

SPICES OF KERALA

11 Day Tour to Cochin, Munnar, Periyar, Kumarakom, Backwater Cruise & Kovalam

This amazing eleven-day holiday allows you to travel back in time through the spice-trading port of Cochin, with impressive cultural influences, lulled by the serene beauty of Kerala's backwaters and thrilled by the game-spotting in the jungles of Periyar, the fragrant of tea plantations and hill forests of Munnar are sure to captivate you as you discover the Spices of Kerala.

Day 1: Australia - Kochi

Meal: D

Fly from Australia to Kochi. Upon arrival Kochi, the most cosmopolitan city of Kerala; transfer to your hotel for 2 nights stay. Kochi, also known as the Queen of the Arabian Sea, is one of the finest natural harbours in the world. Starting from the Dutch, Portuguese and the British, Kochi was the site of the first European colonial settlements in India.

Day 2: Kochi

Meal: B/D

After breakfast, take a guided walk through the historic Fort Kochi area. This morning we will visit the **Dutch Palace, Jewish Synagogue, St. Francis Church** and see the authentic **Chinese fishing nets** still in active use by the fishermen in Kerala. This evening, watch a spectacular **Kathakali performance**. Kathakali is one of the oldest theatre forms in India. One of the most complex and highly stylized Indian art forms, this performance is a spectacular combination of drama, dance, music and ritual. Characters with vividly painted faces and elaborate costumes re-enact stories from the Hindu epics of Mahabharata and Ramayana. Reach early for the unique opportunity to see the performers dressing up in their very elaborate and colorful costumes and painting their faces with make up to create the special persona for the performance. Also visit the onsite **cultural museum** to see sculptures of Kerala's unique dance forms, a large replica of an authentic Keralan wooden canoe and see how Keralan handicrafts and saris are woven.

Day 3: Kochi – Munnar (135 Kms / 5 Hrs)

Meal: B/D

After breakfast embark on a scenic drive to Munnar, one of the most popular hill resorts of south India. Under the British Raj, Munnar was popularly called 'Switzerland of India' for its natural surroundings and cool climate. The entire area is occupied by thick forests and tea estates. The specialty of Munnar is its jungle honey, tea and a rare flower 'Neela Kurunji' which blooms once in 12 years. Upon arrival check-in at your hotel for 2 nights stay.

Day 4: Munnar

Meal: B/D

After breakfast, visit a local **tea plantation** and the **Tata Tea Museum** to learn about the cultivation and processing of a variety of Indian teas. Then we visit a unique **welfare initiative** in Munnar, which focuses on enhancing the hidden talents of differently abled children, most of whom are from families of local tea pluckers of Munnar. Here we see three projects that aim to equip disabled children to secure a better future: a centre for special education; a natural dye fabric printing project; and a unit that manufactures handmade paper and paper products. The products made by these children are sold at a small outlet near the workshops and are exported to Japan and Europe. A visit to this unique initiative reiterates how enthusiasm is a sign of spiritual health and imperfections are what make you beautiful! Enjoy the evening at leisure.

Day 5: Munnar - Periyar (100 Kms / 4 Hrs)

Meal: B/D

After breakfast, embark on a scenic drive to Periyar, the spice plantation hub of Kerala. Upon arrival in Periyar, check in to your hotel and freshen up. This afternoon, take a **spice plantation tour** and learn about the mystery and history of Indian spices. The spice plantations in Periyar are captivating farms growing different spices in different sections of the plantations. You will be intrigued to see the vast variety of spices ranging from cloves, cardamom, ginger, pepper, chilli, turmeric etc.

Day 6: Periyar to Kumarakom (130 Kms / 4 Hrs)

Meal: B/D

Early this morning, we take a **guided walk** with a naturalist in Periyar Wildlife Reserve. Observe some rare species of flora and fauna, along with a variety of birds and if you are lucky you may even spot a few elephants and wildlife across the lake.

This afternoon, drive to Kumarakom, a coastal town in the backwaters of Kerala. Upon arrival, check-in at your hotel for an overnight stay. Kumarakom is based around Vembanad Lake, Asia's largest freshwater lake. Vembanad Kayal, as it is called in the regional language, acts as a giant reservoir, and a major ecological resource, which has conditioned the flora, fauna and lifestyle of the people of the region. The peaceful surrounds of the lake and backwaters here are peppered with wooded banks, chirping birds, fishermen with large palm-leaf hats, women immersed up to their necks in water searching for Karimeen fish. Enjoy a relaxing day at your backwaters resort, observing the local life around the backwaters and embracing the serenity of Kumarakom.

Day 7: CRUISE to Alleppey

Meal: B/L/D

Today you will board your houseboat to cruise through the backwaters of Kerala. Moving further, stop at another place from where take a canoe ride through which they goes through the local houses located on the back waters and watch the activities of people living in this area. On board **cooking demonstration** to learn about how to prepare a local Kerala dish. Overnight stay at houseboat. Kerala backwaters consist of a complex network of lagoons, lakes, & canals and are best experienced while slowly rowing down the labyrinth of canals in a traditional thatch-roofed houseboat, known as 'Kettuvallam'.

Day 8: Alleppey to Kovalam (170 Kms / 5 Hrs)

Meal: B/D

After breakfast, disembark from your houseboat and drive to Kovalam, a serene south Indian beach destination that is renowned for offering authentic Indian Ayurveda therapies. Upon arrival in Kovalam, check in to your hotel for 2 nights stay. Enjoy the evening at leisure. You may wish to explore the spa at your resort and experience an Indian Ayurveda massage (at extra charge).

Day 9: Kovalam

Meal: B/D

Enjoy the day at leisure to relax and unwind or enjoy the various facilities offered by your resort (at extra charge)

Day 10: DRIVE Kovalam - Trivandrum (20 Kms / 30 Mins)

Meal: B

After breakfast, transfer to Trivandrum airport to board your flight back home.

Day 11 Australia

Arrive into Australia this morning.