



Zuid-India Kerala 14 daags programma

SPECIAL HIGHLIGHTS

- CYCLING along the stunning coastline and through tropical forests.
- BACKWATERS Staying in traditional village houses with local families.
- PERIYAR NATIONAL PARK Boat trip in the nature reserve, to view wildlife.
- KOCHI Fascinating coastal town.
- KOVALAM Relax on the stunning beaches of the Arabian Sea.

Clinging like a slender leaf to the south west of India, our tour takes us to one of India's hidden jewels, the state of Kerala. The networks of rivers, streams, lagoons, and canals are lined with tropical palms and there is an easy going relaxed atmosphere – unlike the hectic pace found in other parts of India. Traveling along shaded back roads, across a timeless landscape that leads us through villages and plantations, our cycling route takes us into the very heart of this beautiful and diverse region and our unique mode of transport allows us closer contact with and a deeper insight into the lives of these hospitable people.

This trip is rated

Grade B. Using Trek 4300 21 gear mountain bikes we cycle 237kms in 9 days, an average of 26kms per cycling day. Cycling will be mostly on level terrain or down hill apart from 4 days inland where the terrain will be hillier. We avoid main roads and cycle on back roads. Approximately 90% of the cycling is on tarmac, 10% on earth or gravel roads. An leader cycles with the group on each day and a back-up vehicle follows a little way behind the group and also carries the luggage.

Cycling Grades

Grading is a somewhat difficult topic as much depends on the individual's own perception of his or her abilities. The following is intended as a general guide to our cycling grades. This is rated Grade B. Grade B (Moderate): Generally cycling on the flat and in hilly terrain with occasional steeper ascents and descents. These trips are suitable for more frequent cyclists who perhaps enjoy regular cycling at home and have a reasonable level of fitness.

Day 1. Arrive Trivandrum transfer to Kovalam
Check-in to our hotel.

Day 2. Drive to Veli Lagoon; visit Anjengo fort and Cycle to Varkala After breakfast this morning we transfer by bus to Veli, from where we cycle the 20 kms to the estuary. The lagoon is a large lake separated from the ocean by the narrowest of sandbar spits, where fisherman can be seen working on their boats and nets, or poling across the lake with sand-filled barges.



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Transferring by boat we visit the fishing village of Anjuthengu, where we stop to visit Anjengo fort, built by the British East India Company in the 17th century and the first British trading post on the Malabar coast. After our visit we carry on towards Varkala, a temple town renowned throughout the region as a pilgrimage centre for the millions of Hindus who come here to worship at the ancient Janardhana Swamy Temple. On arrival in Varkala there should be time to relax and enjoy the beaches of the Arabian coast, wander amongst the palms and perhaps enjoy a stunning sunset before enjoying a well-earned dinner in one of the local restaurants. (Approx. 35 km cycling).

Day 3. Cycle to Kollam

This morning's ride gives us the chance for some interaction with the local people of the area. Travelling through villages we see some traditional coir-making skills (the fibres from the outer husk of the coconut, which is used to make rope and mats), as well as fishing. We then continue on and hope to visit an elephant trader's camp, where there may be the option to ride on one of the working elephants. After lunch in Kollam we will visit the fishing village of Thangassary before visiting the lighthouse built by the British in 1902, which affords fantastic views of the area. Situated on the edge of the Ashtamundi Lake, Kollam is surrounded by coconut palms and cashew tree plantations, indeed the town is the centre of the cashew industry here. Its old wooden houses are typical of the Keralan style and its situation at the southern end of the backwaters makes it an ideal spot from which to explore this fascinating network of canals and lagoons. (Approx. 40km cycling).

Day 4. Boat trip along Backwaters;

Cycle through villages to Mancombu Transferring to Kollam jetty we catch a motor launch to travel through the backwaters to Kayamkulam. This is the ideal way to explore these waterways, which cover an area of some 1900km. The boats – their bows often carved in the shape of a dragon – are the lifeline for the villages, acting as taxis, mail delivery, even the harvest is carried in boats. You may see great pyramids of coconuts or even the odd buffalo being carried along in this time honoured fashion. Stopping at Ayiramthengucoir village for lunch en route, we eventually reach our destination of Kayamkulam, from where we cycle once more, along tranquil backroads and through fishing villages, to the Manarasala snake temple, close to the settlement of Thottapally. After visiting the temple we transfer to our accommodation, a couple of typical Keralan village houses, in the district of the ancient trading town of Alleppey. (Approx. 15km cycling). 2 nights Village homestay

Day 5. Full days cycling through

Backwaters' villages; afternoon canoe trip Today we spend a full day exploring our immediate surroundings. Cycling through the villages of these myriad backwaters we get plenty of opportunity to interact with the locals, visiting churches and temples, before returning to take a moonlit cruise by canoe. Crafted out of Anjili wood, we take to the waters whilst locals sing traditional songs as they row.



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Paddling along at our own pace we can leave the main channel to explore the smaller waterways. The industrious villagers survive on narrow spits of land, keeping cows, pigs, chickens and cultivating vegetable gardens. Even the shells from the fresh water mussels are burnt to make building lime, and coir is used for just about everything it seems. The gardens are generally well tended often with brightly coloured flowers, such as hibiscus, that contrast sharply with the tropical greenery. (Approx. 35km cycling).

Day 6. Drive and cycle to Vanilla County

Leaving the beautiful backwaters behind we use a combination of engine and pedal power to reach today's destination; the Hill Station of Vanilla County. Travelling via the town of Chengancherry, we quickly see the landscape and its flora change as we gain elevation to arrive at the town of Kanjirapalli, from where we cycle up to the hill station. Situated at an elevation of 400m, Vanilla County is an enchanting setting, surrounded by the lush greenery of tea gardens and spice plantations, overlooking the valleys and meadows of the surrounding countryside. In the evening we can visit Ayyampara, an area of startling rock covering some 30 acres. On clear days it affords views down to Alleppey's lighthouse, and is a favourite haunt for those wishing to see spectacular sunsets. (Approx. 32km cycling). 2 nights Plantation bungalow

Day 7. Cycling around Vanilla County

A morning stroll among the seemingly numerous fruits and medicinal plants of a local plantation brings us to the Meenachil river, the enigmatic source of life and death in Arundhati Roy's Booker prize-winning novel 'The God of Small Things'. Depending on the season, we may bathe in its rock pools before cycling to Poonjar Palace, a 900 year old residency of the Maharajah and his family. After lunch, we may have a chance to track elephants at work among the surrounding forests of teak and sandalwood. (Approx. 12km cycling)

Day 8. Drive and cycle to Thekkady

Visit plantations Taking the meandering roads through the high ranges today we will drive some of the steeper sections of road, before transferring to two wheels to continue our journey to Thekkady, situated close to the border with Tamil Nadu. Our route to the Periyar wildlife sanctuary takes us past many rubber plantations, and through the varied spice gardens of this part of India which we plan to visit with a local botanist. Further on, we may have the opportunity to meet local tea pickers at a factory and get something of a feel for how people live in this beautiful region before arriving at our hotel. Periyar is one of the 16 Project Tiger Reserves in India, with about 40 tigers living in the 777 sq km park, but as they are solitary creatures, the chances of seeing them are very slim. (Approx. 26km cycling).



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Day 9. In and around Thekkady

Afternoon boat trip on Lake Periyar This morning we go for a walk in the forest in search of other wildlife such as the star tortoise, porcupine and the flying squirrel. The park itself is made up of a variety of habitats, open grasslands, deciduous, semievergreen and tropical forest – all of which have different animal species. The ecosystem of the tropical evergreen jungle is very interesting – the trees grow up to 40m, and the dense canopy above only allows in limited sunlight. Therefore at ground level, there are abundant ferns, orchids and airplants – plants that need little light to survive. The park is probably better known for its elephants and this afternoon we take a boat cruise on Periyar reservoir, where we hope to catch sight these magnificent beasts drinking at the waters edge. This is reputedly one of the most picturesque reservoirs in the area and home to myriad wildlife. As well as elephant, we may see sambar, barking and mouse deer, as well as wild pigs, bisons, monkeys and langurs. Also look out for some of the many birds which live here, such as cormorants, darters, ospreys, kingfishers, hornbills and kites. The nearby fruit trees attract hill ynas, orioles and racket-tailed drongos and there are an amazing variety of butterflies, with up to 112 species being recorded.

Day 10. Bus and cycle to Kochi via Malyattoor

Today we make our way back to the coast, as we head for the bustling port of Kochi, with a beautiful natural harbour that earned it the title of Queen of the Arabian Sea. On the way we'll pass through Malayattoor, an important devotional centre for Kerala's substantial Christian community. Finally, we'll rejoin our bus for the drive down to Kochi. As well as being the oldest European settlement in India, with its mix of English, Dutch and Portuguese influences, Kochi is also home to the famous Kathakali dancers. Its origins came from traditional temple rituals and from an art form known as Koodiyattam. The dancers can take up to three hours painting their faces – the features are heavily emphasised as it is the facial expressions and co-ordinated eye movements which are important in the dance. The dances usually portray events from the Ramayana and Mahabharata, great Indian epics. (Approx. 22km cycling)

Day 11. Tour of Kochi by cycle; evening boat cruise

As you might expect Kochi was founded on trade, originally with the arrival of the Chinese, Arabs and Phoenicians in the second millennium BC. Its links to Europe strengthened in the 16th century, with the arrival of the Portuguese, closely followed by the Dutch and the English. This has produced an eclectic mix of styles and influences. You can find both the oldest European church and the oldest synagogue in India amongst its winding streets and elsewhere Chinese fishing nets vie for space alongside Portuguese houses and Dutch palaces. After spending the day touring the town we take a sunset cruise around the surrounding islands. (Approx. 07km cycling)



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Day 12. Early morning train to Trivandrum;

Cycle to Kovalam We catch an early morning train back to Trivandrum, from where we cycle back to Kovalam. Once a quiet hippy haven, Kovalam is today a thriving tourist resort, but its palmfringed beaches and turquoise waters still offer the weary traveler a relaxing place to unwind. What better place to end our trip (approx. 30km cycling)

Day 13. Morning cycle ride; free afternoon

In the morning there will be the opportunity to take a relaxing ride through some of the villages to the south of Kovalam. In the afternoon you may like to explore this area at leisure; to walk along the sandy beaches, take on the pounding surf of the Arabian Sea or head down to Kanyakumari, the southern cape of India and a year-round pilgrimage site for millions of devout Hindus. In the evening you can sit in a beachside cafe, enjoying the vista of local fishermen sailing out for their evening catch with a backdrop of the setting sun. Kerala is particularly renowned for its herbal care, and you may choose to try out an Ayurvedic massage, the science of rejuvenation and purification through natural remedies, that uses a range of oils and herbs to treat a number of ailments. (Approx. 30km cycling).

Day 14. Transfer back from Kovalam to Trivandrum airport for flight back to home.

**14 daags individueel programma.
Kan perfect verlengd worden.**

Prijzen 2009

Aantal reizigers	2	3-4	5-6	7-9
Prijs per persoon €	1940	1830	1770	1645

Toeslag éénpersoonskamer: € 310

Inbegrepen: overnachtingen in kamer met ontbijt, alle middag- en avondmalen, Engelstalige fietsgids, goede huurfiets met technische assistentie, volgwagen met airco, beschreven boottochten, treinreis Cochin naar Trivandrum in klasse met airco, alle inkomstgelden, hoteltaksen, BTW en garantiefonds.

Vluchten naar Trivandrum kunnen vanaf € 650 exclusief luchthaventaksen.