Abercrombie & Kent



ESSENTIAL KERALA

From Kochi’s vibrant art scene to Alleppey’s shimmering backwaters, and lush forested hills to fragrant spice plantations, Kerala promises an exotic medley of different landscapes and cultures.

Tailor-Made Journeys, Suggested Itineraries

Indian Subcontinent, India

9 days from AU$4,290 pp

Private

Journey Overview

From Kochi’s vibrant art scene to Alleppey’s shimmering backwaters, and lush forested hills to fragrant spice plantations, Kerala promises an exotic medley of different landscapes and cultures. Immerse yourself in the region’s rich cultural legacy with vibrant dance and ancient martial arts. Taste the freshness, spice and tropical flavours of local cuisine. Drift along sleepy backwaters in a private houseboat. Wander among exotic birds, butterflies and elephants. Dip into some of India’s most exquisite resorts. And experience the heart and soul of “God’s own country”.

Journey Highlights

- Explore the harbour town of Kochi, the captivating 'Queen of the Arabian Sea'
- Cruise the sleepy Keralan backwaters aboard a traditional converted Kettuvallum
- Witness Kerala’s ancient martial arts and dance performances
- Breathe in exotic aromas in a traditional spice plantation
- Discover a nature lover’s paradise in Periyar National Park



Itinerary

Day 1: Arrive Kochi

Welcome to the historic and vibrant port city of Kochi (or Cochin). Known as the ‘Queen of the Arabian Sea’, this charming port town on the Malabar Coast is the oldest European settlement in India. Receive a warm A&K welcome and transfer privately to your waterfront hotel, elegantly restored from a Victorian shipyard. Settle in and spend your afternoon at leisure, soaking up Fort Kochi’s historic ambience and the views across the broad expanse of the Arabian Sea.

Brunton Boatyard

Day 2: Kochi

Experience local life in Kochi. Begin in Fort Kochi where the famous Chinese fishing nets droop towards the waters like over-sized hammocks. Watch as the fishermen hoist their nets and reveal their catch. Continue to the once-powerful steam boilers and head to the ruins of Fort Emmanuel, built in 1503 as a symbol of the strategic alliance between the Maharajah of Kochi and the Portuguese monarch. Next, explore India's oldest European church, the Church of St Francis, founded by Franciscan monks around 1505, and pass by the wonderful Santa Cruz Basilica.

Take a tuk tuk to the Dhobi Khana (laundry station), established by the Dutch in 1720, before continuing through the crumbling historic quarters of Mattancherry discovering narrow lanes infused with the scents of turmeric, clove and cardamom. Arrive at the local fruit and spice markets and pause for a “meter tea”. Uncover the history of the Jewish people in Kerala with a stop at the Jewish Synagogue and appreciate their legacy in Jew Town. Later, step inside the home of a local Brahmin family, the highest of the four Hindu castes. Watch a fascinating Kolam demonstration, a traditional drawing in a home’s entrance to invite the Goddess Laxmi to bring luck and prosperity.

Return to your hotel and enjoy some time at leisure. This evening, enjoy a taste of Kerala's Hindu culture, witnessing a Kathakali performance, one of the oldest dance forms in the area. See the elaborate make-up process before the show, then watch this utterly unforgettable art form combining classical dance, theatre, opera and pantomime.

Brunton Boatyard | Meals: B

Day 3: Kochi

Watch Kochi come to life as you catch the early morning rush hour traffic in the sea when the local fisher folk set off to cast their nets. Get a peek into the massive seafood auction and witness the morning hustle as the fisher folk haggle over their days prized catch. Have tea at a local Chaikadda, then pay a visit to the Soviet era communist reading rooms. Take a ride on the local ferry to Eranakulam, where you can catch all the action of the local market. End your tour with a visit to the city's namesake temple – Eranakulatappan and some fresh South Indian delicacies.

This afternoon relax in your luxury hotel or delve deeper into Kochi with optional activities (additional charge). Join a local art expert for a walking discovery of the flourishing art scene sampling local sweets along the way or explore the city by bicycle.

You can choose to enjoy the hotel's complimentary sunset cruise on the Brunton Boatyard's private boat that sets off every evening from their private jetty (shared with other hotel patrons).

Brunton Boatyard | Meals: B

Day 4: Kochi – Periyar National Park

Drive east into the verdant Western Ghats to Periyar National Park. Nestled in the Cardamom Hills and enclosing the glistening Lake Periyar, the sprawling Periyar National Park is a nature lover's dream. Discover one of the region's richest hubs of biodiversity, a protected reserve for both elephants and tigers. Arrive at your cottage in Spice Village surrounded by fruit trees, rare herbs and a profusion of flowering plants. This evening, step into the arena to witness Kerala's ancient martial art form, Kalaripayattu. With its origins in traditional warfare, it is truly thrilling to watch.

Spice Village | Meals: BD

Day 5: Periyar National Park

Rise early and join your expert tribal guide for a walk through lush forests and sprawling grasslands. Look out for colourful birdlife, elephants, rare lion-tailed macaque and even the occasional big cat catching the sun's first rays. Return to your accommodation for breakfast and spend some time relaxing in the spectacular setting. Later, visit a local spice plantation where exotic aromas will stir your senses. Learn how to cultivate cinnamon, cardamom, clove, black pepper, ginger, turmeric, vanilla and nutmeg.

Return to your luxury cottage to indulge in tranquil time at leisure. If you so choose, you may take a bullock-cart ride through the lush Cumbum Valley to an organic fruit farm. Pick pomegranates, papayas, grapes, sapota and climb atop the watch towers for commanding views of the windswept valley (additional charge).

Spice Village | Meals: BD

Day 6: Periyar National Park – Backwaters (Alleppey)

Descend a dramatic escarpment as you journey overland to the village of Alleppey, the gateway to Kerala's backwaters, a chain of lagoons running parallel to the coast on the Arabian Sea. Board your private houseboat for an overnight cruise of the serene setting. Known as Kettuvallam, elegantly designed like a traditional rice barge, not a single nail is used to construct the body of the boat and upper sections are constructed of woven natural materials like coir and bamboo. Float lazily through a timeless landscape of lush paddy fields, brightly coloured houses and boats laden with coir and copra. Soak up the atmosphere as children play along the banks and fisherman reel in their daily catch. Later, savour a delicious feast of local cuisine prepared by your onboard chef.

Houseboat | Meals: BLD

Day 7: Backwaters (Alleppey) – Kumarakom

Leave your houseboat behind at Kumarakom, a tranquil village on a cluster of lake islands. Ease into the pace of local life at Philipkutty's Farm, in the backwaters of Lake Vembanad. Spend time on the property's working farm and breathe in the fragrant spices, bananas, mangos and coconuts. Enjoy a cooking demonstration and a lunch of farm-harvested vegetables and sample traditional cuisine centred around fish and supplemented with rice and local breads like appam and string hoppers. Later, continue to Kumarakom Lake Resort on the scenic banks of Lake Vembanad. Spend the rest of the day relaxing among 25 acres of beautiful landscaped gardens and enjoying the many resort activities***.***

Kumarakom Lake Resort | Meals: BL

Day 8: Kumarakom

Indulge in a full day at leisure. Take part in yoga sessions or relax in your private swimming pool. Alternatively choose to enjoy a day of fishing from a traditional canoe, a cycling tour of villages, a tour of the Kumarakom Bird Sanctuary or a walk through the Kumarakom Village witnessing traditional activities from coir making to pine screw and coconut tree climbing, toddy tapping, and fishing (additional charge, paid locally).

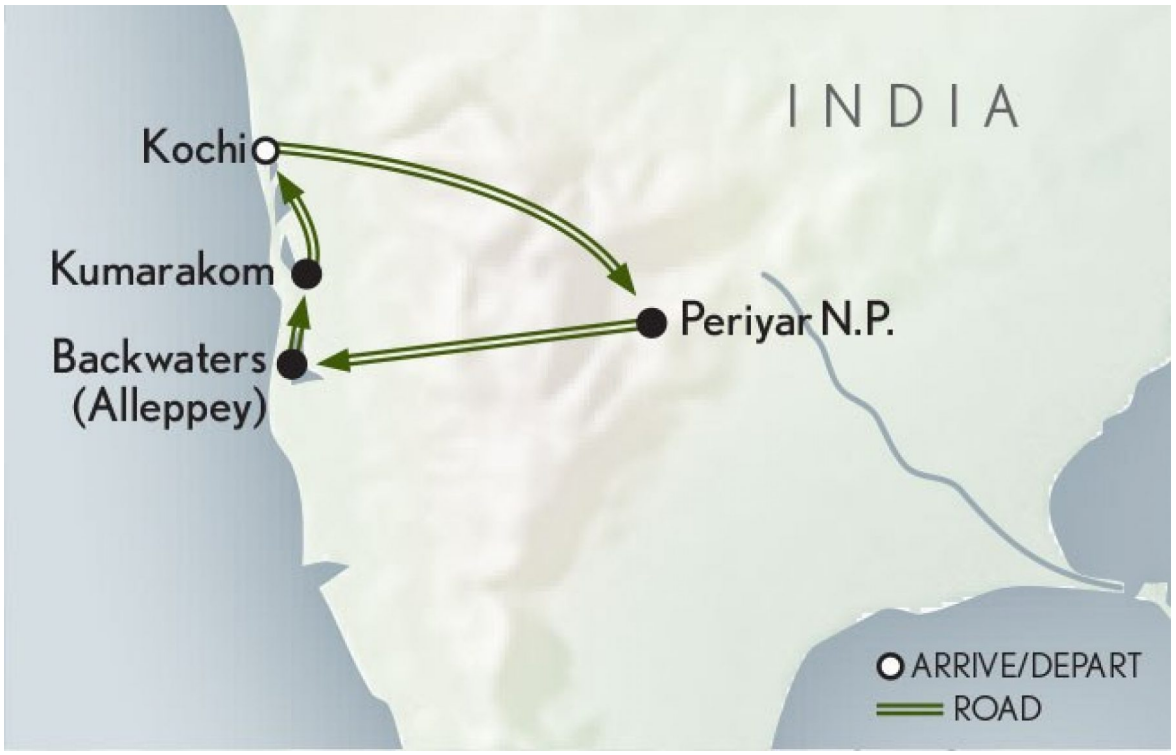
Kumarakom Lake Resort | Meals: B

Day 9: Kumarakom – Depart Kochi

Farewell your Keralan sanctuary and transfer to Kochi airport for your onward journey.

Meals: B

Map


INDIA
Kochi
Kumarakom
Backwaters
(Alleppey)
Periyar N.P.
ARRIVE/DEPART
ROAD

Accommodation

Brunton Boatyard, Kochi



Although a new building, this hotel perfectly echoes the Dutch and Portuguese colonial architecture of old Fort Kochi. With lime-washed walls and terracotta floors, fine public areas and bedrooms featuring antique four poster beds, it is a perfect fusion of old and new.

The lobby sets the tone - a vault of sunlight and air, it is framed by arches and overhung with punkahs - enormous, old-fashioned fans of Indo-Portuguese origin. The rooms meanwhile are simple, yet comfortable spaces, with décor dominated by exposed wood, white walls and local craft pieces. All afford superb views, not least of Kochi's famed fishing nets, which date back to 1350 and whose preying-mantis shapes are one of the city's most enduring images.

Why we like it

- All rooms and suites have sea views
- The History restaurant serves a menu reflecting the cultural diversity of the region - Portuguese, Dutch, English, Arab, Syrian Christian and Jewish. The Terrace Grill specializes in fresh seafood
- An outdoor heated pool is located on the seafront
- Ayurvedic massage services are available

Spice Village, Periyar National Park



Curling around a misty ridge in the Periyar vastness, an arboretum of fruit trees, rare herbs and a profusion of flowering plants is home to the Spice Village, a truly magical destination. Recreating the architecture and atmosphere of a tribal village, it is a pure, unadulterated escape in truly astonishing landscapes.

The cottages are constructed using natural materials and local woodcraft, roofs are thatched with the same elephant grass used in tribal huts - woven using the same traditional techniques. The comforts of a modern hotel exist, but they never intrude. Modern plumbing, comfortable beds and hot showers find their place, but in a setting stripped down to its natural essence - with birdsong replacing television.

A perfect mix of the traditional and the contemporary, the property is always the perfect location from which to explore the tiger reserve and plantations - accompanied by the heady scent of spices.

Why we like it

- All the cottages have private verandas
- Highland location amidst valleys which are home to plantations of teak, cardamom, tea, rubber and coffee
- Imaginative South Indian cuisine on offer
- Ayurvedic treatments are available as well as a Yoga and meditation centre
- The resort has a swimming pool

Kumarakom Houseboat



Drift in sheer bliss aboard a Kumarakom houseboat. Styled as a traditional Keralan kettuvallom yet equipped with every luxury and comfort, the Kumarakom houseboat offers a perfect sanctuary for relaxing on the serene backwaters of Kerala.

Your private houseboat will take you into the heart of the palm-fringed backwaters where life has little changed for centuries. Watch fishermen reel in their daily catch and children playing on the banks lined with coconut palms. Float alongside brightly painted houses, boats laden with coir and copra, and verdant paddy fields. Then, savour delicious Keralan cuisine prepared by your own onboard chef.

Why we like it

- Private traditional houseboat with modern luxuries
- The ultimate cruise on the backwaters of Kerala
- Your own onboard chef
- Immerse yourself in the fascinating life along the waterfront

Kumarakom Lake Resort, Kerala



With a tranquil setting amidst swaying palm groves and silvery canals beside Lake Vembanad, Kumarakom Lake Resort offers a wondrous retreat in the heart of Kerala.

Spread over 25 acres of beautiful landscaped gardens, red-tiled, wood-walled villas have been carefully reconstructed from traditional 16th century Keralan homesteads. Each villa is beautifully furnished using teak interiors and earthy tones, with open roofed bathrooms and intimate private courtyards. The Meandering Pool Villas are a highlight of the resort, offering access to the pool from a private bathing cove and peaceful lounge area. The Heritage Villas and Presidential Suites all have their own private pools, Jacuzzis and courtyards, with some offering lake views.

When it comes to relaxing, the biggest choice you need to make is between the variety of swimming pools on offer, or the extensive menu of treatments in the ayurvedic spa. There's also a fully-equipped health club and daily yoga sessions, not to mention a range of activities to choose from, such as boating, cycling and water skiing.

The resort's four restaurants, including a traditional teashop, offer a taste of true Keralan delicacies, along with north Indian, Chinese and continental flavours. Seafood lovers will find plenty to indulge their appetite at Vembanad, the seafood bar on the banks of the backwaters.

Why we like it

- Peaceful setting within extensive landscaped gardens
- Beautifully appointed villas reconstructed from traditional 16th century Keralan homesteads

- Extensive ayurvedic spa, health club and swimming pools
- Taste true Keralan delicacies in the resort restaurant

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