

Eco & Culture Tours



## Trip Highlights

- Palaces, temples, festivals
- Wildlife viewing
- Magnificent walking trails
- Heritage Train ride
- Exquisite local cuisine
- Pristine Backwaters & beaches of North Kerala
- The historic town of Fort Kochi



## At a Glance

Southern India offers somewhat a different experience from that of North India. The land is lush with great swathes of forests teeming with wildlife, many of them endemic and mountain ranges awash with tea gardens coffee estates and large numbers of indigenous peoples.

Our journey begins at the city of palaces at Mysore and slowly winds its way through the cool Coorg hills to the beautiful Malabar coast, winding its way back to the wildlife reserves at Mudumalai, the great hill station at Ooty and ending up at historic Fort Kochi. On show will be the great palace at Mysore, the wildlife at Mudumalai, the culinary feast of Kerala, a heritage train ride, the fantastic *theyyam* dances at temples, visit to the indigenous people's villages and staying at some of the best boutique hotels and lodges in South India.

# South India Walking, Culture & Wildlife Tour

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## Detailed Itinerary:

### Day 1 - Mysore

Arrive Bangalore & transfer to Mysore. After checking into the hotel we will discover this historic city of palaces and temples. The morning sees us exploring the city - the Palace with its durbar hall, golden royal elephant throne and the Jayachamarajendra art gallery with paintings of Raja Ravi Varma and Svetoslav Roerich. Also on offer is the town of Srirangapatna home of Tipu Sultan, a warrior king of Mysore and a visit to *Chamundi hills*, 13kms from Mysore to see a 2000 year old temple.

**O/N: Green Hotel Palace Rooms (B)**

### Day 2, 3: Coorg

We will make our way to Coorg (or Kodagu) - a forested expanse in South West Karnataka. Coorg is famed for its cool weather and natural beauty. Traditional festivals are associated with either the agricultural or the military nature of its people. Coorg is overrun with coffee plantations and the terrain is a combination of mountainous forests and coffee estates, connected by winding roads, stately mansions and flowering trees. Our stay will be in a coffee plantation bungalow. Here we will go on walks through the beautifully laid trails amongst the coffee estates and also try our hand at climbing Thudianamol - the spectacular mountain range which dominates the area. Besides there is also the opportunity of a visit to the Tibetan settlement as well as trip to the elephant rescue centre at Dubare.

**O/N: Plantation Trails coffee Estate Bungalow (B, L, D)**

### Day 4, 5 - Kasargod

We will transfer to the Northernmost part of Kerala. Here we will stay at a secluded resort set against the backwaters & beaches of Kasargod. The resort is the handiwork of Mohamad Gul, whose innovative way of farming oysters on locally available coconut fibre helped turn the economy of this remote area. The area is still pristine and off the normal tourist trails. Here we can go on long village walks, do some amateur fishing and go on canoe rides. This area is also famous for its natural coir fibre harvested from coconut trees and handloom industries and is to some exquisite folk arts and rituals of Kerala. Breathtaking backwater stretches and pristine beaches are something to look for in here.

**O/N: Oyster Opera (B, L, D)**

### Day 6, 7: Tellicherry

Today we leave the hills behind us and transfer to a secluded beach at the historic town of Tellicherry where sea food is the specialty. Here we can discover a small village, visit the local temples for the traditional *theyyam* dances or take part in fishing along the coast or learn to cook Mopla cuisine of this Malabari coast. The many forts that dot the landscape are mute spectators to its rich historical past. During our walks through this landscape we will be visiting the small local temples to watch the *theyyams* and have chance to interact with the local fishermen, visit the local cooperatives that have thrived since the influx of Marxist ideology in these areas.

**O/N: Ayesha Manzil (B, L, D)**

### Day 8, 9 - Mudumalai

We will transfer to Mudumalai - a part of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve. The terrain is varied with hills, valleys, ravines, watercourses and swamps, moist deciduous forests, dry deciduous forests and scrub forests. Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary & National Park is located at the tri-junction of Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Karnataka on the North Eastern Slopes of the Nilgiris part of Western Ghats descending to the Mysore Plateau. An erstwhile game reserve, Mudumalai was declared a wildlife sanctuary with a 62 sq KM area in the early 1940 by the then Madras Presidency. With Bandipur Tiger Reserve (Karnataka) in the north, and Wynad Wildlife Sanctuary (Kerala) in the west the region forms a single, continuous viable habitat for a varied range of wildlife and is a part of the **Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve**. The wildlife includes Elephant, Gaur, Sambar deer, Sloth bear, Tiger, leopard, Malabar Giant Squirrel, Flying Squirrel, Dholes (Wild Dogs), Cat Striped Hyena, Leopard-cat, Indian Giant Squirrel, Slender Lories, etc.. Tigers are largely elusive but leopards or packs of Wild Dogs on the move are frequently seen. We will go on forest walks & safari with the naturalist based at the eco lodge.

**O/N: Jungle Hut (B, L, D)**

### Day 10, 11: Ooty

We drive up the Nilgiris (literally blue mountains) to the old 'hill station' of Ooty or Udagamandalam. The journey passes through the thickly forested areas where we will briefly stop over before we encounter the many 'hair pin bends' after which you find yourself greeted with pleasantly cool weather at your destination situated at

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just over 2,200 metres. Take long walks along these mountain roads, here one finds charming English style cottages blending into the landscape. These cottages with teak floors, art-deco armchairs, red-tiled roofs, chimneys with a ridge tile placed over the top to keep out the monsoon also boast of well kept gardens with a profusion of flowers that thrive here. The excellent botanical garden at Ooty which is over 160 years old is home to not only a great variety of exotic flora but also many endemic birds. Here there are great places for walks and we will also visit the Botanical gardens set up over a century ago.

### O/N: Taj Savoy (B)

#### Day 12: Heritage Train

We will embark the UNESCO Heritage train to the plains at Mettupalayam. The train passes through the breathtaking scenery of the Nilgiri mountains. Arrive plains and drive to Pollachi. Our stay would be at a Heritage Villa. Built in the early 1900's in the midst of hundreds of acres of farmland and natural beauty, Shenbaga Vilaasam opens its doors to a rare and fulfilling experience for you. Shenbaga Vilaasam was built as a farm get away for the Zamindari of Samathur, Shrimati Maruthapushpambal. The care bestowed by the Vanavarayar family, is evident everywhere in this beautiful mansion. The royal ancestry of the Vanavarayar family date back over 2000 years. The families headed the land down the ages and were the guiding force over this region. This guest house has four bed rooms. Built in a unique blend of south Indian architecture, Shenbaga Vilaasam has a beauty in every tone. Giant wooden pillars support colorful hand dyed chettinad tiles. The center of the formal sitting room opens towards the sky, allowing the play of natural light and at the same time, shielding the home from the mid day glare of the sun. Each room at the Shenbaga Vilaasam is named after the women of the household - Manickam, Maruthapusham, Radhamani and Jaya.

### O/N: Shenbagavilasam (B, L, D)

#### Day 13, 14: Kochi

After a walk around the village in the morning, we will set course for Kochi, stopping off for refreshments en-route. An important stop on the spice trading route due to its strategic location near the tip of the Indian subcontinent, Kochi (Cochin) has been a melting pot of influences since

the 14th century. The city's history stretches back much farther: by 1102, Kochi was already the seat of an eponymous princely state that traced its lineages to the Kulasekhara empire. Ancient travellers and tradesmen made references to Kochi in their writings, and in 1503 Kochi became the first European colonial settlement in India when it was occupied by the Portuguese. Also of interest is the fact that Vasco da Gama, the first European explorer to set sail for India, was initially buried in Kochi's St. Francis Church until his remains were returned to Portugal in 1539. Later, both the Dutch and British occupied Kochi, resulting in the variety of architecture, food and other influences typical of today's Kochi.

### O/N: Old Harbour (B)

#### Day 15: Depart

Drop at airport. Tour ends

#### Inclusions

- Accommodation in Boutique hotels, resorts, Forest Lodges & home stays
- Most meals
- All transfers by A/c vehicle
- All walks & safaris

#### Exclusions

- Insurance -please take your own insurance
- Tips
- Beverages
- Laundry
- Expenses of a personal nature

#### What to Bring

- Cottons
- Warm Clothes (Fleece, Gloves, Caps)
- Casual Shirts/T-shirts
- Walking shoes
- Insect repellent
- Sunglasses cap
- Sun screen
- Day pack
- Binocs & Camera (optional)