

Optional Pre-Tour: Exotic Kerala

November 2-7



Friday, November 2: Arrive Cochin

On arrival into Cochin, you will be met at the airport outside of baggage claim for your private transfer to your hotel, Vivanta by Taj Malabar. Here, you will check in for a three-night stay in a Superior Charm room in the tower wing.



Kochi (Cochin) is spread across islands and promontories in a stunning location between the Arabian Sea and the Keralan backwaters. The city was formed in 1341 when a flood created a natural safe port, which became the principal harbor for the Malabar Coast's spice trade. The rulers of Kochi invited people of various religions to settle here, attracting Jews and Christians who built places of worship and created their own communities. Today, there remains much evidence of the influence of Portuguese, Dutch and British settlers, and even the Chinese in the form of the famous fishing nets – huge contraptions that are still used to lift fish from the bay. The city's greatest concentration of historic sites is in the Fort Kochi area, where the ancient streets are home to the Mattancherry Palace, the old spice warehouses, the Jewish synagogue and numerous churches.

Spend the day relaxing after your flight.

Saturday, November 3: Cochin (B, D)

Following breakfast, proceed to Kumbalanghi Village (approximately half-hour drive).

Spend your day in a village experiencing the “old-ways” of life. Ride on the pristine backwaters in a country boat; visit a crab farm; watch coir yarn making and weaving of coconut leaves; visit an agriculture farm, various plantations, water harvesting ponds and biogas plants. Learn of the ancient practice of fishing with Chinese fishing nets.



Return to the hotel for free time and lunch on your own. This evening, enjoy a welcome dinner together as you get to know your fellow travelers.

Sunday, November 4: Cochin (B)

Following breakfast, proceed for the sightseeing tour of Cochin. The tour begins with a visit to the Mattancherry Palace, presented to the Raja by the Portuguese in 1515. Built of stone, the palace's great attraction are its murals, featuring some of Kerala's finest paintings, and the coronation hall of the Kochi (Cochin) maharajas.

Continue to the synagogue in Jew Town, built in 1568 and rebuilt in 1664. Its interior is a mix of styles, with hand-painted blue and white floor tiles from Canton; 19th-century Belgian oil-burning chandeliers; and an elaborately carved ark housing four scrolls from the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament. Visitors to the synagogue should be modestly dressed. (*No shorts, short skirts or sleeveless tops; bare shoulders and midriffs are not permitted.*)



Also visit the church of St. Francis. Dating back to 1503, it was the first European church in India, built by the Portuguese Admiral Albuquerque. The church was Protestant Dutch, then Anglican and is now Church of South India.

Finish the day by admiring the Chinese fishing nets lining the northern shore of Fort Kochi. It is a graceful sight, the nets suspended from their arched poles. They are thought to have been introduced to the region by the court of Kublai Khan.

In the early evening, proceed for a cultural program called Kaleidoscope, which comprises seven different art forms:

- Make up demonstration
- Traditional welcome dance of Kerala
- Mohiniyattom, the classical dance of Kerala
- Bharathanatayam, the south Indian classical dance
- Martial arts of Kerala, Kalaripayattu
- Demonstration as well as the episode of Kathakali
- Theyyam, a temple ritual
- Program concludes with a fusion of all the dance forms.



Monday, November 5: Cochin-Alleppey- Kumarakom (B, L)

After breakfast, drive to Alleppey (approximately one hour drive) to embark on a traditional houseboat. Fringing the coast of Kerala and winding far inland is a vast network of lagoons, lakes, rivers and canals.



Arrive Kumarakom and disembark late afternoon. Transfer to Kumarakom Lake Resort and check in for a two-night stay.

An island on Vembanad Lake, Kumarakom is a sleepy agricultural and fishing town, accessed by navigable waterways known as the Keralan backwaters. On the water the locals punt narrow dug-out boats carrying their loads of coir, copra and cashews, while on the wider waterways the larger rice boats ply their trade. This area is one of extraordinary natural beauty, characterized by lush tropical vegetation, coconut palms and colorful birdlife, including kingfishers, fish eagles, storks and egrets.



Tuesday, November 6: Kumarakom (B)

Spend the day at leisure, enjoying the amenities of the hotel and the beauty of this area. In the evening set out on a sunset cruise on Lake Vembanad provided by the hotel.

Wednesday, November 7: Kumarakom-Cochin-Mumbai (B)

Following breakfast, check-out and drive to Cochin airport (approximately 2 ½ hours' drive) to meet your flight to Mumbai. (*flight priced separately*)

Optional Post-Tour: The Hills of Darjeeling

November 19-22



Monday, November 19: Delhi – Bagdogra - Darjeeling (D)

Fly from Delhi to Bagdogra (*flight priced separately*). On arrival, you will be met and transferred to Darjeeling, a drive of approximately 3 ½ hours.

Darjeeling is a well-known hill station, due to its moderate climate and high elevation (6,700 feet), and offers fabulous views of Kangchenjunga, the third highest mountain in the world. It is also known for its tea plantations and the Darjeeling Himalayan Railway.

On arrival, check in to the Windamere Hotel for a three-night stay on a full-board basis.

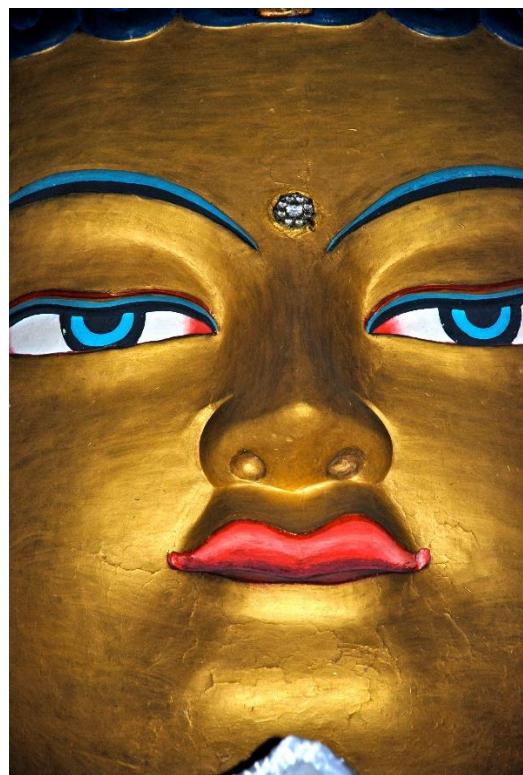


Tuesday, November 20: Darjeeling (B, L, D)

Depart early this morning to see the fabulous sunrise at Tiger Hill. On a clear day, enjoy views of the Himalayans including Kanchandzonga and Mount Everest.

Continue to, the oldest monastery in the area, built in 1875. Marvel at the colorful structure and its 15-foot-high Mythey Buddha. Return to the hotel for breakfast.

Late morning we'll take an unforgettable ride on the famous Darjeeling Himalayan Railway, also known as the "Toy Train," from Darjeeling to Ghoom.



Watch the spectacular landscape unfold as the two-foot gauge railway, opened in 1881, labors at about 10 mph criss-crossing the road. It has tiny four-wheel locomotives (some over 100 years old) like living legends. Experience the sound, smell and romance of a bygone era. DHR is a work of genius and technological achievement of 1881. It has social and cultural importance.

Afterward, proceed for a city tour of Darjeeling, first to the Himalayan Mountaineering Institute, established in Darjeeling in 1954 after Tenzing Norgay climbed Everest. The institute offers courses in mountaineering and adventure sports training. There is also a museum focusing on the culture of the Himalayan region, as well as displays of climbing equipment and its evolution.

Next we'll stop at the Himalayan Zoological Park where one can see Himalayan animals like Snow Leopard, Tibetan Wolf, Tibetan Yak, Himalayan Black Bear and several varieties of birds.

Our final stop will be the Tibetan Refugee Self- Help Center. This institute is run by Tibetan Refugees to preserve their handicrafts – such as Tibetan Carpets, leatherwork, paintings and woodworking.

Wednesday, November 21: Darjeeling (B, L, D)

Today is at your leisure to enjoy Darjeeling. All meals included at the Windamere Hotel.



Thursday, November 22: Darjeeling (B)

You will be transferred to Bagdogra airport to meet your flight to Delhi and onward. (*flight priced separately*).



Photo by IRT Traveler Saul Rothstein

Pricing:

Pre-Tour: Exotic Kerala

\$2,285 per person, double occupancy

\$3,190 single occupancy

Flight, Cochin to Mumbai **\$440** per person*

Nov. 7: Jet Airways #825 departing Cochin 12:10 p.m. / Arriving Mumbai 2:05 p.m.

Post-Tour: Hill Stations of Darjeeling

\$1,190 per person, double occupancy

\$1,545 single occupancy

Flights, Delhi to Bagdogra & Bagdogra to Delhi: **\$840** per person*

Nov. 19: Jet Airways #7156 departing Delhi 10:20 a.m. / Arriving Bagdogra 12:15 p.m.

Nov. 22: Jet Airways #7157 departing Bagdogra 4:20 p.m. / Arriving Delhi 6:40 p.m.

**Flight costs are estimated and subject to change until booked.*

Booking terms:

A deposit of 25% of total is due upon booking by check or credit card. We will send you a link to our secure payment portal when you are ready to deposit. Final payment is due 120 days prior to departure by check, credit card or wire transfer. All payments are nonrefundable.

Medical/evacuation insurance is required for this journey. We highly recommend full tour cancellation/interruption insurance to protect your travel investment.



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