TOUR CODE

30F

ADVENTURESABROAD

SOUTHERN INDIA FAMILY TOUR

14 days

Updated 29/04/2013

Day 1 *Arrival in Kochi (Cochin)*

Today we arrive in Kochi and transfer to the hotel.

The history of European involvement in Kochi, from the early sixteenth century onwards, is dominated by the aggression of, successively, the Portuguese, Dutch and British, competing in their desire to control the port and its lucrative spice trade. From 1800, the state of Cochin was part of the British Madras Presidency; from 1812 until Independence in 1947, its administration was the responsibility of a series of diwans, or financial ministers. In the 1920s, the British expanded the port to make it suitable for modern ocean-going ships; extensive dredging created Willingdon Island, between Ernakulam and Fort Cochin.

Overnight in Kochi. Meal plan: Dinner, if required.

Day 2 *Kochi: City Tour*

Today we have a tour of Kochi, including: Chinese fishing nets. A legacy of one of the earliest visitor to the Malabar coast, these nets are unmistakable as one enters the harbour. Records show that they were first erected between AD 1350 and 1450. Constructed out of teak wood and bamboo poles, they work on the principle of balance. The best place to watch is from Vasco Da Gama square, a narrow promenade that parallels the beach with little stalls that serve fresh seafood, tender coconuts and so on.

Santa Cruz Basilica: Built by the Portuguese, the church was elevated to a Cathedral by Pope Paul IV in 1558. Spared by the Dutch conqueror of Cochin who destroyed many Catholic buildings in 1663, it later fell into the hands of the British who demolished it when they took over Cochin in 1795. For almost a 100 years there was no church on the site until Bishop Dom Gomez Vereira commissioned a new building in 1887.

Also at Mattancherry is the Jewish Synagogue built in 1568 AD by the prosperous Jewish trading community whose links with Kerala begin in Kodungallor (Cranganore) in the north of the state. This is the oldest synagogue in India. It was partially destroyed in the war of 1662 and rebuilt by the Dutch. In the mid-18th century the clock tower was added and the floors paved with exquisite hand-painted blue willow tiles from China.

Overnight in Kochi. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 3 *Kochi - Alappuzha - Kerala Houseboat Cruise*

Today we drive to Alappuzha (Alleppey), known as the "Venice of the East", situated on the Vembanad Lake, the longest lake in India. A maze of canals and a network of bridges give this busy commercial town its descriptive sobriquet. Alleppey is known for its "coir", the retted fibre of the coconut husk, and black pepper.

Today we board our houseboat for a very special Kerala delight -- a slow boat through its forests and palm-shaded

canals. We take a leisurely cruise on the beautiful backwaters, enjoying the magnificent scenery along the waterways and stopping to admire what history and religion have left along the way.

THE HOUSEBOAT will be approx 60 feet long and 13 feet wide in the middle. There are comfortable beds, and traditional lanterns. There will be a sundeck for daytime relaxation. The boats are made of local natural fibres that truly echo the villagers' harmony with the natural surroundings. As your oarsman slowly and silently propels us along the backwaters, we will enjoy the magnificent scenery along the waterways. We will stop to view working villages and witness locals fishing, swimming, crafting, and bathing (most boats will have an oarsman though some will be motorized with a silencer on the motor). The houseboats have the provision for air-conditioning, but most travellers do not care for the all-night gasoline engine noise required to run the units. Most find that the peace and quiet, and comfort provided by a fan, are preferred. NOTE: Single cabins are NOT available on the houseboat. Single supplements reflect sharing for this one night.

Overnight houseboat cruise. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 4 *Alappuzha - Periyar National Park*

Today we travel to the Periyar National Park (travel time +/- 4 hours), a lower lying part of the mountain range where tropical rainforest still holds its own in. On the way we will stop at a working rubber plantation to see traditional rubber tapping techniques and have lunch made with local organically grown vegetables. On arrival in Periyar we check in to our hotel and have an evening boat ride for a relaxing tour of the park. With luck, there are many animals to see, including herds of elephants, bison and packs of wild boar that roam through the woods and parade along the shores of the lake just before sunrise and sunset.

You can also see different species of apes. The golden langur monkey that lives here is rarely seen in the rest of India. Other animals in Periyar are otters and porcupines. Water turtles can often be seen sunning themselves on the pieces of wood that stick out of the water.

Overnight in Thekkady. Meal plan: Breakfast, lunch and dinner.

Day 5 *Periyar National Park*

Early this morning we take a guided jungle walk at the Periyar Tiger Reserve / National Park. This easy walk is very interesting and (with luck!) gives you the chance to see wildlife at a very close distance. If you are lucky you may even spot the rarely sighted leopards and tigers.

Later we return to the hotel and set off for a guided plantation tour at the outskirts of town. You will be taken to a large plantation garden to demonstrate the processing of many varieties of spices, tea and coffee.

Overnight in Thekkady. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 6 *Periyar - Madurai*

After breakfast we drive to Madurai (+/- 4 hours). On arrival we have a tour of Madurai visiting the Sri Meenakshi Temple where thousands of priests and worshippers come daily. People are blessed by the temple elephant and astrologists read the stars and hands. You can also get your fortune read by parrots that pick tarot cards out of a pile. All the believers bathe themselves in the temple baths. The temple houses a thousand pillared hall, one of its major attractions. In the evening sermons are held within the walls of the temple and concerts are often given in honour of the

gods.

Optional: Later you might choose to participate in a local rickshaw tour. Over the years the local rickshaw wallas have been trained to show clients the town of Madurai in their cycle rickshaws to earn a living. This tour takes you to the local oil mill run with cattle, the local vessel merchants and many interesting sites.

Overnight in Madurai. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 7 *Madurai - Chennai - Mahabalipuram*

We have a morning flight from Madurai to Chennai. On arrival we drive to Mahabalipuram via the silk weaving center at Kanchipuram. After a visit to Kanchipuram, we continue to our seaside hotel at Mahabalipuram. Afternoon at poolside for kids. Adults can visit Mahabalipuram monuments (optional for the youngsters).

The temples and carvings of Mahabalipuram date back to the 7th century. They stand out because of their simplicity and the fact that they also depict many scenes from the every-day life of every-day people. It is now recognized as the site of some of the greatest architectural and sculptural achievements in India.

Overnight in Mahabalipuram. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 8 *Mahabalipuram - Chennai - Bangalore*

We have a morning free to enjoy the pool. Late morning we drive to Chennai (Madras) followed by Chennai sightseeing.

Our sightseeing of Chennai includes a visit to Fort St George, once a stronghold of the British; St Mary's Church, the oldest Anglican church in India; the San Thome Cathedral where the remains of St Thomas the Apostle are believed to have been buried; the Mylapore Temple dedicated to Lord Shiva and the Light House which is the only one of its kind in the world to be located on top of a High Court. We drive along the Marina, the thirteen kilometre-long beach which, with its shining white sands, aqua blue sea and violet lights at night, is the pride of Chennai.

Evening fast train to Bangalore.

Overnight in Bangalore. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 9 *Bangalore - Belur & Halebid - Hassan*

Today we travel to Hassan via Belur and Halebid. Belur and Halebid were both capitals of The Medieval Hoysala kings who built the exquisitely carved temples in the 12th & 13th centuries. Belur is famous for its Hoysala architecture; the Temple of Lord Channakeshava is embellished with carving that has few equals in the world. It took 103 years to complete and you can see why. The facade of the temple is filled with intricate sculptures and friezes with no portion left blank.

Halebid was the seat of the Hoysala Kingdom; its great Hoyaleswara Temple was built in the typical Hoysala style architecture. The temple, dating back to the 12th century, is astounding for its wealth of sculptural details. The walls of the temple are covered with an endless variety of gods and goddesses, animals, birds and dancing girls. Yet no two facets of the temple are the same. This magnificent temple--guarded by a Nandi Bull--was never completed, despite 86 years of labour.

We continue to Hassan.

Overnight in Hassan. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 10 *Hassan - Mysore*

After breakfast we drive to Mysore (+/- 3 hours). Our sightseeing of this princely town will include the famous "Palace of Mysore," once the residence of Wodeyar Kings and one of the largest of its kind in India. Built in 1912 in the Indo Saracenic style, this palace has a grandeur that is unmatched. We will visit the "Jayachamsrajendra Art Gallery" housed in the Jaganmohan Palace. This gallery has a collection of exquisite paintings dating back to 1875.

Overnight in Mysore. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 11 *Mysore & Srirangapatna*

The fruit and flower market of Mysore is the best in south India. We also hope to visit rosewood carving and incense-stick-making workshops.

Then we drive to "Chamumdi Hill Temple" at a height of 1062 m (3,500 ft). The 2000-year-old temple is dedicated to Goddess Chamundi. A seven storey, 40m high tower dominates the temple. Today we also drive to Srirangapatna to visit Tipu Sultan's Palace, Mausoleum, and the fort area.

Overnight in Mysore. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 12 *Mysore - Bangalore*

We have an early departure for our drive to Bangalore (210 km / 130 mi). We check in to our hotel in Bangalore and depart on a tour of this cosmopolitan capital of Karnataka.

Bangalore is called the Garden City for its delicate blossoms and greenery that impart a unique beauty to this lovely city. The weather is the city's best feature, with pleasant summers and bearable winters. Bangalore, which literally means the 'town of baked beans', was founded by Kempe Gowda, a chieftain of the Vijayanagar Empire, around the 16th century. He built four towers in four directions to specify its boundaries.

Today we tour Bangalore, visiting the Lal Bagh which has a variety of old trees, fountains, lotus pools, terraces and an assortment of tropical herbs and subtropical herbs. We also see the government buildings and the Maharaja's Palace.

Overnight in Bangalore. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 13 *Bangalore*

Today we have a a quick drive past Lalbagh Gardens and Legislature to visit ISKCON Krishna temple, one of the largest temples built in modern times. Here we learn about the midday meal scheme -- a mammoth free lunch plan that provides free lunch to over 200,000 poor children in Bangalore district. Our Tour Leader uses his/her local contact to give you a presentation on the success of this plan and will make efforts show you the massive kitchen which is custom built to feed thousands of children.

Overnight in Bangalore. Meal plan: Breakfast and dinner.

Day 14 *Departure*

We have an evening departure from Bangalore.

BON VOYAGE!! Meal plan: Breakfast.