We go for a walk in search of other wildlife such as the wild boar, giant malabar, porcupine and the flying squirrel. The Park itself is made up of a variety of habitats, open grasslands, deciduous, semi-evergreen and tropical forests all of which have different animal species. The ecosystem

of the tropical evergreen jungle is very interesting as the trees grow up to 40m, and the dense canopy only allows in limited sunlight. Therefore at ground level, there are abundant ferns, orchid and airplants- plants which need little light to survive. Leaving the park we head back towards the coast and our homestay for the next two nights. We stay with local families within a village, and your tour leader will brief you on local customs and traditions. It is a great opportunity to spend time learning about the real life of Keralans as well as an opportunity to sample some delicious home cooking - perhaps a spicy coconut curry. The rooms are in the same style as a traditional Keralan home with mattresses made locally using coir fibres, a material taken from coconut husks which allows air to flow naturally - ideal in this humid region. All rooms are twin share and the majority of them have their own attached bathrooms, although there are some rooms with a private bathroom located in a corridor next to the room. Bathrooms are basic with a toilet and a simple shower, and hot water can be limited at times. All bedding and towels are provided.

Overnight: **Simple Homestay**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 6 Take an optional cooking class or village walk

We spend today exploring the village and getting to know our host families. There will be a chance to take a cooking lesson, take gentle walks through the surrounding villages or just kick back and relax for the day.

Overnight: **Simple Homestay**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 7 Board a houseboat and float through the backwaters

This morning we board our houseboats and begin our journey into the network of the Kerala backwaters. The traditional houseboats are simple vessels, with en-suite twin rooms. The pace is relaxed - enabling us to see riverside village life in its entirety. The industrious villagers survive on narrow spits of land, keeping cows, chickens and cultivating vegetable gardens. Even the shells from the fresh water mussels are burnt to make building lime, and the fibre from the coconut palm has many uses including coir products made from coconut fibre. The gardens are generally well tended often with brightly coloured flowers, such as hibiscus, contrasting sharply with the tropical greenery.

Overnight: **Simple Boat**

Included Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 8 Free time to explore Kochi

After a relaxed breakfast we disembark from our houseboats and return to Kochi where the rest of the day is left free for personal exploration.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**
Single Room Available

Included Meals: Breakfast

DAY 9 Tour ends Cochin

Our tour ends this morning after breakfast.

Included Meals: Breakfast

Accommodation and Meals

Accommodation Notes

Accommodation in India is as varied as the country itself. On our tours we stay in a mix of hotels, heritage properties, camp sites and homestays. Standards do not equate to standards in the UK and it's best to approach each type of accommodation with an open mind. Service can be slow in places especially when travelling with a group. For the most part hotels do not have heating so in the winter months it can be chilly and if you feel the cold you may wish to ask for extra blankets. Hot water is not always available 24 hours a day in some of the smaller properties, and with a group staying you might find if you are showering last you may miss out on the hottest water.

Food & Drink

Included meals: 8 breakfasts, 2 lunches,3 dinners included in the price of this trip. Please be prepared to pay for non-included meals. Please note that costs for drinks and meals can vary depending on location.

Budgeting for your Trip

You will need some extra money to cover meals and drinks not included in the trip price, any optional sightseeing, souvenirs and items of a personal nature such as laundry.

Food

The costs for meals may vary depending upon location, type of restaurant and number of courses eaten and so the prices given are an average guide.Local restaurants located off the beaten track may be less expensive, whereas an upmarket restaurant located in the centre of a major city may charge more.

India

Lunch £: 6.00

Dinner £: 8.00

Drink

The prices for drinks can vary greatly depending upon location and the prices detailed below are an average guide. In general you would expect that drinks purchased in a supermarket or local bar to be less expensive, whilst drinks in an upmarket bar or restaurant may be more expensive.

India

Bottle of Beer £: 1.40

Water £: 0.50

Tipping - Tour Leader

At your discretion you might also consider tipping your Tour Leader in appreciation of the efficiency and service you receive.

Tipping - Local Crew

Although entirely voluntary, tipping is a recognized part of life in this region of the world. Some local staff will look to members of the group for personal recognition of particular services provided. In order to make things easier for you, the Tour Leaders may organise a group's tips kitty and if this is the case, they will account for it throughout the tour.
Accordingly, you should allow £30 for tipping. Your tour leader will account to you for any organised tipping.

Foreign Exchange

India

ATM Availability: ATMs are available in most large cities in India but they are very limited elsewhere so please do not rely on this.

Credit Card Acceptance: Very rarely, only in the larger outlets.

Travellers Cheques: Opportunities to exchange are limited.

Local Currency: Indian Rupee Recently new 500, 1000 and 2000 rupee notes have been bought in to circulation and as the old notes are no longer accepted there have been some cash flow issues. You don't need to worry about being given old notes as it's very easy to tell the difference, the new notes are pristine in comparison with most Indian money which is fairly tatty.

Recommended Currency for Exchange: GBP/US$ are the best currency to change into local currency.

Where to Exchange: The Indian rupee is a restricted currency and it is best not to obtain in the UK as rates are very poor. You can either change money at the airport on arrival or in major towns during the tour. Your Tour Leader will advise you on the best places in each town. Both GBP and USD cash are easy to exchange at the airport and at hotels however you will be restricted to changing £60 cash at a time and it's not possible to change money at these locations using a credit or debit card.

Joining your Trip

Flight Information

You are able to book this tour on a 'land only' basis or as a ‘flight inclusive’ package. Your flight inclusive package will be fully protected by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) ATOL protection scheme.

Booking a land only package with Explore

Customers who have chosen to book on the ‘Land Only’ arrangements of our tour, please ensure that you have checked your tour specific ‘Joining Instructions’ prior to booking your own travel arrangements. Your joining instructions can be found on our website at www.explore.co.uk, in the tour specific dates and prices section.

You may also be eligible for the Free Explore Transfer. For more information please refer to https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers.

Joining Tour Abroad

Customers booked on the ‘Land Only’ arrangements will now receive a Free Transfer, provided you arrive and depart on the tour only itinerary start and end dates. The transfers will be from the Explore designated airport or train station to the joining point of your tour,

and then back from the ending point to the designated airport or train station. The exception to this rule is customers who are booked on a tour where the joining and ending point is at the designated airport or train station.

Free transfers are not available for Self-Guided, Tailormade or Tours for Churches customers.

If you are not eligible for the Free Transfer then you will need to make your own way through to the joining and ending point. On a majority of our tours Explore will be able to provide a private transfer at an additional cost. Please ask for a quote at the time of booking.

For more information regarding the Explore Free Transfer please refer to https://www.explore.co.uk/transfers.

Booking a flight inclusive package with Explore

We have a good selection of flights not only from London but from many regional airports around the UK allowing us to compare fares between scheduled carriers as well as low cost and charter airlines. Our dedicated flights team will match the best flight options to your arrival and departure airport.

On our website we display a UK flight inclusive package guide price which is generally based on a London departure. To avoid paying supplements or to secure your preferred flight option, we recommend booking as early as possible, especially for peak travel dates.

Important Information

Travel Insurance

It is a condition of booking with Explore that you have adequate valid travel insurance. It is your responsibility to arrange appropriate travel insurance and ensure you have read and understood the full terms and conditions of your travel insurance policy to ensure that you are covered for all activities you intend to undertake whilst on the tour, including all optional activities. Your Insurance Policy must fully cover you for medical expenses and emergency repatriation to your home country. Please ensure your policy includes medical emergency helicopter evacuation in the event of illness or injury and covers the entire duration of your holiday. If you are trekking at altitude please ensure that there is no upper altitude limit which may limit or exclude cover for your trip. Medical and repatriation insurance cover is not mandatory for UK residents who are travelling on trips within the United Kingdom.

EXPLORE!
The Adventure Travel Experts

CAMPBELL IRVINE
DIRECT TRAVEL INSURANCE

Travel Insurance is essential. If you have not already arranged cover, please contact our recommended Travel Insurance providers www.campbellirvinedirect.com/Explore who offer Travel Insurance specifically designed to cover travel with Explore or call **Campbell Irvine Direct** on Tel: 020 7938 1734

Explore Worldwide is an Introducer Appointed Representative of Campbell Irvine Ltd who are authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority.

Travel Aware

We strongly recommend that you check your government's travel advisory for up-to-date information and advice about your destination: safety and security, entry requirements, health, local laws and customs. For UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office Advice follow the link at www.explore.co.uk/travel-safety
We strongly advise that you register with the FCO to receive updates to the travel advice for your chosen destination. A hard copy of the current FCO Travel Advice for your chosen destination is available by contacting cr@explore.co.uk or 01252 379438.

Under 18 immigration guidance

Please note that some countries require proof of parental consent when travelling overseas with under 18s. Please check requirements with the relevant embassy or consular office well in advance of travel if this applies to your party.

Visa Information

India: Holders of passports endorsed 'British citizen' may be eligible for the e-Tourist Visa to enter India.

The visa can be applied for through the official Indian government visa website only - https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html. Please check all eligibility criteria that can be found on the website but important points are listed below -

You must be arriving into one of 16 selected entry points, however, you can exit from any of the authorised immigration check posts in India.

Entry points are - Bengaluru, Chennai, Delhi, Goa, Kochi, Kolkata, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Thiruvananthapuram, Jaipur, Amritsar, Gaya, Lucknow, Trichy, Varanasi and Ahmedabad.

Passports must have at least 6 months validity from the date of arrival in India and at least two blank pages for stamping. The visa application will take approximately 4 days to process.
It is only valid for 30 days and is only allowed for a maximum of two visits in a calendar year.

The visa costs $60. Biometric data will be collected on arrival in India.

Whilst the online form offers a relatively quick way to apply for a visa, a number of applicants have reported difficulty in completing the form. Travcour will complete the on-line visa on your behalf for a fee of £25 + the visa cost. Please contact them directly if you wish to take up this service.

If you are not eligible for the e-Tourist Visa, please refer to VFS Global to apply for your Indian visa - http://in.vfsglobal.co.uk/how_to_apply.html.

If you do require assistance in obtaining a visa then you may consider applying through Explore's recommended visa service in the UK, Travcour. See www.travcour.com to download the relevant visa application for your trip, if applicable (UK citizens only), along with details of how to apply for your visa through Travcour. The Team at Travcour will be happy to answer specific questions relating to visa applications, please call them directly on 0208 5431846.

Vaccinations & Protection

India

Nothing compulsory, but we recommend protection against Tetanus, Infectious Hepatitis, Typhoid and Polio. Consult your travel clinic for latest advice on different prophylaxis available against malaria (eg. Paludrine, Chloroquine, Mefloquine etc.). The above is not an exhaustive list. Further information regarding vaccinations and travel health advice can be found by following the NHS and NaTHNaC links at http://www.explore.co.uk/Travelhealth and from your local healthcare provider.

Preparing for your Trip

Climate

India

There is considerable variation between the different regions of India but, in general, the climate is tropical. Summer temperatures on the plains are very hot, but cooled by the South-West Monsoon, which lasts from June- September. During these months it can be very wet and therefore very humid. At altitude, temperatures can become quite cool at night even in the summer and may drop below freezing between December and February so warm clothing is necessary. In the winter, northern and mid India can be very cool, with cold evenings, so warm clothing, including plenty of layers, are essential. The south of India remains warm and sunny during the winter months.

Clothing

Kerala is a tropical tropical region with high humidity. Lightweights are needed all year round with some warmer clothes for the cooler winter evenings (November to March) in Munnar and Periyar. Casual clothes are the most practical: tight fitting garments, brief shorts and skirts should be avoided, since they attract unwelcome attention. A beach towel is also recommended.

Equipment

Binoculars, torch, insect repellent and water bottle. You may wish to take a mosquito net for use in the village house as they are not provided.

Footwear

Walking shoes or trainers and sandals.

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of baggage and a daysac. Remember – hotel porters are not always available, so don't overload yourself.

Luggage allowance on trip: 20kg

General Information

Country details

India

Population: 1,210,193,422

Size of Country: 3,287,263 sq km

Major Language: Hindi and English.

Religion: Catholicism, Hindu, Muslim and Sikhism

Time Difference to GMT: +5

Electric Supply & Plugs

India

3 Pin Round

Why Choose Explore

We've been creating award-winning pioneering adventure holidays for over 30 years, earning the trust of thousands of delighted customers, who feel safe in our hands. Our tour leaders have expert local knowledge and our tours are designed to take you off the beaten track to see the most exotic, inspiring and dramatic places in the world.

- With over 30 years' experience, we are passionate about what we do.
- Pioneering small group adventures, self-guided, private journeys & tailormade holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one the driving principles of Explore.

Our adventure holidays are full of exciting things to see and do, exploring in small groups travelling by bus, boat, plane, rickshaw, camel, or any number of unusual forms of transport. Often you will stay in family run hotels and village houses and enjoy authentic local cuisine. In this way, it's easy to discover the true heart of the people and the place you travel to – and make some new friends along the way. Each tour is uniquely different, so please feel free to browse through our tours to see what may whet your appetite.

Cool Earth

Explore are proud to support Cool Earth in their effort to reduce global carbon dioxide levels through the prevention of deforestation in the South America rainforest. Cool Earth focus on areas in immediate danger of deforestation, supporting local communities to be forest guardians. To date 350,000 acres of rainforest has been protected. Saving rainforest also protects rare animals and plants, allows local forest communities to maintain their way of life, and protects a major source of oxygen and fresh water. When you travel on an Explore holiday we make a donation to Cool Earth that exceeds the impact of our customers flights each year.

Earth Matters

We are passionate about sustainable travel and work hard to create tours where your holiday delivers real benefits to the local communities. We minimise our impact by travelling in small groups, respecting local cultures, reducing waste and offsetting 100% of the CO2 from our flights.

When you travel with Explore, you are directly contributing to local economies and helping empower the people you meet. We currently support a range of charities and good causes, including: Toilet Twinning (helping to flush away poverty), Lone Buffalo Foundation (a community project based in Laos providing creative skills for young people) and have recently supported women's cooperatives in Borneo and Morocco. We are a member of Tourism Concern's Ethical Tour Operator Group (www.tourismconcern.org.uk) and support their campaign for fair and ethical tourism. We also care passionately about the world's wildlife and actively support and promote the Born Free Organisation and Mahouts Elephant Foundation.

Booking Your Holiday

Peace of mind - book with confidence

You can book your Explore holiday with confidence, as all monies paid to us for your trip are fully protected. Explore is a fully bonded tour operator licensed by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) and by ABTOT.

The air holiday packages (Tours including flights) that we advertise are ATOL protected, since we hold an Air Travel Organiser's LicenceÂ granted by the Civil Aviation Authority.Â Our ATOL number is ATOL 2595. In addition, As a member of the Association of Bonded Travel Organisers Trust Limited (ABTOT), Explore has provided a bond to meet the requirements of the Package Travel, Package Holidays and Package Tours Regulations 1992. Please note that packages booked outside the UK are only protected when purchased directly with Explore.

Reserving your place

To reserve your place on this tour you will need to check availability on the Explore website or through our dedicated call centre based in the UK where you can. Our tours can fill up quickly so you are advised to book as early as possible. If your chosen date is 'Available' or 'Guaranteed' we will be able to provisionally hold you a space for up to 48 hours.

For Self-Guided holidays and Private Journeys simply choose your date of travel and let us know so we can confirm all ground services.

The easiest way to confirm your booking is through our website. When you are ready to book, we normally require a 10% non-refundable deposit, but for some holidays this may be more to cover such items as permit fees, internal flights or other non-refundable services. If your travel starts within 60 days of booking, full payment will be required at the time of booking

100% No Surcharge Guarantee

The price paid for our holidays is no longer subject to change. Once booked and confirmed we will guarantee the price you pay will not increase, whatever the circumstances. You will not be approached to pay fuel surcharges unlike the vast majority of other adventure tour operators. The price guarantee applies to all new bookings departing between 1st January 2016 and 31st December 2017.

Trip Itinerary Versions

Itinerary details may vary depending on departure date and alternative itineraries for this tour may exist. Please refer to the dates and prices page on our website to check which itinerary operates on each departure date.

Please ensure that you have an up-to-date copy of these tour notes immediately before you travel, as from time to time our itineraries may be amended, either for operational reasons or in response to feedback from customers. You will be informed of any major changes to your tour but small changes may just be added to these tour notes.

Please note: 2017 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing in 2017. 2018/19 itinerary versions are applicable to tours departing from 1st January to 31st December 2018.

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