

EXPLORE!

TRIP NOTES



Indian Rail Odyssey (RIN 2017)



TRIPDURATION
21
DAYS



Tour Style: Classic

Tour Pace: Full On

Tour Type: Small Groups

Accommodation

Grade: Standard

Trip Code: RIN

Trip Highlights - Indian Rail Odyssey

- ✓ Amritsar - Experience the captivating atmosphere of the Golden Temple, the sacred heart of the Sikh faith
- ✓ India Pakistan border - Join in with the noisy crowds at the spectacular daily border closing ceremony
- ✓ Delhi - Take in the grandeur of the city's Moghul and Colonial past
- ✓ Agra - Watch the sunrise over the beautiful Taj Mahal
- ✓ Bandipur National Park - Look out for the mighty Bengal tiger
- ✓ Toy Train - Ride the narrow gauge train from Ooty
- ✓ Kochi - Relax in this coastal town on the Arabian Sea and take a boat ride through the peaceful backwaters

Trip Essentials

Accommodation: 10 nights Standard Hotel
3 nights Simple Overnight Train
7 nights Premium Hotel

Included Meals: 20 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 0 dinners

Start Point: Join trip: Amritsar

End Point: Trip ends: Cochin

Transport: Rickshaw, Bus, Train, Boat

Countries: India

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Indian Rail Odyssey

Taking to the tracks of India's extensive railway system we travel from the holy Sikh city of Amritsar to Kerala's beautiful backwaters. We uncover the history of Delhi's colonial past, explore the 'Pink City' of Jaipur and visit the magnificent Taj Mahal. Along the way we discover Moghul treasures, track tigers, relax on tropical beaches and explore jungle-lined foothills.

Why Book this trip

Travelling from Amritsar in the north to Kochi in the south this tour is ideal for anyone wanting to experience India's incredible rail network. Train travel in India is the perfect time to meet the locals, who are always interested in where and why you are travelling. This tour is packed full of experiences so ideal for those wanting a busy itinerary.

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: Full On

These fast paced tours move on quickly from place to place and with lots of early starts and long busy days, they're packed with experiences.

Your trip itinerary

Tour itinerary notes

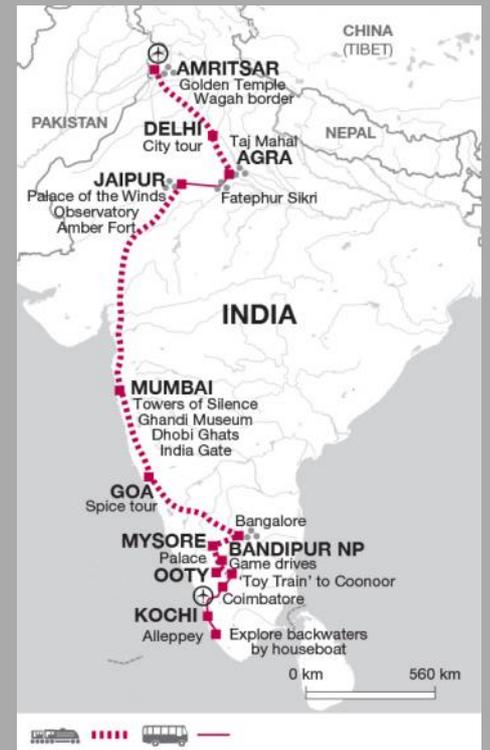
While our intention is to adhere to the day-by-day itinerary as printed below, a degree of flexibility is built in. Overnight stops may vary from those suggested.

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 Amritsar

Our journey begins in Amritsar, a city at the spiritual heart of the Sikh religion, its magnificent Golden Temple providing a serene centrepiece to this most holy of cities. This evening you may wish to take the opportunity to visit the temple itself, to watch the reflective light of the moon playing across the tranquil waters that surround the main shrine, the Harmandir. The temple is home to the revered texts of the Sikh Holy Scriptures, the Guru Granth Sahib, and its gilded dome is covered in over 700kg of pure gold. A sumptuous fusion of Hindu and Islamic influences, the temple was the scene of the massacre of hundreds of Sikh protesters in 1984, when



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the Indian army, acting on the orders of the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, evicted extremists from the temple, an act that led to the assassination of Indira Gandhi by Sikh bodyguards later that same year.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** None

DAY 2 Visit Amritsar's Golden Temple; take a sleeper train to Delhi

This morning we will pay a visit to the Jalianwala Bagh, site of the notorious massacre under General Dyer in 1919, which led to 379 Sikhs being shot from point blank range by British troops. This wholly unprovoked attack on a peaceful demonstration led to Gandhi's programme of civil disobedience and helped to galvanise India's burgeoning independence movement. We also visit the Golden Temple, where we need to make sure that we remove our shoes, cover heads and wash our feet before entering. The temple itself is a surprisingly small building surrounded almost entirely by tanks of holy water in which the Sikh pilgrims bathe (the name of the town itself comes from the Amrit Sarovar - the Pool of Nectar). The atmosphere is one of incredible calm, with devotees taking their turn to pass through the main shrine, where there is a continuous and melodic recital (known as the Akhand Path) from the Guru Granth Sahib. This afternoon there will be an excursion to Wagah Border to see the 'Flag Down' ceremony before we catch the overnight train, the Golden Temple Mail to Delhi.

Overnight: **Simple Overnight Train**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 3 Take a rickshaw to explore Old Delhi's narrow alleys

This morning we arrive in Delhi and transfer to our hotel. Late morning we will take a tour of Old Delhi by metro and cycle rickshaw. The former capital of the 17th century Mughal emperor Shah Jahan, the old city is a magnificent fusion of grandiose architecture and vibrant chaos, centred around the Chandni Chowk Bazaar, an eclectic cacophony of noise, colour and deafening barter that is so essentially Indian. Our sightseeing takes in the spectacular Jama Masjid Mosque, the largest in India and Shah Jahan's magnificent swansong. Taking 14 years to complete, the mosque is a majestic structure, featuring four towers, three gateways and two towering minarets that stand some 40m high. Built from sandstone and marble its vast courtyard can hold upwards of 25,000 worshippers and from the top of the southern minaret you can get a clear view of the colonial designs of Edward Lutyens across the city. After our tour we have left the rest of the day free, so anyone who wishes to continue exploring may do so at their own pace, taking in the vibrant atmosphere of this most Indian of cities before making their way back to the hotel.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 4 Discover Humayun's Tomb before driving to Agra

The Indian capital has long been a phoenix, rising again and again out of its own ruins and is essentially a city divided in two: a magnificent living monument to the grandiose designs of the Moghals and the British. New Delhi, the setting for this morning's tour, was the creation of the British Raj of the 1930s and its streets are filled with a rich collection of the architectural creations of Edward Lutyens. Following the broad expanse of the Rajpath (Kingsway), we will view the towering memorial arch of India Gate, a testament to the 90,000 Indian troops who lost their lives during WWI and the fighting along the Northwest Frontier during the early years of the 20th century. We will also view the imposing buildings of the Indian Parliament, as well as the Moghal majesty of Humayun's Tomb, a 16th century mausoleum commissioned by the emperor's Persian born wife and considered by many to be one of the best examples of Moghal architecture in the country. Our final visit of the day will be to the towering Qutub Minar, a spectacular 13th century edifice made of sandstone and marble that towers some 73m above the city and heralded the final demise of the Hindu kings and the arrival of the Muslim sultans. From here we will then drive straight to the city's Nizamuddin Station for the afternoon train on to Agra.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**

Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 5 Watch the sun rise over the Taj Mahal

This morning we have an early start as we head for the magnificence of one of the most universally recognised buildings on earth, and surely the greatest testament to love ever constructed. Built by the emperor Shah Jahan to honour the memory of his beloved wife Mumtaz, the building took some 22 years to complete and was once described by Rudyard Kipling as '...the embodiment of all things pure'. Built of marble and decorated with the most exquisite inlay work, the Taj Mahal required the labours of 20,000 men and is estimated to have cost something in the region of 3 million rupees (at today's prices that equates to around \$70 million). After driving back to the hotel for breakfast, we then pay a visit to the sumptuous grandeur of Agra Fort. Once the capital of the mighty Moghal Empire, the city is littered with some of the country's most opulent and iconic buildings and the sandstone majesty of its imposing fort is no exception. Built by Emperor Akbar and then embellished by his grandson, Shah Jahan, the fort was once a great city, with palaces, mosques and halls all lying behind the protective embrace of 20m high walls. Once the home of the fabulous bejewelled

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Peacock Throne (until its removal to Delhi by Aurangzeb, the last of the great Mughal emperors) the fort's grandeur and importance has seen it inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List. After our visit there will be some free time to wander the city, perhaps taking in the rich elegance of the exquisite Itimad-ud-Daulah, a 17th century tomb built for the Emperor Jehangir's chief minister that mirrors the marble majesty of the more famous Taj Mahal (hence its rather apt title of 'Baby Taj'). There is also a possibility of returning to the Taj Mahal, to watch the setting rays of the sun casting a golden glow across its marble splendour (optional). Please note: There is currently a restoration project taking place at the Taj Mahal, which involves applying a mud pack to the outer walls of the monument. In order to carry out the work, temporary scaffolding is being erected around the minarets and portions of the main dome. The work is being carried out in phases and is expected to continue until January 2018.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 6 Explore the deserted city of Fatehpur Sikri en route to Jaipur

Departing the city this morning we first head to the nearby abandoned city of Fatehpur Sikri, lying to the west of Agra and, for a brief time, the capital of the Moghals under Akbar the Great. Founded in 1569 it was deserted just 16 years later following the emperor's death and today it remains a ghostly testament to the majesty and power of 16th century Moghal India. Visiting the site with a local guide we take in the splendour of its perfectly preserved imperial court and the grandeur of the 5-storey Panch Mahal. We will also see the courtyard and pachi board, where the emperor played an Indian equivalent of chess, using slave girls as pieces. Perhaps the finest of all the city's monuments though is the lotus shaped carved central pillar of the Diwan-i- Khas (Hall of Private Audience), a magnificent column of matchless proportions that supports the vaulted roof of Akbar's old debating room. From here we drive onto the 'Pink City' of Jaipur, a city steeped in the rich heritage of the Rajput princes. The capital of the state of Rajasthan, Jaipur was India's first planned city and is considered by many to be one of the finest planned cities anywhere, the usual Indian urban chaos being replaced by wide streets and formal gardens

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 7 Visit Jaipur's Amber Fort and City Palace Museum

With a full day to explore the delights of this majestic city we will enjoy a guided tour this morning of the highlights of one of India's most important cultural treasures. We will start by viewing the exterior of the Hawa Mahal, the famous 'Palace of the Winds', whose extraordinary façade of red and pink sandstone towers some 5 storeys above the city streets. Built at the end of the 18th century its 935 windows were designed to allow the women of the harem to gaze out on the city scene below without themselves being seen, the openings affording the added bonus of creating a refreshing breeze (hawa), which kept the palace cool even in the hot summer months. This morning we will also visit the once mighty Rajput capital of Amber and its magnificent fortress. Lying at the mouth of a rocky mountain gorge, overlooking Maota Lake, the fort is a stunning creation of white marble and red sandstone that contains a dazzling mix of Hindu and Muslim ornamentation, including the breathtaking mirrored halls of the Sheesh Mahal. It was from these towering walls that the Kachchawahas ruled over their kingdom for some 7 centuries, until its importance was eclipsed by nearby Jaipur. Today it presents visitors with a staggering insight into the opulence and grandeur of the Rajput rulers. This afternoon we will visit the remarkable observatory of Jantar Mantar, the fascinating creation of Maharajah Jai Singh II, which houses a collection of astronomical instruments that are capable of measuring time, predicting eclipses, tracking the stars and ascertaining the declination of the planets and also includes the largest sundial in the world, believed to be capable of keeping time to an accuracy of two seconds. Begun in 1728, the incredible collection represents the largest and best preserved of the 5 observatories that Jai Singh had constructed during his reign. Our other visit is to the opulent splendour of the City Palace, a stunning complex of gardens and courtyards that presents a rich fusion of Moghal and Rajasthani design and houses an armoury and a museum that is home to a dazzling array of costumes, manuscripts and inlaid grandeur.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**
Single Room Available

Swimming Pool Available 

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 8 Free morning in Jaipur before taking a sleeper train to Mumbai

This morning we have some free time to explore the markets and winding streets of Jaipur before driving to the train station to board the overnight express to Mumbai, India's commercial powerhouse on the western coast.

Overnight: **Simple Overnight Train**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 9 See Mumbai's laundry at the municipal dhobi ghats

Made up of seven islands on the eastern edge of the Arabian Sea, Mumbai draws people from all over the country to its booming streets. As well as being India's largest city and commercial centre this is also the home of 'Bollywood', an industry that produces more films per year than any other city in the world. Its natural harbour made Mumbai an attractive prospect for the ruling British and it became a major centre of maritime trade upon the opening of the Suez Canal in 1870 and today it accounts for over 40% of India's sea going trade. After a chance to freshen up we will take a sightseeing tour of the city this morning, viewing the honey-coloured Gateway of India arch and the macabre Towers of Silence. Built by the Parsis fleeing persecution in Persia during the 17th century, the Towers were a mortuary for the dead. Being Zoroastrians the Parsis were not allowed to bury or cremate their dead, so instead they were deposited in these towers to allow nature to dispose of them. We also visit the municipal dhobi ghats and the Prince of Wales Museum, which has an excellent collection of Indian miniatures from the Moghal and Rajasthan schools, whilst at the Mahatma Gandhi Museum we'll learn a little of the great man's life and ideas, through an impressive collection of books, photographs and letters.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 10 Spend a day on the train travelling through the Western Ghats to Goa

Departing the city early this morning we travel by train to Goa, following the Konkan Railway to the station at Thivim. Journeying along this line affords us an opportunity to truly appreciate some of the most spectacular scenery offered by any of the Indian rail networks as we pass through the staggering scenery of the Western Ghats. The palmfringed shores of Goa were colonised by the Portuguese in the 16th century, who captured the original Arab trade settlement and began building a city on the Arabian Sea strewn with houses, gardens monasteries and churches, many of which unfortunately no longer remain. Goa eventually became the commercial centre for East and West, where merchants could buy pearls, coral, rubies, golden jewellery, silks, China porcelain, lacquered furniture, ambergris and exotic spices. The Portuguese influence is still very much apparent - the main religion is still Roman Catholic and siestas are still widely practised in the hot afternoons. Like most areas in India, Goa also has its own food specialities, the most popular being pork vindaloo! You may also want to sample the locally brewed spirit feni - a spine-tingling drink made from coconut or cashew apples.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 11 Experience Goa's history on a walking tour through Panjim City

We have a relaxed start to the day with the morning free before we meet in the afternoon and take a walk around the city of Panjim. Whilst Goa is mainly known for the beaches that tempt tourists throughout the year, the wide streets of Panjim are worth exploring. The buildings are distinctly European in style with shutters, balconies and red tiled roofs although they are mixed in with more traditional temples to create a rather unusual style. If you wish to spend some time on the beach it is just a short taxi ride away.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 12 Learn about spice growing. Take a sleeper train to Bangalore

After breakfast this morning we will drive to a local spice plantation, to learn a little of the spices and plants that grow amongst these fertile landscapes. This part of India has long been famed for its abundant array of spices; indeed Christopher Columbus was en route to the spice rich Malabar Coast when he bumped into America by mistake. A tour of the gardens with a local guide will reveal the vast wealth of Goa's aromatic treasures, including pepper and nutmeg, vanilla and cinnamon. This afternoon we will transfer to the station for the overnight train to Bangalore, travelling across the historically rich province of Karnataka to its south-eastern border with Tamil Nadu. Founded in the early years of the 16th century Bangalore went on to become an administrative centre under the British during the 1830s and today can boast one of India's most vibrant economies, having taken on the title of the country's science and technological centre.

Overnight: **Simple Overnight Train**

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 13 Arrive in Bangalore and transfer to nearby Mysore

Arriving in the city early this morning we will take time to freshen up after the train journey and take breakfast. We then continue by road to Mysore, a city which today is famed for its silk and sandalwood. Transferring to the hotel on arrival, we will have some time to relax this afternoon.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 14 Discover Mysore's ornate Grand Palace

Today we visit the sumptuous grandeur of the Maharajah's Palace and the enormous monolithic sculpture of the sacred bull, Nandi. Originally built in the 14th century, the palace has undergone two subsequent re-buildings, the most recent being in 1912 when the palace was redesigned by the English architect Henry Irwin, and is today an opulent mixture of Hindu and British architecture. Filled with stained glass, mirrored halls and an eclectic array of ornate furnishings and vibrant colours, the palace's interiors are a fascinating mix of the elegant and the gaudy, with beautifully carved doors and mosaic floors sharing space with vividly painted pillars and overly ornate furniture. The Chamundi Hills overlooking the city are home to the towering Sri Chamundeswari Temple and the 5m high representation of Shiva's sacred bull, Nandi, which was carved from a single piece of rock in the 17th century and is one of the largest in the country. The afternoon is free for personal exploration.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 15 Transfer to Bandipur National Park

After a free morning to relax we take the short drive to Bandipur National Park. The park was established in 1974 as a tiger reserve under 'Project Tiger', once a private hunting reserve the park is now known for its diverse wildlife. This evening there will be a short lecture at our jungle lodge on the wildlife in the park.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 16 Take two game drives to view Bandipur's wildlife

An early start this morning as we take our first game drive in search of the mighty Bengal tiger. We will also take an afternoon game drive to increase our chances of a sighting. The park is known for having a significant tiger population and along with neighbouring parks cover an enormous area in southern India. As well as tigers you can hope to spot herds of wild elephants, gaur and wild boar as well as an impressive array of birdlife.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 17 Drive to the old British hill station at Ooty

Today we head towards Tamil Nadu and the most famous of all South India's glittering hillstations. Ooty (or Udhagamandalam to give it its full title) was established by the British in the 19th century, as a summer retreat for the Madras Government amongst the cooler climates of the Nilgiri Hills. We arrive amongst its forested landscapes in time to enjoy some free time this afternoon to take in something of its genteel charm. You may like to visit the Botanical Gardens, or perhaps enjoy a round of golf, visit the historic old church of St Stephen's (the oldest in the Nilgiris), or maybe pay a visit to a local tea factory. Those looking to stretch their legs might like to consider a walk up to Dodabetta Peak for some spectacular views out across the countryside.

Overnight: **Standard Hotel**
Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 18 Travel on the Toy Train to Coonoor. Transfer to Kochi

Ooty lies along the mountain railway that connects the hillstations with Mettupalayam some 46kms away. Today we will take this historic railway down to Coonoor, a journey of just over an hour that takes us across a rocky and forested terrain and over girder bridges as we pass through tea estates and across rolling hills en route to our destination. Please note: The section of railway that this train route travels on has a very high gradient which means the train will be powered by diesel for the time we are on it. The blue and cream carriages hark back to a golden age of engineering, when seemingly no hurdle could halt the ever-expanding British Empire. The railway itself can boast an interesting array of statistics, including a gradient of 1 in 12, no fewer than 208 curves and an impressive 13 tunnels. Given the terrain over which it has to negotiate it is also probably the slowest train in the country, averaging just 10.5km an hour and covering the distance to Mettupalayam in a little over 4 hours. Disembarking in Coonoor we continue our journey by road to Coimbatore. At Coimbatore we join a train again and continue to Ernakulum. With a beautiful natural harbour that

earned it the title of Queen of the Arabian Sea, Kochi, as you might expect, was founded on trade, originally with the arrival of Jewish and Arab spice traders in the first century AD. Its prosperity and importance increased even more with the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century, to be closely followed by the Dutch and the English, an eclectic heritage that helped produce a fascinating mix of styles and influences. You can find both the oldest church and the oldest synagogue in India amongst its winding streets, whilst elsewhere Chinese fishing nets vie for space alongside Portuguese houses and Dutch palaces

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 19 Explore Fort Kochi and Kochi's Dutch heritage

Visiting Fort Kochi with a local guide this morning we get a better view of some of the city's rich fusion of divergent styles. Fort Kochi is the oldest European settlement in India (1500), with a mix of English, Dutch and Portuguese architecture. During our tour we will visit the Jewish Quarter and its surviving synagogue, the church of St. Francis where Vasco do Gama was buried for a while and the Basilica of Santa Cruz. 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' and today it houses some of the best murals in India, depicting scenes from the Ramayana and other great legends. There will also be time to wander through the fish market and see the interesting cantilevered Chinese Fishing nets before the chance to continue exploring on your own. There is the option of taking a ferry across to nearby Ernakulam, or perhaps visiting the sumptuous grandeur of the Tripunithura Hill Palace, the impressive former residence of the Maharajahs of Kochi. As well as being the oldest European settlement in India, Kochi is also home to the famous Kathakali dance, thought by some to be the very essence of the culture of Kerala, portraying as it does events from the great Indian epics of the Ramayana and Mahabharata. 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 and 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. This evening there may be an opportunity to view one of these remarkable performances for ourselves (optional).

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast

DAY 20 Board a houseboat to explore Kerala's backwaters

After breakfast this morning we drive to Alleppey, to board a houseboat to enjoy some time exploring the labyrinth of canals and channels that make up this captivating region, the perfect way to observe the everyday life of the villages of the backwaters. Boat styles are very much adapted to their environment here and on the more open canals you can often see boats with large sails, their bows carved into the shape of stylised dragons. Boats are a vital lifeline for the villages and an integral part of the social structure of the region. They act as taxis and school buses, deliver the mail, and even collect the harvest. You may see great pyramids of coconuts or even the odd buffalo being carried along in this time honoured fashion! In days gone by these waterways were once the scene of post-harvest water wars, which have now evolved into great water pageants that take place on Lake Vembanad each year. A celebration of Kerala's seafaring traditions, these 'snake boats', which reach over 30 metres in length, are crewed by up to 100 rowers, including teams made up exclusively of women. Along the narrow channels the industrious villagers survive on narrow spits of land, keeping cows, pigs, and chickens and cultivating vegetable gardens. Even the shells from the fresh water mussels are burnt to make building lime, and coir is used for just about everything it seems.

Overnight: **Premium Hotel**

Single Room Available

 **Included Meals:** Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 21 Tour ends in Kochi

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.

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Food & Drink

Included meals: 20 breakfasts, 2 lunches, 0 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

Other Sightseeing & Activities

The following excursions and/or activities are usually available and may be arranged locally. Estimated costs are provided below for guidance only, are on a per person basis unless shown otherwise, and may depend on the number of participants. Prices quoted are correct as of the date these tour notes were originally issued but may change at any time due to currency fluctuations.

Please note: These activities are booked and paid for direct with the supplier and do not form part of your Explore holiday contract.

Optional Excursions

Agra - Visit to 'Baby Taj' £6.00

Kochi - Kathakali Dancing £3.00

Tipping - Tour Leader

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

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 approx. £45 for gratuities for local staff.

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 brought 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

EXPLORE! Share your experiences with us



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 24 selected entry points which can be found via the official Indian Government website link above. However, you can exit from any of the authorised immigration check posts in India.

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 valid for 60 days from the date of arrival in to India, and double entry is permitted on the e-Tourist visa. You can only obtain 2 e-visas for India in a calendar year.

The visa costs \$75. 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.

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. Please consult your travel clinic for the latest advice on Malaria, Dengue and Zika Virus. 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

In general only lightweight clothing is needed during the day, but bring some warm clothes for winter mornings and evenings (November to end February) in the north and for early morning game drives in Bandipur (especially during December and January) a windproof jacket, warm layers, gloves and hat are also recommended. Often hotel heating arrangements in North India are not on a par with UK standards and from December to February thermals are also recommended. Casual clothes are the most practical: tight fitting garments, brief shorts and skirts should be avoided, since they attract unwelcome attention. Waterproofs and or an umbrella may be useful in October and November.

Equipment

A torch, water bottle, good quality sunglasses, insect repellent and high factor sunscreen are all essential. You may also find binoculars a bonus for the game viewing.

Footwear

Comfortable shoes & sandals

Luggage: On Tour

One main piece of baggage and a daypack. We recommend a holdall or rucksack for ease of getting on and off trains and please remember, you are expected to carry your own luggage so don't overload yourself.

Luggage allowance on trip: 20kg

Transport

Travelling on an Indian train is a fantastic experience, with millions using the rail network every day it is the perfect opportunity to meet local families.

For all the train journeys on our trips, we will reserve your seats/berths in advance in 2nd class with air conditioning. Whilst we'll try to ensure the group is all together, due to overwhelming demand and the system for booking train tickets in India, it may not always be possible to have everyone in the same carriage and some reservations may be in 3rd class. In such cases our Tour Leaders will help everyone to find their seats and ensure you get the most out of your journey. For overnight trains, each berth is separated by curtains and has 4/6 bunk beds. Bedding (sheet, blanket and pillow) is provided but you may wish to bring your own sleeping liner for added comfort. Train travel in India is safe and civilised but for added security whilst you sleep it may be a good idea to bring a bike lock for your bags. If you do not wish to carry one with you, your tour leader can help you to purchase one locally before your train journey.

Please note that in January train journeys can sometimes be affected by fog. This may result in some last minute changes to the itinerary. In this eventuality we will endeavour to stick to the itinerary as closely as possible and will cover any extra costs incurred.

In order to make reservations on Indian trains and guarantee the smooth operation of your trip, we require your full passport details. It is important that we receive these details as soon as possible so we are ready to make the arrangements as soon as train tickets are available to buy.

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, Islam 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 & tailor-made holidays.
- Award winning tour leaders who you can trust.
- Responsible travel is and always has been one of 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 Licence granted by the Civil Aviation Authority. 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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