



Marari Beach

Graham's Best of Kerala for Friends

I love Kerala, S. India, but I haven't visited since 2017, and I really want to return; and I want you to come along too, so I have made a Kerala for friends' itinerary for March 2027, and I hope you will find it of interest

The journey takes you from sea level to 5,000ft and back again

Start in old colonial Fort Kochi – then up to Munnar (the tea hills) – then Thekkadey (for Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary) – then a Backwaters houseboat cruise – then Marari Beach on the Arabian Sea shore

I have designed this itinerary using lovely small hotels that I have stayed in previously, know well, and that I can recommend most highly. Getting around will be in chauffeured cars with English-speaking drivers.

The price is £2,440 per person (ex flights)

Mark Bratt Travel
Studio 107, SEESAW
86 Princess Street, Manchester
M1 6NG
Email: info@markbratttravel.com

About India

India is one of the world's most rewarding destinations: a country of extraordinary history, vibrant cultures and unforgettable landscapes. It is home to magnificent temples and palaces, bustling markets, remarkable wildlife, colourful festivals and one of the world's great culinary traditions. Few places offer such variety or such a profound sense of discovery. For anyone with an interest in history, architecture, nature or simply experiencing a different way of life, India deserves a place on every traveller's wish list.

For first-time visitors, however, it is worth understanding that India offers very different experiences. North India is famous for icons such as the Taj Mahal, the forts and palaces of Rajasthan, the sacred River Ganges and energetic cities such as Delhi and Jaipur. It is dramatic, exhilarating and deeply memorable, but it can also be busy, noisy and intense.

Kerala, on India's south-west coast, presents a quite different side of the country. Lush tropical landscapes, tranquil backwaters, palm-fringed beaches, tea plantations and wildlife reserves create a more relaxed pace of life. The state is widely recognised for its high standards of education, healthcare and environmental awareness, and many visitors notice that it feels cleaner, greener and more orderly than much of the north. Combined with welcoming people, excellent cuisine and comfortable accommodation, Kerala offers a gentler introduction to India without sacrificing the country's richness, colour or cultural depth.

Kerala – Land of Coconuts

In 2001 I somehow became a tour operator (www.redbirdtravel.co.uk - but that's another story) and I first visited Kerala in 2002 and fell in love with the Land of Coconuts. Kerala became my favourite destination, and I have returned many times (16 I think), but the last time was 2017 and I really want to see God's Own Country one more time. But I would like my friends to experience Kerala too. It is a tropical paradise, a bucket list destination, not to be missed. And I have to mention the food, because food is one of Kerala's great pleasures, from fragrant seafood curries and coconut-rich vegetarian dishes to fresh tropical fruit and wonderful spices.

And, while this itinerary is only 10 nights in India, it isn't a whistle-stop tour but a carefully crafted journey through everything that makes Kerala so special: the historic streets of old colonial Fort Kochi, the cool green hill station of Munnar, the spice region of Thekkadey and the elephants, and maybe tigers, of Periyar Wildlife Sanctuary, an unforgettable magical night aboard a traditional backwater houseboat, and time to unwind on beautiful Marari Beach on the palm fringed Arabian Sea shore.

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I've chosen small, characterful hotels *please view by clicking on the URLs - and included experiences I've enjoyed over many years. Some of you have travelled with me before and know how rewarding Kerala can be. I'd love you to join me this time so we can explore this extraordinary green corner of India together.

Kerala is described as 'India for first-time visitors', and with good reason. It is nothing like raucous north India. It is friendly, calm, and welcoming. English is widely spoken, healthcare is excellent, and Kerala has long been regarded as one of the safest and most enjoyable destinations in India.

I plan to take this trip in March, just after the high season has ended. And March is an excellent time to visit, with warm sunshine, cooling sea breezes and little chance of rain. The daytime temperature will be around 30c at the coast, but much cooler up in the hills at Munnar and at Thekkadey.

As mentioned previously I have visited Kerala many times, and I hope that I can provide answers to any questions.



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International return flights from the UK – TBA when a firm departure date is set. 1st March is used in the itinerary for convenience.

GRAHAM'S BEST OF KERALA FOR FRIENDS ITINERARY

02 Mar'27 On arrival at Kochi airport by flight [TBA], you will be met by a Redbird representative who will be holding a paging board with your name on it and then you will be transferred to your hotel by car. The day is at leisure.

In the evening, there will be a sunset cruise around the picturesque waters of Fort Kochi. During the cruise you can see the iconic Chinese fishing nets, passing cargo ships and traditional fishing boats, as well as the historic waterfront warehouse buildings that line the shores of Fort Kochi.

Eighth Bastion

<https://www.cghearth.com/eighth-bastion>



03 Mar'27 Breakfast at the hotel

A full day guided tour of Kochi - the principal port and center of the spice trade on the Malabar coast. Kochi was the first European settlement in India and the port was founded by Vasco-da-Gama in 1502. Portuguese, Dutch and British settlers have all left their culture on this colorful city.

Tour of the city visiting the Dutch palace, Jewish Synagogue and Fort Cochin. Visit St. Francis church, the oldest European church in India and try your luck with the locals to get the fresh catch on Chinese fishing nets.

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In the evening learn about Kerala's fascinating art form - Kathakali. Witness the artist's make-up demonstration followed by the dance performance. (Make-up session starts at 1715 hrs. and the performance starts at 1900 hours and lasts for an hour)

Eighth Bastion

04 Mar'27

After breakfast, you will be driven to Munnar through the rubber and spice plantations (approx. 135 kms / 4.5 hrs). This is a fascinating drive from sea level to 5,000ft, through the varieties of Keralan flora including: coconut, rice paddy, spices (ginger, turmeric, vanilla, pepper, rubber and coffee) to emerge in the incredible landscape of tea. There will be plenty of stops along the way for stunning photo opportunities.

Arrival and check in at family-owned plantation retreat.

The rest of the day will be at leisure.

Windermere Estate

<https://windermereunnar.com/>



05 Mar'27

Breakfast at the hotel.

This morning, enjoy a 3–4-hour guided trek to Letchmi Hills, one of Munnar's most scenic walking trails. The trek takes you through a diverse landscape of rolling tea estates, open grasslands, rocky outcrops, and patches of pristine shola forest. Along the way, admire breathtaking views of the vast tea plantations and the charming town of Old Munnar nestled in the valley below. On a clear day, the majestic peaks of the Western Ghats and winding mountain streams can be seen in the distance. The trail also offers an opportunity to experience the rich biodiversity of the Western Ghats, with colourful birdlife, fascinating insects, and occasional signs of wildlife, making the walk both rewarding and immersive.

In the afternoon, visit the Tea Museum, tea plantation & tea factory.

Windermere Estate

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06 Mar'27 After breakfast, depart for Thekkady (approx. 100 kms/3 hrs). Enjoy another spectacular drive through Munnar's rolling tea plantations. The scenic journey winds through mist-covered hills, lush forests, and picturesque mountain roads before arriving in Thekkady, renowned for its rich wildlife and spice plantations.

Upon arrival check-in at the hotel. Set in the heart of the Cardamom Hills of Kerala, Spice Village lies just outside the Periyar National Park.

The remainder of the day is at leisure to relax and enjoy the facilities and serene surroundings of Spice Village. Recreating the mood of a local tribal community, the resort architects have designed individual cottages set among a landscaped spice garden. Each dwelling is thatched with elephant grass. The rooms are spacious and furnished with simple sophistication.

Spice Village

<https://www.cghearth.com/spice-village>



07 Mar'27 After breakfast, you will enjoy the Bamboo rafting, this is a hiking and rafting program through some of the richest forest tracts of the Periyar Tiger Reserve. A mosaic of habitats will be traversed before one boards a bamboo raft. While rafting, you will enjoy panoramic views of forest-clad hills reflected in the lake. Wildlife such as elephants, gaurs, and sambar deer are often spotted along the lake's edges.

Later in the day visit a spice plantation followed by a nature walk - various nature trails traversing diverse habitats form the trekking routes, generally 4 to 5 km in length. This is an interpretive program that offers an excellent opportunity to observe birds, butterflies, and other wildlife. The trails often pass through evergreen and moist deciduous forests, interspersed with marshy grasslands. The Nature Walk is the perfect program to connect with nature.

Spice Village

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08 Mar'27 After breakfast, you will drive to Alleppey in the backwaters. [Approx 140 kms/ 4 hrs] This afternoon, you will board the houseboat for an overnight stay (Check in time is 1300 hrs).

A typical 'kettuvallam' houseboat is about 60 to 70 feet in length and has a width of around 15 feet in the middle. The boat is made of wooden planks joined and stitched together using coconut fibre ropes. Usually the wood used will be 'Anjili', the roof covering is made of bamboo poles and palm leaves. The outside of the boat is painted using cashew nut oil, which acts as a protective coating. Your crew of 3 will prepare your meals and help you appreciate the unique environment and society of the backwaters.

It is an experience of intense tranquillity and many visitors to Kerala count it as the highpoint of their tour.

Rest of the day is at leisure to relax and enjoy the serenity of the backwaters;



The check-in time on houseboat is at 1300 hrs and the boat then sets off cruising along the backwaters of Alleppey till sunset. Around 1800 hrs, the boat will be anchored to avoid interfering with the fishermen of the lake and their nets. The boats come with en-suite bedrooms that are air-conditioned. On the following day after breakfast, the boat will start cruising again and you will be dropped back to the jetty by 1000 hrs. No bar onboard. You can carry your purchase on board if required.

Spice Coast Cruises Houseboat - CGH Earth

<https://www.cghearth.com/spice-coast-cruises>

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09 Mar'27 Breakfast on board the houseboat.
After breakfast, cruise towards the jetty and disembark.

You will then be transferred to Mararikulam (approx. 35 kms / 45 min -1 hr).

On arrival, you will check in at your resort (standard check in time is 1400 hrs).

On the shores of the Arabian Sea at Mararikulam, this lovely resort located on the pristine Marari Beach. The resort consists of beautifully designed cottages that look like a traditional, reimagined Malabar fishing village.

The remainder of the day is at leisure to relax and enjoy the facilities and serene surroundings of the resort. *I absolutely adore this place.GR*

Marari Beach Resort

<https://www.cghearth.com/marari-beach>

10 Mar'27 Breakfast at the hotel.

The day is at leisure to relax or pursue independent activities.

Marari Beach Resort



11 Mar'27 Breakfast at the hotel.

The day is at leisure to relax or pursue independent activities.

Marari Beach Resort

12 Mar'27 Breakfast at the hotel, [Check out time: 1200 hrs]

In time, you will be met and driven to Kochi international for your onward flight.
[approx. 80 Kms/2.5 hrs]. [Flight: TBA, Time: TBA]

End of the itinerary

THE ACCOMMODATION: 4 DOUBLE/ TWIN ROOM.

Dates	Nts	City	Hotel	Room Category	Meal	Status
02 – 04 Mar'27	02	Kochi	Eighth Bastion	Bastion Room	BB	OK
04 – 06 Mar'27	02	Munnar	Windermere Estate	Garden Room	BB	OK
06 – 08 Mar'27	02	Thekkady	Spice Village	Spice Garden Cottage	BB	OK
08 – 09 Mar'27	01	Alleppey	Spice Coast Cruises House Boat - CGH Earth	Deluxe 2 Bedroom Houseboat	FB	OK
09 – 12 Mar'27	03	Mararikulam	Marari Beach Resort	Garden Villa with Pool	BB	OK

Meal Plan: Bed & Breakfast (BB) at all hotels; Full Board (FB) on the houseboat.

*About Redbird and Mark Bratt Travel. In 2020 during the pandemic, when business was almost extinguished, I gave up my ATOL licence and thereafter I could only be a travel consultant, not a tour operator. Mark Bratt Travel <https://markbratttravel.com/> holds an ATOL and delivers Redbird holidays for me.

The price includes:

10 nights accommodation on twin sharing basis as per the hotels above including an overnight houseboat stay;

Meal plan as stated above; [BB: Bed & Breakfast; FB: Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner];

Evening sunset cruise for 2 hrs;

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Half day sightseeing tour of Kochi;
Evening witness Kathakali dance performance;
Tour of Munnar including a 3-to-4-hour guided trek to the Letchmi Hills, a visit to the Tea Museum, and a tour of tea plantation and tea factory visit;
Bamboo rafting, Nature Walk and spice plantation in Thekkady;
All transfers, sightseeing, and excursions as per the itinerary will be by a chauffeured vehicle
Entrance fees, road taxes, parking fees, fuel charges, interstate taxes and portage at train stations.
A Red Bird representative for assistance on arrival and departure transfers;
All currently applicable taxes, including the service tax applicable on the total invoice amount.

The price excludes:

Expenses of personal nature like tipping, laundry, telephone/fax calls, alcoholic beverages, camera/video camera fees at monuments, medical expenses, airport departure taxes where not included in the ticket price, etc.;

Meals other than those specified above;

Any insurance;

Any visa fees;

Any air-fare unless mentioned above;

Any other services not mentioned in the inclusion.

Special Notes:

UK, US, EC and citizens of most other countries require a visa to visit India and you will require a minimum of 6 months validity remaining on your passport from date of arrival.

You are responsible for obtaining visas yourselves but we will of course provide any guidance or assistance you may require. For single entry visits of up to 30 days UK, US and some EC citizens can use the e-TV online visa on arrival system which has simplified the application process and reduced the cost. Details can be found at <https://indianvisaonline.gov.in/visa/tvoa.html>

Journey times are approximate and may vary considerably due to adverse traffic or road conditions and the number and duration of stops along the way.

Check in time at the hotel is 1400 Hrs and check out time is 12 Noon;

The check-in time on House Boat (Spice Coast Cruises) is at 1300 hrs and the boat then sets off cruising along the backwaters of Alleppey and Kumarakom till sunset. Around 1800 hrs, the boat will be anchored to avoid interfering with the fishermen of the lake and their nets. The boats come with en-suite bedrooms that are air-conditioned (from 1900 hrs to 0700 hrs). On the following day after breakfast, the boat will start cruising again and you will be dropped back to the jetty by 1000 hrs. No bar onboard. You can carry your purchase on board if required.

In case of any currency fluctuations, amendments to Government taxes, or any fuel price rises we reserve the right to adjust the tour price accordingly.

Any change in hotel or room category may attract a supplement or reduction in the tour cost.