

# Hyderabad, Hampi & Kerala Backwaters Cruise, India

Discover southern India's ancient history, architectural splendour and captivating waterways on this varied and fascinating cultural tour.



## Group departures

See overleaf for departure dates

## Holiday overview

Style	Adventure Cruising
Accommodation	Hotels, Cruise Boat
Grade	Tour
Duration	16 days from London to London
Min/Max group size	4 / 12. Guaranteed to run for 4
Trip Leader	Local Leaders Hyderabad, Hampi & Kerala
Land only	Joining in Hyderabad, India Departing from Kochi, India

**Private Departures & Tailor Made itineraries available**



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# Departures

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## Group departures

### 2022 Dates:

Sat 29 Jan - Sun 13 Feb

Fri 18 Nov - Sat 03 Dec

### 2023 Dates:

Fri 06 Jan - Sat 21 Jan

## Group prices and optional supplements

Please contact us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or visit our website for our land only and flight inclusive prices and single supplement options.

## Deposit and payments

A higher deposit is required to secure your booking on this holiday and your final balance is due 95 days before departure. For full details please contact the office or refer to our terms and conditions on our website <http://www.mountainkingdoms.com/essential-information>.

We will confirm cabin availability for this trip before processing your booking.

## No Surcharge Guarantee

The flight inclusive or land only price will be confirmed to you at the time you make your booking. There will be no surcharges after your booking has been confirmed.

## Will the trip run?

This trip is guaranteed to run for 4 people and for a maximum of 12. In the rare event that we cancel a holiday, we will refund you in full and give you at least 6 weeks warning. Many trips do fill up quickly - we advise you to book early if you want to secure a place(s) on the dates of your choice.

## Insurance

We offer a travel insurance scheme - please contact us for details.

## Private Departures

We can also offer this trip as a private holiday. A Private Departure follows exactly the same itinerary as the group departure but at dates to suit you (subject to availability) - please contact us with your preferred dates.

## Tailor Made service

We pride ourselves on the level of quality and choice we provide for our clients who want a fully tailor made holiday. A holiday will be created especially for you by one of our well-travelled experts. They will be able to advise on the accommodation best suited to your needs, the sights you should visit (and those to avoid!) and the best walks and activities matched to your ability. In short, we will work together with you to create your perfect holiday.

If you would like to explore the idea of a Tailor Made holiday with Mountain Kingdoms then please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 or see the Tailor Made pages of our website for further inspiration.

## Your guide

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In Hyderabad and Hampi you will have specially selected English-speaking guides with in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of these two places.

During the river cruise in Kerala, a crew of nine hospitality staff will attend to your every need, and an English-speaking guide will accompany you on your shore excursions.

## Your trip highlights

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- Tour the old city of Hyderabad including the Royal Qutub Shahi Tombs, Lad Bazaar and Golconda Fort
- Explore the vast ruined city of Hampi, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, including the stone chariot at the Vittala Temple and the exquisite Lotus Mahal
- Discover the charms of Kochi and its picturesque Chinese fishing nets
- Take a seven night cruise along the tranquil Keralan Backwaters with daily excursions to enjoy cultural experiences and wildlife rich havens
- Stay in luxurious hotels for maximum indulgence in Hyderabad, Hampi and Kochi

## At a glance itinerary

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Days 1-2	Fly London to Hyderabad. Transfer to hotel for welcome dinner.
Days 3-4	Full day sightseeing in Hyderabad. Fly to Vidyanagar and transfer to Hampi.
Day 5	Exploration of the ancient monuments at Hampi.
Day 6	Fly to Kochi via Bangalore.
Day 7	Guided tour of Kochi. See famous Chinese fishing nets.
Days 8-15	Backwaters cruise. End cruise at Alleppey.
Days 15-16	Disembark. Time at leisure at Fort Kochi. Transfer to Kochi airport. Fly back to London.

## Trip summary

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Your journey begins in Hyderabad, known both as the ‘Pearl City’ and the ‘Tech City’ of India, reflecting the city’s rich historical heritage spanning four centuries and its modern day dynamism. You will discover palaces and forts sitting harmoniously alongside upscale restaurants and designer shops. You have a full day to explore the main highlights with visits to Golconda Fort, the Qutub Shahi Tombs, the Salar Jung Museum and the night bazaar. And no visit to the city is complete without a taste of its culinary specialties - Hyderabad biryani and Iranian tea.

Cultural appetites whetted, you now fly to Hampi, the hidden gem of central India. This incredible UNESCO listed ruined city is a vast complex of palaces, baths, forts and temples, many remarkably intact. Akin to Angkor Wat in Cambodia in its splendour, but far less visited, the vast ruins tell the story of the fabulous wealth and grandeur of the ancient Vijayanagara civilisation. The magnificent stone chariot and the elaborate monuments of the Royal Enclosure are among the many sights you will experience.

The final stage of your adventure takes you south to Kochi where, after a guided city tour, you board your cruise boat, the R V Vaikundam, and set sail on a seven night cruise of Kerala’s tranquil backwaters. You sail across broad lakes and along gently flowing rivers, stopping daily for excursions to cultural and scenic places of interest. Immersing yourself in the cultural life of the region you will be able to observe traditional village life, meet craftspeople at work, see cookery demonstrations and enjoy martial arts and dance performances. You will also discover the wonderful scenery and exotic birdlife of beautiful Lake Vembanad and the Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary.

Onboard the R V Vaikundam you can revel in the attentive service, good-sized cabins with private bathrooms, delicious food and a range of experiences to give you a taste of Kerala’s music, arts and cuisine. And in Hyderabad, Hampi and Kochi, you will find your hotel accommodation is of a very high standard, ensuring you enjoy maximum comfort and relaxation from start to end of this delightful tour.

# Your trip itinerary

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## Day 1: Fly London to Hyderabad

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Today you depart London on an overnight flight to Hyderabad in southern India.

**Overnight: In flight**

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## Day 2: Arrive Hyderabad. Group transfer to hotel.

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On arrival at Hyderabad airport you will be met and transferred to your hotel. The journey will take you across the longest flyover in India, giving you an intriguing overview of this vibrant, sprawling city. Hyderabad is a great example of India's booming economy. The old city has expanded and stretched for miles with large shopping malls, high end shopping outlets, and residential suburbs. These all combine in surprising harmony with the traditional buildings and architecture preserved within the Old City.

In the evening there will be a welcome dinner at your hotel.

**Overnight: Taj Krishna or Similar, Hyderabad (Meals: D)**

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## Day 3: Full day sightseeing in Hyderabad.

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Today you start your exploration of Hyderabad with a visit to Golconda Fort. Located in the western part of the city, Golconda is undoubtedly one of the most magnificent and well-preserved fortress complexes in India. Once the capital of the seven Qutub Shahi kings it boasts numerous bastions and gates and the remains of once palatial rooms. The fortress rests on a granite hill 120 metres high and is surrounded by huge crenelated ramparts. On entering through the Grand Portico your guide will suggest you clap your hands to show off the fort's acoustics. This sound can be clearly heard at the hill top pavilion, almost one kilometre away, serving as a warning note to the inhabitants of the fort of any impending danger. Of course it now amuses visitors. The hill top itself offers far-reaching, panoramic views.



Outside the walls of the fort, are the tombs of the Qutub Shahi kings as well as many of their relatives and courtiers. Each tomb is a domed structure built on a square base surrounded by pointed arches - their distinctive look marrying Persian, Pashtun and Hindu styles. These royal tombs may well remind you of the most iconic Indian monument of all - the Taj Mahal. In fact, they served as inspiration for the Taj Mahal and that is why they are also known as 'the Taj Mahal of Hyderabad'.

After lunch at a local restaurant you will pay a visit to the Salar Jung Museum which has the distinction of being the third largest museum in India and houses part of the huge, esoteric collection of art and artefacts of Salar Jung. You could literally spend a full day at this fabulous museum, but your guide will take you through the main highlights such as the musical clock, the statue of Mephistopheles and Margareta, the Egyptian double-sided carpet, and a favorite piece, the Melody in Marble statue.

Leaving the best till last, your tour will conclude with a visit to Hyderabad's principle landmark - Charminar - an impressive triumphal arch built in 1591. Located in the heart of the Old City, the Charminar arch comprises Indo-Islamic and Persian architecture, and you will no doubt learn all about the memorial and its fascinating history from your guide. The arch leads into Lad Bazaar which comes alive at sunset with people buying, selling and haggling over all manner of exotic goods late into the night. Your guide will take you through the bazaar, giving you the chance to taste one of Hyderabad's favourite specialities, Iranian tea.

**Overnight: Taj Krishna or Similar, Hyderabad (Meals: B L)**

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## Day 4: Fly to Vidyanagar. Drive to Hampi - approximately 18 miles/29 km, 50 minutes.

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After breakfast you check out from your hotel and transfer to the airport to board a flight to Vidyanagar which will take just over an hour. On arrival at Vidyanagar Airport, you will be met and taken to your hotel. Be aware that the airport is very small and the baggage collection systems quite basic!

The drive to Hampi is full of interest as you bump along roads, cross rail tracks, pass by the largest steel factory in central India and drive along country lanes through small, traditional villages. After around 45 minutes you will see a large rock engraved with 'Evolve Back Hampi', at which point you will follow a dirt road to a large wooden gate behind which lies your home for the next two nights.

The Evolve Back hotel, is situated just 4 kilometres from Hampi, a village in the northern Karnataka region of India, set alongside the spectacular ruins of the ancient city of Vidyanagar (now also known as Hampi). Stunningly beautiful, this idyllic place sprawls on the sides of River Tungabhadra an atmospheric memorial to the wealth and glory of the once powerful Vidyanagar Empire. Comparable to sites such as Machu Picchu, Angkor Wat and Bagan, but without the tourist hordes, Hampi is astonishing both in its scale and grandeur. Rightly, it has now been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site which should help preserve its unique architecture.

**Overnight: Evolve Back Hampi or Similar, Hampi (Meals: B D)**

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### Day 5: Sightseeing at Hampi.

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Your time exploring Hampi today will be split between the morning and the afternoon to enhance the experience and ensure you don't become 'temped-out'.

The day starts at the Vitthala Temple complex which is undoubtedly the most splendid monuments in Hampi. Amongst its most celebrated features is the great Mandapa with its 56 musical pillars constructed to sound the notes of the scale when struck. Resting on a richly sculpted basement, its roof is supported by huge pillars of granite, each consisting of a central pillar surrounded by detached shafts, all cut from one single block of stone. In front of the temple you will also see the famous stone chariot with stone wheels that still actually revolve.



Then you proceed to the Zenana Enclosure, or women's quarters, where you can visit the Lotus Mahal, a two-storey pavilion with a unique lotus-like structure. Beyond the Lotus Mahal are the Elephant Stables, a series of high-ceilinged domed chambers that were used to provide shelter for the royal elephants of the Vijayanagara Empire.

Avoiding the heat of the day, you head back to the hotel to freshen up, eat and relax until you are ready for the second part of your journey back in time. The afternoon starts at the Virupaksha Temple which rises majestically at the western end of the famous Hampi Bazaar. The temple has a 120 feet tall tower on its eastern entrance and contains the shrines of Shiva, Pampa and Bhuvaneshwari. Parts of this temple are older than the Vijayanagar kingdom itself with the style dating back to the 11th or 12th century. It's hard to believe that less than 10 years ago people still had their homes within the complex.

Next you proceed to visit the Hazara Ramaswami Temple that is believed to have been the private place of worship of the royal family. Within the complex you will be entertained by the presence of many monkeys, so keep an eye on your belongings. Finally you visit the Achyutaraya Temple and walk through the bazaars of Sule and Hampi before returning to your hotel for the evening.

**Overnight: Evolve Back Hampi or Similar, Hampi (Meals: BLD)**

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### Day 6: Drive to Vidyanagar airport. Fly to Kochi via Bangalore.

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After breakfast you check out of your hotel and drive back to Vidyanagar airport. Here you board your first flight which takes you to Bangalore where you catch your second flight on to Kochi. On arrival in Bangalore you will need to collect your bags then follow the signs for flight transfers, checking in using the kiosk machines, and then proceeding to the bag drop counters.

On arrival at Kochi you will be met and transferred to your hotel about an hour from the airport.

**Overnight: Taj Malabar or Similar, Kochi (Meals: B)**

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## Day 7: Sightseeing in Kochi.

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After breakfast you will head out to begin your tour of Kochi. You will cross the famous Thoppumpady Bridge connecting man-made Willingdon Island to Old Fort Kochi, and here you will start with a tour of Mattancherry, the bustling part of Old Fort Kochi and the epicenter of the spice trade for centuries.

You begin with the Dutch Palace, actually originally built by the Portuguese as a gift for the Raja of Kochi in 1555. The Dutch renovated and expanded it a century later, earning it its name. The palace also contains some of India's finest mythological murals, the walls depicting scenes from the great Hindu epics: the Ramayana and the Mahabharata.



Then you will see the church of Saint Francis, India's first European church (ca. 1510), famed as the original burial site of Portuguese explorer Vasco de Gama, who died in Kochi in 1524 while on his third visit to India. Not immune to the turbulence of the colonial era, the originally Catholic St. Francis changed hands - and denominations - with each new power that took control of Kochi, becoming a Protestant Dutch Reformed church in 1663 then Anglican under the English in 1804.

After lunch at a local restaurant you head to see the picturesque Chinese fishing nets unique to Kochi. These iconic land-based nets combine elegance and ingenuity with their massive frames balanced by counterweights manipulated by teams of up to six men. Long believed to have been introduced by the Chinese explorer Zheng He in the 14th century, or possibly travellers from Kublai Khan's court, these nets actually trace their origin to Portuguese settlers from Macau. You will no doubt want to take lots of photos before returning to your hotel.

**Overnight: Taj Malabar or Similar, Kochi (Meals: B L)**

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## Day 8: Visit the Kalari Centre at Nettoor. Drive to Marad and board cruise boat. Sail to Vaikom and visit temple.

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Today is the start of your backwaters cruise and your opportunity to really get under the skin of Kerala culture.

After breakfast you head to Nettoor where you visit the Kalari Centre, a training centre for Kalaripayattu, Kerala's traditional martial art, said to be the origin of all martial arts including Karate. You will enjoy a spectacular student performance, and you will learn that Kalaripayattu is not just a martial art, but is in fact a way of life.

Leaving Nettoor, you drive to the nearby village of Marad where you board the R V Vaikundam by noon. The crew will welcome you onboard the boat with refreshments and a cold towel, before you receive your ship orientation and safety briefing. During this time your luggage will be taken to your cabin.



Then you set sail as you gently cruise along the lake waving goodbye to the skyscraper-lined horizon of the city of Kochi. After lunch is served, the boat's resident expert will tell you all about Kochi, the Queen of the Arabian Sea, and its geographical, cultural and social significance.

By evening you arrive in the ancient village of Vaikom. You disembark here and, after a short walk, head to the ancient temple of Shiva by tuk-tuk. You will take a tour of the temple to discover its history and architecture. The architecture of temples in Kerala is based on ancient principles of construction and the geographical features of the land. Following the traditional architecture, each element of the temple represents an element of the human body and a temple is considered to be not only the space for spiritual enlightenment but also a place for social networking. You then return to the boat for dinner.

**Overnight: R V Vaikundam Cruise Boat (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 9: Visit Vaikom Cultural Centre to watch Kathakali dance performance. Sail from Vaikom to Chenganda to Kumarakom.**

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After breakfast tuk-tuks will line the docking area waiting for you - it's a great photo opportunity. Your guide will lead the way to the Vaikom Cultural Centre, where you will watch a performance of 'Kathakali', the traditional dramatic and mimetic dance form. It is a unique blend of dance, music, action and literature and you will be mesmerised by the quality of the acting and mimicry, not to mention all the colourful make up. At the end of the show you will return to the boat and sail to Chenganda village. Here you will take a walk through the village spending time with the coir weavers, the shell harvesters and the local farmers. You will be able to talk to them about their way of life and watch various indigenous fishing techniques.



Returning to the boat for lunch you continue your cruise through the Thanneermukkom Barrage. The barrage straddles Vembanad, the largest lake in Kerala, dividing the lake into two - one half with perennial salty water and the other with fresh water enriched by five rivers flowing from the hills. You will learn all about the indigenous practices of paddy cultivation in Kuttanad.

As you continue to cruise through the expanses of Lake Vembanad take a seat at the viewing lounge to enjoy the lush landscape of its wetland ecosystem. By the evening you dock and then take a longboat to a farmhouse. This house is located on an island which was made by the men of the house by reclaiming land from the backwaters. On arrival you will walk around the farm and the owners will demonstrate the preparation of traditional Syrian Christian cuisine. You may also try your hand at cooking and listen to the story of the family before enjoying dinner here, after which you return to the boat for the night.

**Overnight: R V Vaikundam Cruise Boat (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 10: Bird watching excursion to Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary. Sail from Kumarakom to Kavalam.**

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In the early morning, after a light breakfast, a short tuk-tuk ride will take you to Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary for a bird watching experience. The sanctuary comprises a cluster of lagoons from Lake Vembanad with a backdrop of mangroves, paddy fields and coconut groves.

The walk will take around an hour and you will get the chance to view many birds. Endemic birds that are routinely seen here include waterfowl, cuckoo, owl, egret, heron and ducks. Parrots, teal, larks, flycatchers, wood beetle, and other birds are also seen here during their respective migratory seasons. After time to observe the birds, you return to the boat where a full breakfast will be served.

After breakfast you continue to cruise the lake giving a further opportunity for bird watching from the viewing terrace or, you may prefer simply to relax, read a book, and just enjoy the delightful scenery. Lunch will be served whilst cruising.

Later, you arrive into Kavalam where the Pampa River reverses its course and drains into Lake Vembanad. You dock here and leave the boat to explore the village. Your excursion begins by taking the ferry to cross to the other side of the river, before walking along the dykes surrounding the expanses of paddy fields, meeting some of the local people as you stroll.

**Overnight: R V Vaikundam Cruise Boat (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 11: Visit Chavara Bhavan. Sail from Kavalam to Kainakari to Pulinkunnu.**

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After breakfast your cruise continues to Kainakari. Your morning excursion requires a short walk through paddy fields to reach Chavara Bhavan, the ancestral home of the Catholic Saint, Kuriakose Chavara, which is now preserved as a museum. This unique shrine can only be reached by boat and on foot. Saint Chavara, the first canonized Catholic male saint of Indian origin, was the co-founder of the first congregation for men, the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate, and of a similar one for women, Congregation of the Mother of Carmel.



You return to the boat for lunch and set sail once more heading for the village of Pulinkunnu. Now the scenery changes to smaller waterways and you will get closer to the laid-back life of the Keralan people. Later this afternoon you will experience paddling along narrow canal in small country boats, meeting the local villagers as you go.

**Overnight: R V Vaikundam Cruise Boat (Meals: BLD)**

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### **Day 12: Sail from Pulinkunnu to Nedumudy to Champakkulam to Changankari.**

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This morning you cruise to Nedumudi. On arrival you drive through scenic villages for a little over one hour to reach Mannar. No visit to Mannar is complete without visiting a bell metal and brassware factory. Here you will meet the artisans and watch the indigenous method of casting traditional lamps, utensils and ornate locks, with the chance to purchase some brassware souvenirs should you wish. You drive back to the boat with time to freshen up before lunch is served.

In the afternoon you cruise to Champakkulam. Kerala's old spice trade used to pass through this town en route to Kochi and other ports on the west coast. Settled more than 1,000 years ago by Syrian Christian traders, who later converted to Roman Catholicism under the Portuguese, the people chose to keep their syncretic cultural heritage. This can be seen in the monumental St Mary's Church on the riverside. Built in 1550, the foundations are said to be as old as the 5th century AD. Architecturally, it is a mélange of several European styles, from the Levantine altar and structure to the Dutch arches that tower overhead.

In Champakkulam you will visit the old church of St Mary's, a school and the local artisans who skilfully and passionately craft biblical characters. You will also see examples of the narrow, long Snake Boats (Chundan Vallom) which today are used for hotly competed races although they were originally designed as boats of war. They are considered a real icon of Keralan culture. Over one hundred oarsmen power these boats in races, moving their oars to the beat of drums at the aft of the vessels.

The cruise continues to Changankary village, passing through several serene canals. Once there, you may relax on board or take a walk before dinner.

**Overnight: R V Vaikundam Cruise Boat (Meals: BLD)**

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### **Day 13: Excursion from Changankari to visit the craftsmen of Aranmula. Cruise to Thottappally.**

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This morning starts with an early breakfast, before driving to Aranmula. The village is home to a family of craftsmen who are skilled at making mirrors out of a special combination of metals, a secret that has been passed down through the generations. These mirrors have the distinctive feature of 100% reflection unlike the common mirror. Local people consider it as auspicious to keep one at home to attract prosperity and luck. Aranmula has a different feel to the other backwater villages you have visited as there is so much to see and do here. You start by visiting the famous traditional mural art gallery, where you learn about the art of mural painting. Then you proceed to the mirror makers and watch the different stages of their work. A walk through the village takes you to the ancient temple of Krishna, which is followed by a stop to see the snake boat and learn about the snake boat race which this village hosts every year.



Lunch will be arranged at a local house located on the bank of the Pampa, a sacred river for the locals. After lunch you will drive back to the boat in time for refreshments before cruising on to Thottappally village. Once docked you can take a leisurely walk to the beach before returning to the boat for dinner.

**Overnight: R V Vaikundam Cruise Boat (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 14: Visit ancient grove and plant a coconut sapling. Sail from Thottappally to Karumadi to Kanjippadam.**

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An early breakfast this morning before taking a short drive to visit an ancient sacred grove near Harripad where serpents are worshipped. This is the only temple in Kerala which has female priests. You can walk inside to observe the rituals.

At Thottappally you will mark your cruise by planting a coconut sapling at the village. The coconut tree is considered as the 'Kalpavriksha' or Divine Tree of Kerala. All parts of the tree are useful in one way or the other: the water inside is a healthy drink; the fresh kernel and the oil extract from dried kernel are inevitable components of every cuisine; fibre from the coconut husk is used to make coir, mats and geotextile; the palm fronds are used for thatching roofs; the wood is suitable for making furniture and all the dried parts of coconut make good firewood. Last but not the least, the toddy - the local alcoholic beverage drunk by labourers after toiling in the fields.

After a leisurely sail you next arrive in the quaint village of Karumadi. Here you take a walk around a small shrine preserving the ruins of an ancient sculpture of Buddha. Along the way you may meet 'toddy tappers' who collect the sap of the stem of blossoming coconut flowers to make toddy. The tapper will tell you about the process of making toddy and may allow you to take a sip from his pot!

Your next stop is the village of Kanjippadam to enjoy a leisurely walk. You will meet carpenters at the boat building yard and talk about the traditional method of building wooden boats (Kettuvallom) that involves joining wooden planks using coir, cotton and natural resin.



Tonight you celebrate your journey over a farewell dinner onboard the RV Vaikundam.

**Overnight: R V Vaikundam Cruise Boat (Meals: BLD)**

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**Day 15: Sail to Punnamad and disembark at Alleppey. Drive to Fort Kochi with time at leisure. Drive to Kochi airport. Depart India.**

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After breakfast you cruise to Punnamada Lake - the venue of the annual spectacular race of Snake boats from the different villages of Alleppey. The race takes place on the second Saturday of August.

By 9.30am you will have disembarked and you will then be driven to Fort Kochi where you will have time at leisure to enjoy the last few hours of your trip. Here you will find a wide range of shopping and dining options, or you may simply take a stroll and soak up the atmosphere of this fascinating island.

Later you will be picked up and transferred to Kochi airport for your late evening departure for London.

**Overnight: In flight (Meals: B)**

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**Day 16: Arrive London.**

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## Our grading system

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Hyderabad, Hampi & Kerala Backwaters Cruise is graded as a Tour, as described below.

### **Tours**

Tours may include any of the following activities: sightseeing, visiting local villages, exploring temples, game viewing, birdwatching, husky sledding, mountain flights, city tours and dramatic journeys by road, rail, or river. Occasionally there will be short, gentle walks so that you can properly explore the cultural sites you are visiting.

## What the price includes

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**Mountain Kingdoms** aims to offer the best value for money. We do not charge extra for meal packages or apply local charges and try to ensure that all the key elements of your holiday are included.

### What's included:

- ✓ English-speaking local guides in Hyderabad and Hampi. An English-speaking guide during the cruise excursions
- ✓ 6 nights good quality hotel accommodation (4\* and 5\*) in Hyderabad, Hampi and Kochi
- ✓ 7 nights cruise on a twin share basis - price based on a Deluxe cabin.
- ✓ Internal flights and domestic transfers
- ✓ 13 Breakfasts, 10 Lunches, 10 Dinners
- ✓ Economy class return air fares from the UK & UK Departure Tax (flight inclusive only)
- ✓ Single, timed, group airport transfers on arrival and departure
- ✓ All road transport described in the itinerary
- ✓ All excursions and applicable entry fees as described in the itinerary
- ✓ Carbon offsetting with the Ecoan Tree Planting Project (for clients taking our flight inclusive option)
- ✓ A free Mountain Kingdoms Water to Go bottle

### Airport transfers

The cost of a transfer to/from the airport is included in the price of your holiday. This is a single group transfer which is arranged to coincide with the timings of the group flights. If you book your own flights which arrive/depart at different times to this, or we book flights at your request that have different timings, we will be happy to provide a quote for a separate transfer. Please contact us should you require any further information.

### What's not included:

- ✗ Travel insurance
- ✗ Visa fees
- ✗ Tips
- ✗ Some meals (as per the itinerary)

### Water-to-Go Reusable Bottle Campaign

We have joined the campaign to help cut down on the use of plastics and, in particular, single-use water bottles. To do this we have teamed up with the revolutionary company, Water-to-Go who have developed a multi-use drinking bottle with a reusable filter that eliminates over 99.9% of all microbiological contaminants. This makes water from virtually any source safe to drink and significantly reduces the need for travellers to buy bottles of water wherever they are in the world.

Our clients who are not given a free Mountain Kingdoms kit bag for their holiday (these are required for certain treks), will instead receive a free Mountain Kingdoms Water-to-Go bottle. These unique Water-to-Go bottles can also be purchased from us at a discounted rate.

For further information about our campaign visit <https://www.mountainkingdoms.com/water-to-go-reusable-bottle-campaign>.

## Your accommodation

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### **Taj Krishna or Similar, Hyderabad**

The luxurious Taj Krishna Hotel is set amidst lush, landscaped gardens in Banjara Hills - a central location in Hyderabad. Facilities at the hotel include a large outdoor pool and several restaurants serving a range of cuisines. The Deluxe rooms are well-equipped with all modern conveniences including minibars, kettles and free Wi-Fi.



### **Evolve Back Hampi or Similar, Hampi**

This wonderfully indulgent hotel reflects the architecture and grandeur of the Vijayangara Empire of nearby Hampi, and boasts a superb range of facilities including an infinity pool, reading lounge and Vaidyasala spa. Two restaurants serve a fine selection of both local and international cuisine whilst the spacious rooms have every comfort and amenity for a five-star stay.



### **Taj Malabar or Similar, Kochi**

The Taj Malabar is situated on the far northern tip of Willingdon Island, with views out across the Arabian Sea. This high-end hotel combines old world, colonial charm with modern design and facilities. Features include an infinity pool, jacuzzi, gardens and spa complex for relaxation, plus four restaurants for a wide range of dining options. Guest rooms are elegantly styled and come with a range of amenities such as tea/coffee makers, mini bar, bath robes and Wi-Fi.



### **R V Vaikundam Cruise Boat**

The R V Vaikundam is styled on the traditional rice barges, or Kettuvallom, of the region and offers a first-rate cruise experience. The nine well-appointed cabins have air-conditioning, large windows and storage space as well as en suite bathrooms. On the upper deck, there is a large dining room, a bar with lounge, an Ayurvedic massage room and an open sun deck at the rear. There is an attentive crew of 12 to cater to the passengers needs, and entertainment is provided in the form of live music, art and cookery demonstrations giving a real flavour of Kerala.

## Meal arrangements

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13 Breakfasts, 10 Lunches, 10 Dinners

## Flight arrangements

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### Flight inclusive from price

Our 'Flight inclusive from' price is based on the best fare available at the time of printing. As airfares change on a constant basis, this should be used only as a guide price. Rest assured that, at the time of booking, we will endeavour to get the best possible price for the flights you need. Remember, the earlier you book the greater your chances of securing the best fare.

Flight inclusive packages booked through Mountain Kingdoms are protected through our ATOL bonding scheme.

### Flight upgrades and regional Airports

Please call us on +44 (0)1453 844400 for flight options from regional UK airports, Business Class upgrades, alternative airlines and stopovers. Please also check our website for the most up to date flight inclusive 'from' prices.

## Further information

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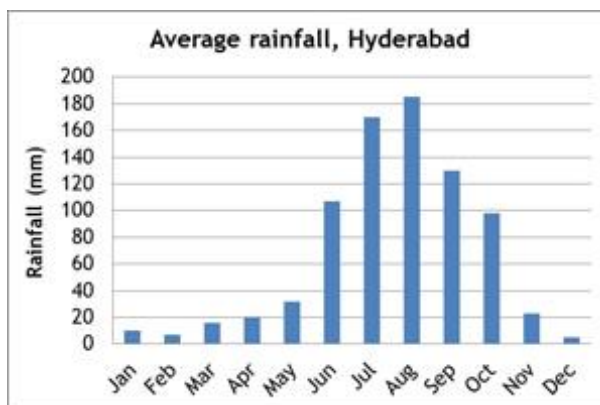
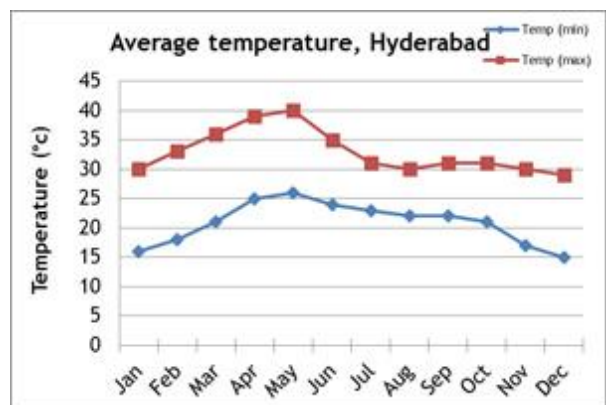
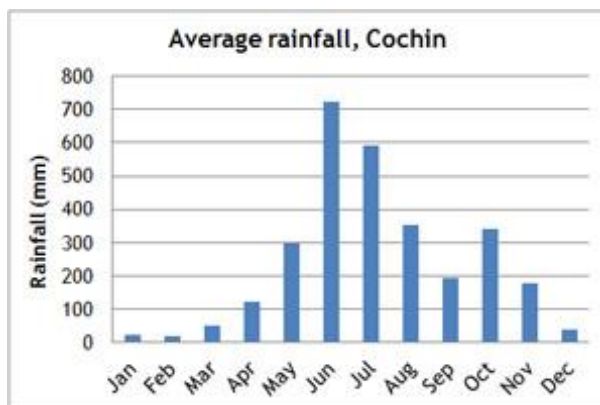
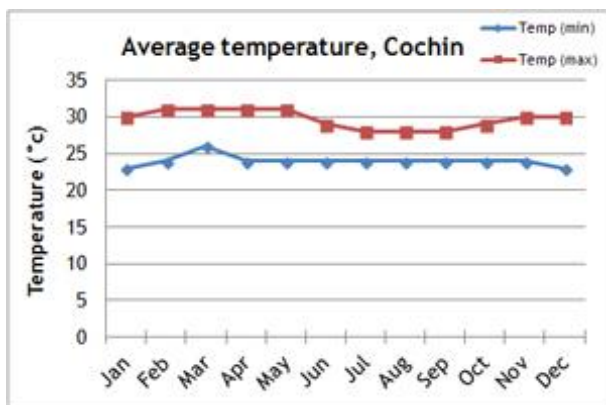
When we receive your booking, we send you a full Trip Dossier which contains details of any visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. If you do have queries at this initial stage do call us on 01453 844400 and we will be pleased to offer advice.

## The nature of adventure travel

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Every effort will be made to keep to this itinerary but we cannot guarantee that things may not change, either before you travel or while you are away. By its very nature, adventure travel involves an element of the unexpected, particularly in more remote areas. A variety of factors such as adverse weather conditions, changes to local schedules and difficulties with transportation can all contribute to the need to make changes to the itinerary, often at the very last minute. Our Operations Manager and your Trip Leader will make every effort to maintain the integrity of the original itinerary and minimise the impact of any changes, but an easy-going and flexible nature is a real asset! Please note that all timings and distances given are approximate.

# Climate information



# Extensions

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## Extending your holiday

If you would like additional inspiration on how or where to extend your holiday please call us on 01453 844400. Alternatively, you can download a range of extension information sheets on our website, at [www.mountainkingdoms.com](http://www.mountainkingdoms.com).



There are many ways you can extend your holiday with Mountain Kingdoms: we can book extra hotel nights at the start or end of your trip for you, arrange a tropical beach extension in Kerala or fly you to any other Indian city for further exploration. For example, you could fly to Delhi and enjoy a 3 day Agra extension to visit the Taj Mahal and Jaipur. In fact, whatever's available we can help make it happen. We're happy to suggest ideas, provide quotes and make all the arrangements.

We can also assist with flight and hotel upgrades.



## Why book this holiday with Mountain Kingdoms?

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- This itinerary is unique to Mountain Kingdoms, and visits three of India's most fascinating cultural centres.
- You will explore the incredible ancient ruined city of Hampi, which sees few western visitors.
- A seven night in-depth cruise of Kerala's Backwaters, provides a real insight into the cultural life, history and cuisine of the region. This relaxed cruise provides a more immersive experience than the standard one or two night cruises.
- We use high quality hotels in Hyderabad, Hampi and Kochi.
- All sightseeing, entrance fees and excursions are included in the holiday price.
- A fixed group transfer to/from airport the airport is included at the start and end of the trip.
- As part of our commitment to 'Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency', we will be carbon-offsetting all international flights booked through us by donating funds to the Ecoan Tree Planting Project in Peru.
- If you wish to fly with a specific airline, from a regional UK airport or on alternative dates to the main group we would be happy to arrange this for you. Please contact our Flights team for flight options, quotes and further information.

If we've tempted you to take your next holiday with us, we advise you to check availability and you can do this via our website: [www.mountainkingdoms.com](http://www.mountainkingdoms.com) or by calling the team on +44 (0)1453 844400. Bookings can be made online, by phone or by completing a booking form and returning it to us. We can also provisionally hold places if you need time to consider your options.

## What we say

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*From the moment we landed at Hyderabad airport, we knew we were in for a treat. Every day we enjoyed experiencing something new and exciting. The trip was packed with sightseeing, including world heritage sights, food and cuisine sampling, Legendary stories, luxury hotels, and above all seven nights on-board the converted rice boat with heritage feel and design. We loved mingling with the locals on a daily basis, and watching picture perfect daily sunsets during our backwaters Kerala cruise. Our highlights were: sampling the famous Hyderabad biryani; learning about Qutub Shahi tombs and how it inspired the building of the iconic Taj Mahal; visiting the sight of Hampi, where it felt like stepping back in time; and of course the best of all was sailing through the canals of Kerala backwaters watching the world go by and visiting villages and watching the artisans in action.*

*- Ahmed, former Head of Operations, Mountain Kingdoms*

# Mountain Kingdoms - distinctly different

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## **Truly independent**

In an age where many so-called 'independent' travel companies have in fact been bought out by multi-national giants, we remain fiercely independent with all the benefits this offers our clients.

## **Value for money prices with an emphasis on quality**

We are not in the business of cutting our itineraries and services to the bone to offer eye-catching cheap prices. We use some of the best airlines, and typically 3 or 4 star hotels in cities. We include the majority of meals and private transport for road travel. We use excellent equipment and appoint well-trained staff and leaders. Last year, over 98% of our clients rated their Mountain Kingdoms holiday as 'excellent' or 'good'. We are members of AITO and bound by their quality charter.

## **Complete financial security**

You can book with us confident that your holiday has full financial protection. Flight inclusive holidays are financially protected by the Civil Aviation Authority under ATOL licence number 2973 and 'Land Only' holidays are covered by a bond secured with ABTOT.

## **No Surcharge Guarantee**

Your peace of mind is important to us so we have a No Surcharge Guarantee on all Land Only and Flight Inclusive bookings. This means that there will be no change to the price of your holiday once we have confirmed your booking, regardless of fluctuations in exchange rates or fuel prices.

## **Award winning Responsible Tourism**

We feel strongly that all our holidays should benefit local communities, protect the environment and respect local traditions, religion and heritage. You can read more about the charities we support and our Responsible Tourism commitments and initiatives on the following page or at [www.mountainkingdoms.com](http://www.mountainkingdoms.com).

## **Genuine small group travel**

Almost all of our holidays have a maximum group size of just 12, plus leader. This provides more contact with your leader, readier access to off-the-beaten-path areas, greater interaction with local communities and a reduced environmental impact.

## **Loyalty Discount**

If you have previously travelled with us we recognise your loyalty with a discount on future trips.

## **Booking your holiday - it couldn't be easier**

Once you've chosen your Mountain Kingdoms holiday you can book online, call the office or complete and post a booking form which can be found in our brochure or downloaded from our website. If you would like to hold a place on one of our trips, whilst you make up your mind, please give us a call to make a provisional booking. This is a no-obligation, no-cost booking and we will hold your place until space comes under pressure or we need your decision.

## **Comprehensive information**

When we receive your booking we send you a full trip dossier which contains details of visas and vaccinations required, a suggested gear and clothing list and lots of useful information. In fact, everything you need to know to give you peace of mind and allow you to prepare for your trip of a lifetime.



## RESPONSIBLE TOURISM STATEMENT CLIMATE EMERGENCY PLAN



For over 33 years, Mountain Kingdoms has been offering people the chance to visit amazing places on this extraordinary planet. We now offer trips to all corners of the world, but we are conscious that inevitably our holidays have a detrimental impact on the world around us, and we want to do all we can to reduce our carbon emissions. We are a signatory to Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency, along with a growing number of like-minded, reputable tour operators. For more information, please visit [www.tourismdeclares.com](http://www.tourismdeclares.com)

From 2020 onwards, we will be focusing on how we can reduce the carbon emissions that our holidays produce, and how to counterbalance this carbon by supporting carbon offset measures. Here are some of our current and future plans to minimise the impact of our business as a whole:

### **Carbon Offsetting**

#### **Already doing:**

- ✓ We have been offsetting carbon since 2007, but will be increasing our donations to the [Ecoan tree planting project](#) in Peru this year. This is with a trusted partner where the funds go directly to a project where the community plants trees on its own land.

#### **Will do:**

- ✓ We are working on making our carbon offsetting more accurate and targeted.
- ✓ In future, we will add to that a further estimate for carbon produced by hotels, local road travel, trains and internal flights to arrive at a carbon offset sum for each trip we operate.
- ✓ Carbon offsetting will be included in our holiday prices. For our Flight Inclusive holidays it will include the international flight and any emissions produced by inland travel and accommodation. Our Land Only prices will include the cost of offsetting emissions caused by inland travel and accommodation.

### **Reducing Carbon Emissions**

#### **Already doing:**

- ✓ We already offer the majority of our customers a free filtered water bottle which means they can instantly cut down on their single-use plastic consumption. This will be an ongoing project.
- ✓ We already predominantly use locally owned hotels, but will continue to ensure that, where possible, we use these rather than multinational chains.
- ✓ We have joined the Tourism Declares a Climate Emergency initiative to stand alongside like-minded travel companies, to work together to initiate best practices to make tourism as sustainable as possible.

#### **Will do:**

- ✓ We will re-evaluate our flights to make sure we are using the most fuel efficient airlines with the youngest fleets and, where possible, direct flights for each trip.
- ✓ We will stop offering unnecessary optional flights – for example our Everest sightseeing trip.
- ✓ We will eliminate unnecessary staff flights wherever possible.
- ✓ We will look at minimising internal flights.
- ✓ We will be asking all our worldwide agents and suppliers to look at their own carbon footprint and encourage them to reduce it.
- ✓ We will promote our more low impact trips to give customers an informed choice.

As part of our wider commitment to Responsible Tourism, we will continue to support a number of charities with whom we have had a long standing relationship over many years. These include: Shiva Charity in Nepal (Ginette Harrison School), Simien Mountains Mobile Medical Service and Porter Welfare, as well as setting aside a sum for emergency disaster relief should the need arise.

